

# Intransitive/Inchoative Structures in L2 Spanish

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## 1. Introduction

Transfer, i.e. the influence of the first language (L1) in the interlanguage (IL), is a characteristic phenomenon of the process of second language (L2) acquisition. In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), different theories have been proposed to predict how and in which stages of this process the grammatical properties for the L1 are manifested in the IL. According to the theory of Full Transfer / Full Access (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996), the grammar of the L1 in its entirety is the initial state of the IL. Afterwards, depending on the properties of the L1 and L2, the linguistic input to which the learner is exposed acts as triggering factor in the reconstruction of the IL grammar. This restructuring process is conditioned by Universal Grammar (UG); for the most part, the IL complies with the restrictions imposed by UG during this whole process.

Nevertheless, other approaches to transfer have explored the relationship between L1 influence and L2 development. The seminal work by Wode (1978) and Zobl (1980), among many others, on the L2 acquisition of negation, questions, and relative clauses, hypothesized and provided evidence in favor of the view that learners have to have attained a certain level of L2 development for L1 transfer to be observed. More recently, in the context of Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998, 2003; Håkansson et al. 2002), it has been proposed that the L2 learner does not completely transfer the L1 grammar at the beginning of L2 acquisition. According to this theory, transfer is developmentally moderated; the learner can only transfer L1 structures that can be analyzed by the incipient interlanguage processor. Along the same lines, in the Autonomous Induction Theory (Carroll 2002), L1 sentence parsing procedures automatically transfer at the onset of L2 acquisition in order to deal with L2 stimuli, but the L1 grammar does not transfer at that point. The transfer of L1 parsing procedures would lead to parsing failure, which in turn leads to language acquisition. In the Input-Processing Model (VanPatten 1996), L1 transfer does not take place directly during input processing, but during intake evaluation. In other words, the L1 is one of the hypothesis testing mechanisms that interact with intake representation to shape IL. The L2 learner would selectively use some L1 properties and not others.

The goal of the present study is to contribute to this debate investigating the role that different types of grammatical transfer play in the acquisition of inchoative structures with *se* in L2 Spanish by English-speaking learners at different competence levels. In my previous research (Cabrera & Zubizarreta 2003, 2006; Cabrera 2008), a series of bidirectional studies on the acquisition of lexical and periphrastic English and Spanish causative structures, evidence of developmentally constrained grammatical transfer was found. In the case of lexical causatives, constructional properties were transferred before lexical specific features. In periphrastic causatives, a more salient surface property, such as word order was transferred before interpretive properties of this construction. Starting from the analysis of the syntactic and morphological properties of English and Spanish inchoative structures (*The window broke / La ventana se rompió*), the present study sets out to test the hypotheses of Full versus developmentally constrained transfer.

## 2. Inchoative sentences in Spanish and English

One of the most frequent verbal alternations in the languages of the world is the causative-inchoative alternation, exemplified in (1). In this alternation, the transitive form (1a) encodes a

causative situation with an argument that acts as a cause (*Peter / Pedro*) and a change of state that the patient argument undergoes (*the door / la puerta*), while the intransitive (or inchoative) form focuses on the result.

- (1) a. Peter opened the door. / Pedro abrió la puerta.  
b. The door opened. / La puerta se abrió.

Inchoative structures in Spanish and English can be characterized according to their lexico-syntactic and morphological properties. These structures show similarities in the former, but are different in the latter.

### 2.1. Lexico-syntactic properties

Not all verb classes participate in the causative-inchoative alternation. In English just as in Spanish, only a subset of unaccusative verbs, called “alternating unaccusatives”, alternate in transitivity. These are verbs that encode a change of state or location, like *break / romper* and *open / cerrar*. According to Levin & Rappaport-Hovav (1995), this verb class is characterized by allowing a wide selection of arguments as subjects; this is to say, the cause of the event is unspecified. As illustrated in (2), this could be an agent (*Peter / Pedro*), an instrument (*the ball / la pelota*) or a natural force (*the wind / el viento*). Moreover, the cause can be left unexpressed, such as the inchoative forms in (3), or it can be internal to the patient, as shown in (4).

- (2) a. Peter / the ball / the wind opened the door.  
b. Pedro / la pelota / el viento abrió la puerta.  
(3) a. The door opened.  
b. La puerta se abrió.  
(4) a. The window broke by itself.  
b. La ventana se rompió sola.

Verbs that alternate in transitivity are those that can instantiate an unaccusative I-syntax structure (Hale & Keyser 2002; Zubizarreta & Oh 2007) by virtue of encoding directed change or change of location. The Aspect (Asp) node in the unaccusative structure in (5) below encodes inner aspect.

- (5) Unaccusative structure (or directed change construction):  
[D<sub>1</sub> [T [Asp [D<sub>2</sub> [V XP<sub>dir</sub>]]]]]

On the other hand, not all the verbs that have a transitive form can participate in the causative-inchoative alternation. Verbs of external specified causation, which I will denominate “non-alternating transitives”, cannot appear in the inchoative form. According to Levin & Rappaport-Hovav (1995), the argument that expresses the cause of the event is specifically an agent (*Patricia*) or an instrument manipulated by an agent (*the knife / el cuchillo*), which is illustrated in (6). Due to the fact that the cause should be specified, this cannot be left without expressing and, therefore, the inchoative form becomes unacceptable, as shown in (7).

- (6) a. Patricia / the knife cut the meat.  
b. Patricia / el cuchillo cortó la carne.  
(7) a. \*The meat cut.  
b. \*La carne se cortó.

### 2.2. Morphological properties

Although from the lexico-syntactic point of view the verb classes that alternate in transitivity in English and Spanish are the same, these languages are different in the morphological marking of the intransitive member of the causative-inchoative alternation. As shown in (8), in Spanish, the

intransitive form is marked with the pronoun *se* while in English there is no morphological marker that indicates the change in argument structure.

- (8) a. The window broke.  
b. La ventana se rompió.

Following the analysis of Kempchinsky (2004) and Bruhn de Garavito (1999), in Spanish, the reflexive marker *se* acts as the head of Aspect Phrase (AspP) where it introduces the information of change of state. In English, an empty morpheme would head AspP.

The l-syntactic and morphological analysis assumed in this section is at the base of the hypotheses built for the present study. Taking into account the saliency of the morphological marking with *se* in the Spanish L2 input versus its absence in surface form in L1 English, it is predicted that this feature will have an effect that we could probably trace since early acquisition. On the other hand, the commonality of the l-syntax structure of the verbs that alternate in transitivity in English and Spanish, may also have an effect since early on, as it was the case with lexical causatives (cf. 1a). The fact that these lexico-syntactic and morphological properties of the native and target languages have been separated allows for tracing what it is that L2 learners transfer at which stage of development. Do they transfer all these properties at once? Do they transfer some of them but not others?

### 3. Previous studies

Research on the L2 acquisition of argument structure is relatively recent in the field of SLA. Some studies have investigated the acquisition of inchoative *se* by L1 English-speaking learners in different proficiency levels of L2 Spanish. In what follows, I summarize the characteristics of these studies and their findings.

Montrul (1999)<sup>1</sup> studied the acquisition of inchoative *se* by learners with intermediate and high intermediate proficiency in L2 Spanish as part of a larger study which included lexical, and periphrastic causatives as well. An acceptability judgment test was used, where the interpretation of the sentences was presented in pictures. Sentences with alternating unaccusatives (*romper*) and non-alternating transitives (*cortar*) were included. These sentences were presented in pairs, where the presence (or absence) of inchoative *se* was manipulated (*La puerta se abrió* / *La puerta abrió*). The grammatical acceptability of each of these sentences was to be rated individually using a scale with values from -3 to +3.

It was found that, at the intermediate level, learners preferred inchoative sentences with alternating verbs without *se* (mean = 1.82) to the ones with *se* (.07). At the high intermediate level, this preference was maintained. Nevertheless, the average for the absence of *se* was lower (mean = 1.29) while the mean for its presence increased (mean = .88). Montrul observed that learners' responses show a rejection of the morphological marking but not necessarily of the syntactic structure, in as much the inchoative structure is not rejected, but it is the marking with *se* that is. It is proposed that transfer is a modular phenomenon, i.e. morphology, but not argument structure, is more likely to transfer in early acquisition. The proposal of modular transfer of morphology is further supported by the fact that the learners in this study tended to incorrectly accept overgeneralized lexical causatives (*\*El mago desapareció al conejito* 'the magician disappeared the rabbit' / *\*El dentista lloró al niño* 'the dentist cried the boy'). Since these lexical causatives are unacceptable in the L1, Montrul claims that transfer of argument structure is not at play in these cases. Moreover, since overgeneralized causatives have been attested in child language acquisition of both English and Spanish, and following a proposal by Braine et al. (1990), Montrul argues in favor of the existence of a default transitive template, which is active in both L1 and L2 acquisition. However, it should be noticed that overgeneralized causatives in child and adult language acquisition have different features. Whereas children overgeneralize causatives with most verb classes, adults tend to do so with unaccusative verbs thus showing a sensitivity to specific verb classes which can be traced back to L1 properties (cf. Cabrera & Zubizarreta 2003, 2006; Cabrera 2008).

<sup>1</sup> Another study on morphological transfer in the L2 acquisition of Spanish inchoative structures is Montrul (2001). Since this study reports similar results to Montrul (1999), plus data on psychological change of state verbs, which are not the focus of the present study, I am not including it in this paper.

Two aspects of the experimental design of Montrul's study can be problematic. First, it only included intermediate level learners, and therefore based on this data a definitive correlation between transfer and L2 development cannot be established. Another aspect is the instrument design. Presenting the sentences in the test items in pairs motivates a direct comparison between the acceptable inchoative form with *se* and the unacceptable one without it. This does not give the subject the opportunity to report what s/he finds grammatically unacceptable with either sentence when rating them on the negative side of the scale. Actually, it somehow elicits a comparative acceptability judgment, which may have caused subjects to be biased with respect to presence / absence of *se*. The present study builds on Montrul's design and findings by including other levels of proficiency and partially redesigning the instrument by including some elements of production to it, such as sentence correction.

A study that included different levels of proficiency (beginning, low intermediate, high intermediate and low advanced) is Toth (1999). A test of written production and another of acceptability judgment, in which the presence (or absence) of the inchoative *se* was manipulated, were used. It was found that the averages of acceptance and production of inchoative sentences with and without *se* were similar. In the production test, nevertheless, learners showed a tendency to avoid producing intransitive sentences (*La ventana se rompió* 'The window broke') by using transitive sentences in its place (*Alguien rompió la ventana* 'Someone broke the window'). This last strategy, in Toth's opinion, would have the objective of compensating the insecurity of the learner about the morphological marking of the L2. Again, this data suggests the presence of morphological transfer in different levels of competence of Spanish as an L2. However, as in Montrul (1999), presence versus absence of *se* is the focus of the test, and subjects are not provided with the opportunity to indicate what problem they found with the ungrammatical sentences.

A more recent study about inchoative and reflexive *se* is Zyzik (2006). Subjects were from the beginner, intermediate, high intermediate, and advanced levels. A test of oral description of pictures, in which they had to build intransitive sentences from given transitive ones or vice versa, was used. Zyzik reported low productivity of *se* at the beginner level, which increased to a semi-productive use in intermediate proficiency. Although learners' use of *se* was close to productive, advanced learners continue to omit inchoative *se* in some cases. Zyzik proposed three stages in the acquisition of *se*: in the first, learners commit errors of overgeneralization and omission; in the second, they use it semi-productively, and in the last one its use is productive. A problem with the test design of this study is the small number of tested verbs. Only two alternating change of state verbs were included: *quemar* 'to burn' and *secar* 'to dry'; the remaining six verbs were used to test reflexive uses of *se*. Therefore, the findings regarding the L2 acquisition of inchoative structures should be taken with caution as they may not necessarily reflect the behavior of this l-syntactic verb class as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Theories of transfer: predictions

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of transfer in the L2 acquisition of inchoative *se* in Spanish by L1 English speakers. Two approaches to L1 transfer are evaluated: Full Transfer as the initial state of L2 acquisition (Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996) and Developmentally Moderated Transfer. More specifically, as proposed in Cabrera & Zubizarreta (2003), and Cabrera (2008), based on the data of L2 acquisition of Spanish and English lexical causatives with different verb classes, lexico-syntactic constructional properties are transferred in early acquisition. The contribution of the present study is that it allows for the exploration of the interaction between the transfer of morphological marking, and constructional properties. Since the presence of the morphological marker *se* may be a salient property of the L2 input, given its absence in the L1, it is possible that it will take precedence over transfer of the properties of the construction. For example, faced with sentences such as *La ventana se rompió* 'the window broke' and *\*La carne se cortó* 'the meat cut', the L2 learner may either make use of L1 l-syntax properties and, therefore, prefer the

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<sup>2</sup> Another study on L2 Spanish inchoative *se* is Bruhn de Garavito (1999) at the near-native level of proficiency. Given that the present study does not test this grammatical structure at that level, I have not included it in the literature review. However, I should point out that it was found that at the near-native level learners performance is not significantly different from that of native speakers.

former to the latter, or make use of morphological properties, thus rejecting both due to the presence of *se*.

Starting off from the central hypothesis that the grammatical properties of the L1 will determine the characteristics of inchoative structures in the IL, I will discuss the predictions of both approaches to transfer in more detail. According to the Developmentally Moderated Transfer approach, not all the grammatical properties are transferred at the same time. If only the lexico-syntactic properties of English verbs are transferred, learners will accept alternating verbs *La ventana se rompió* ‘The window broke’) and reject the non-alternating ones (*\*La carne se cortó* ‘The meat was cut’). On the other hand, if learners transfer only the morphological properties of English, they will reject alternating verbs as much as non-alternating ones since the morphological marking *se* appears with both.

Full Transfer predicts that the L1 in its entirety is transferred in the earliest stage of L2 acquisition. If learners transfer the lexico-syntactic properties as much as the morphological ones, they will reject both types of verbs but for different reasons. The alternating verbs will be rejected by the presence of *se* and not by appearing in an intransitive form, while the non-alternating verbs will be rejected by occurring in the intransitive structure. With alternating verbs, learners will suggest that *se* is the problem (providing a correction such as *\*La ventana rompió* ‘The window broke’), but with non-alternating ones, they would correct inchoative structure transforming them into a different structure (for example, a transitive sentence like *Alguien rompió la ventana* ‘Someone broke the window’).

Differently from previous studies on this topic, the instrument design of the present study, in which L2 learners are required to provide a correction for each sentence that they rate as unacceptable, as we will see in the next section, allows for an exploration as to the reasons why subjects rejected inchoative structures, without directing their attention to a specific grammatical feature. On the other hand, the selection of verb per class tested in the present study is larger compared to that of previous research, while testing across different levels of proficiency. Although there are previous studies on this topic, the instruments, number of tested verbs, and levels of proficiency in them justify the need for a new study on the L2 acquisition of Spanish inchoative *se* in which these aspects are modified and improved in order to more carefully investigate the role of L1 transfer.

## 5. Methods

The experimental group was composed of 71 English-speaking students of Spanish in a university in Los Angeles, California (average age = 19.2). The control group was formed by 18 native speakers of Spanish tested in Lima, Peru (average age = 24.9). The levels of proficiency in the L2 were determined using a cloze test. The experimental group was divided into three levels: beginners (n = 28), intermediates (n = 27), and advanced (n = 16). Differently from Montrul (1999), different levels of proficiency were tested to investigate transfer effects at different stages.

Following Montrul (1999), learners were evaluated with a translation test of verbs to determine if they knew the idiosyncratic meaning of verbs before judging them in sentences. In this test, the subjects had to translate the verbs from Spanish to English using only one word. The verbs used in this test, and in the acceptability judgment task are presented in Table 1.

The main task of the study was the acceptability judgment test, whose design was based on that of Montrul (1999), but substantial changes were made to prevent eliciting comparative judgment of sentences. The purpose of this test was to determine if the learners accepted (or rejected) the verbs presented before in an intransitive configuration. In total, 24 test items and 15 fillers were included. Each sentence appeared accompanied by a picture to indicate the correct interpretation. Participants were asked to evaluate the sentences focusing on its acceptability in the L2, using a Likert scale from -3 to +3. Table 2 shows examples of the sentences included in this test.

**Table 1: Verbs tested in the Translation and Acceptability Judgment tests**

Non-Alternating Unaccusatives (U)	Unergatives (E)	Alternating Unaccusatives (A)	Non-Alternating Transitives (NA)
aparecer 'appear' llegar 'arrive' venir 'come' entrar 'enter' ir 'go' ocurrir 'happen'	ladrar 'bark' acampar 'camp' llorar 'cry' luchar 'fight' reír 'laugh' fumar 'smoke'	romper 'break' quemar 'burn' cerrar 'close' cocer 'cook' abrir 'open' parar 'stop'	construir 'build' cortar 'cut' diseñar 'design' pintar 'paint' vender 'sell' escribir 'write'

**Table 2: Examples of inchoative sentences used in the Acceptability Judgment Test**

<b>Non-Alternating Unaccusatives (U)</b>	La niña <u>llegó</u> tarde a la escuela. 'The girl arrived at school late'
<b>Unergatives (E)</b>	Juan <u>fumó</u> . 'Juan smoked'
<b>Alternating Unaccusatives (A)</b>	La puerta se <u>abrió</u> . The door SE opened 'The door opened'
<b>Non-Alternating Transitives (NA)</b>	*La carta se <u>escribió</u> . The letter SE wrote

As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, labels were included to identify the patient argument to ensure that the participants had the necessary vocabulary to complete the test. All the sentences were intransitive; therefore, an agent argument was not included in any of the pictures. Differently from Montrul (1999), each picture was accompanied by only one sentence; no pair of sentences was used. Alternating unaccusative and non-alternating transitive verbs were all tested with the presence of *se*. Presence / absence of this morphological marker was not manipulated in the test. Furthermore, participants were asked to provide a correction to the original sentence if they had rated it with a negative value. In these corrections, I expected to find deletions of *se* or other type of transformation to the original sentences.

In Figure 1, an example is presented with an alternating unaccusative verb, and in Figure 2 one is included with a non-alternating transitive, with a correction provided by the learner.

**Figure 1: Test item with alternating verb in the Acceptability Judgment Test**

1

La puerta

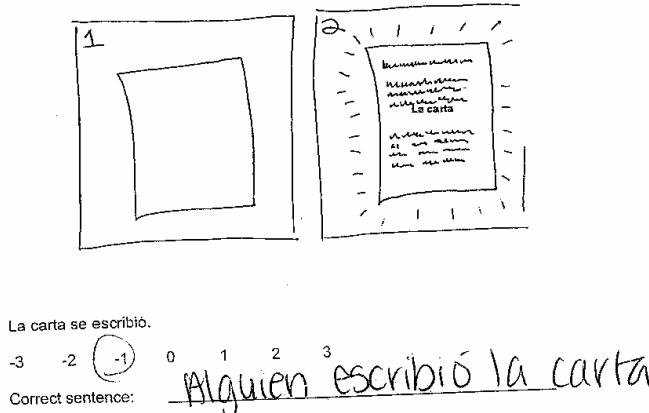
2

La puerta se abrió.

-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 (3)

Correct sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 2: Test item with non-alternating verb in the Acceptability Judgment Test**

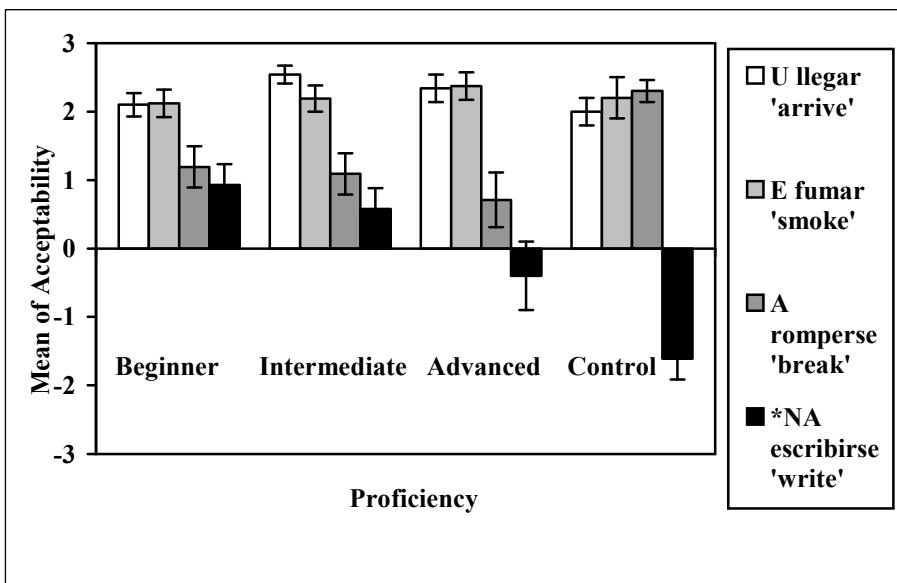


### 6. Group Results

Means of acceptability were calculated for each verb class tested (cf. tables 1 and 2). In Figure 3, the means of acceptability by verb class for each level of competence and the control group with their corresponding standard error bars are shown. As can be appreciated, the averages for non-alternating unaccusative (U) and unergative verbs (E) were higher than those obtained for alternating unaccusative (A) and non-alternating transitive verbs (NA), and over the value 2. Since this paper focuses on inchoative *se*, in what follows, I discuss the results for two verb classes only: alternating unaccusatives (*romper*), and non-alternating transitives (*cut*).

Paired-sample t-tests were used to statistically compare the averages for alternating (A) and non-alternating (NA) verbs within each level of competence. Although alternating verbs have a higher average than non-alternating at all the levels of proficiency, the difference between these only resulted statistically significant for the advanced ( $t(15) = 2.52, p < .05$ ). The difference among these verb classes also resulted significant for the control group ( $t(15) = 6.1, p < .001$ ), which confirms the description of inchoative structures of Spanish presented in section 2.

**Figure 3: Group results of the Acceptability Judgment Test**



The group analyses indicated that intransitive forms with alternating unaccusatives and non-alternating transitive verbs were marginally accepted at the beginner and intermediate levels. At the

advanced level, the first are still marginally accepted while the second starts to be rejected. In other words, in the early levels of acquisition, learners do not make a clear distinction among these lexico-syntactic verb classes, while they do it at the advanced level.

Nevertheless, means may hide details of the individual variation, a frequent phenomenon in L2 acquisition; moreover, since the presence / absence of *se* was not manipulated, these means do not tell us much about inchoative *se*. For these reasons, I performed two qualitative analyses: correction patterns, and individual differences.

## 7. Qualitative analyses

### 7.1. Analysis of correction patterns

In the first qualitative analysis done, the reasons for which the learners rejected the intransitive forms having *se* with alternating unaccusative and non-alternating transitive verbs were explored. For that reason, a percentage for each type of correction was calculated. Only a consistent correction pattern per subject (at or above 50%) was included. The types of corrections that were found were the following: the learner erased *se*, changed the sentence to the transitive form, or changed it to the passive form.

As shown in Table 3, beginners and intermediates that rejected the intransitive forms of alternating unaccusative verbs tended to correct them by erasing *se* or by making the sentence transitive. In the advanced group, nevertheless, the most common correction is changing the intransitive to a transitive form. On the other hand, as can be seen in Table 4, the most common correction for the intransitive form of non-alternating transitive verbs was consistently the change to the transitive form. These data show that learners that reject the intransitive forms have different reasons to reject them. With transitive alternating verbs, lexico-syntactic and morphological properties seem to be at play, whereas with non-alternating verbs mostly lexico-syntactic considerations seem to matter, especially at higher proficiency.

**Table 3: Percentage of corrections with alternating unaccusative verbs**

Correction	Beginner (n=28)	Intermediate (n=27)	Advanced (n=16)
Deleted <i>se</i> <i>*La ventana rompió.</i>	10 (50%)	16 (43%)	5 (15%)
Transitive sentence <i>Alguien rompió la ventana.</i>	10 (50%)	18 (49%)	28 (85%)
Passive sentence <i>La ventana fue rota por alguien.</i>	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)

**Table 4: Percentage of corrections with non-alternating transitive verbs**

Correction	Beginner (n=28)	Intermediate (n=27)	Advanced (n=16)
Deleted <i>se</i> <i>*La carne cortó.</i>	7 (14%)	12 (24%)	0 (0%)
Transitive sentence <i>Alguien cortó la carne.</i>	43 (84%)	34 (66%)	42 (93%)
Passive sentence <i>La carne fue cortada por alguien.</i>	1 (2%)	5 (10%)	3 (7%)

### 7.2. Analysis of individual differences

In the second qualitative analysis, I explored the subgroups of learners according to their consistent (at or above 50%) or non-consistent (below 50%) ratings for the alternating unaccusative and non-alternating transitive verbs, and the corrections they provided when rejected inchoative

structures. Table 5 shows that the learners can be classified in distinct groups. Some of them accepted both verb classes, i.e. they did not make a distinction between lexico-syntactic verb classes; this group falls in number as the level of proficiency increases. Another group rejected alternating unaccusative verbs as much as non-alternating transitive verbs due to the presence of *se* (morphological transfer); its percentages also lower when proficiency increases. It should be noted that both of these groups do not make a difference between alternating and non-alternating verbs, which may indicate that transfer of morphology is at play in both cases. The presence of *se* may be the motivation for the overgeneralizations of non-alternating transitive verbs to the intransitive form. As predicted, the presence of *se* seems to hinder the transfer of lexico-syntactic properties, differently from what was found by Cabrera & Zubizarreta (2003), and Cabrera (2008) for lexical causatives.

Other learners rejected alternating and non-alternating verbs for different reasons: the first for the presence of *se* and the second for the intransitive configuration, i.e. they seemed to be influenced by their L1 in its entirety (Full Transfer). Interestingly, and against the Full Transfer hypothesis, the percentage of these subjects increases with the level of L2 competence. This finding is coherent with Cabrera & Zubizarreta (2003), and Cabrera (2008).

Learners that gave mixed (or inconsistent) corrections are also found in high numbers especially at the advanced proficiency. These findings may be taken as evidence of the way in which the learning process for different verb classes unfolds. Verbs seem to be learned in a piecemeal manner rather than as a lexico-syntactic class even at the advanced level. Finally, there was a group whose responses corresponded to the L2, even though surprisingly its percentage falls with the increase in level of proficiency, which suggest a U-shape developmental pattern for some subjects, and Full Transfer are more likely to happen with more L2 proficiency.

**Table 5: Percentage of subjects according to ratings for alternating unaccusatives (A) and non-alternating transitives (NA)**

	<b>Beginner</b> (n=28)	<b>Intermediate</b> (n=27)	<b>Advanced</b> (n=16)
Accepted A/NA (No Lexico-Syntactic Transfer)	12 (43%)	9 (33%)	3 (19%)
Deleted <i>se</i> with A/NA (Transfer of Morphology)	2 (7%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)
Deleted <i>se</i> with A/ Transitive sentence with NA (Full Transfer)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	3 (19%)
Mixed corrections	9 (32%)	11 (41%)	10 (62%)
Accepted A / Rejected NA (L2)	4 (14%)	4 (14%)	0 (0%)

## 8. Discussion of the results

The present study evaluates the role of the L1 in the development of the IL, with respect to the inchoative (or intransitive) structures marked with the pronoun *se* in Spanish. Two theories are evaluated: Developmentally Moderated Transfer and Full Transfer. Based on the analysis of the lexico-syntactic and morphological properties of the structure studied, specific predictions were formulated.

According to Developmentally Constrained Transfer, not all of the properties of the L1 are transferred in the same stage of acquisition; in other words, transfer requires a certain level of competence in the L2. If the learner transfers only the lexico-syntactic properties, s/he would prefer alternating unaccusative (*La ventana se rompió* ‘The window broke’) to non-alternating transitives (*La carne se cortó* ‘The meat was cut’) in intransitive configuration. The group results show that this prediction more suitably describes the behavior of the advanced group than that of the beginners and

intermediates. The qualitative analyses also show that the differentiation among these verb classes is clearer when the proficiency level in the L2 is higher.

On the other hand, if the learner only transfers the morphology, s/he will reject all of the occurrences of *se* that are presented. The group results show that beginners and intermediates marginally accept intransitives with both verb classes. Through the qualitative analysis of individual differences it is possible to observe that a small group of learners at the beginner and intermediate levels rejected the pronoun *se* independently of the verb class with which it appears.

Finally, Full Transfer predicts that the L1 in its entirety is transferred in the earliest stage of L2 acquisition. If learners transfer the lexico-syntactic and morphological properties, they will reject both types of verbs for different reasons. Alternating verbs will be rejected due to the presence of *se* and non-alternating ones will be rejected for occurring in the intransitive form. The group results show that the advanced level shows this type of behavior. The qualitative analyses gave evidence in favor of this point of view in showing that, at all levels, the learners tend to give different corrections according to whether the verb is alternating or not. This differentiation between verb classes is clearer at the advanced level.

Despite the high level of individual variation found in the acquisition of the inchoative *se*, the data of the present study supports the theory of Developmentally Constrained Transfer, and not Full Transfer in early acquisition. Different properties of the L1 are transferred at different levels of proficiency. The theory of Full Transfer is supported, contrary to the predictions, by the advanced level and not by the beginning one. Similarly to Toth (1999) and Zyzik (2006), the following developmental stages emerge:

- (9)
  - a. Stage 1: morphological transfer:  
Overgeneralization or absence of *se*
  - b. Stage 2: lexico-syntactic transfer:  
Preference for alternating to non-alternating verbs regardless of the presence of *se*

Morphological transfer takes precedence over lexico-syntactic transfer differently from what I found for lexical causatives in my previous research on the acquisition of English and Spanish. Given that morphological marking is not at play in lexical causatives in these languages, but mostly similarities in constructional properties, and differences related to specific verb classes, the present results are not in contradiction with the developmental sequence for lexical causatives.

As discussed in section 3, Montrul (1999) proposed the model of Modular Transfer, according to which morphology is more likely to transfer than argument structure. This approach was coherent with the data reported in that study. However, the present study, by taking into consideration different levels of proficiency, and making explicit predictions according to different types of L1 properties, provides a different view of transfer. L1 transfer do not seem to be modular, i.e. there is not incompatibility between morphological and lexico-syntactic transfer. What is different is the developmental stage at which certain type of transfer is available. Transfer of morphology is more evident in early acquisition, whereas lexico-syntactic transfer, or sensitivity to different verb classes, is more noticeable later on.

On the other hand, by testing a larger number of verbs per lexico-syntactic class, I have been able to see whether the L2 acquisition process proceeds in a piecemeal fashion or whether all verbs in class pattern together. For a considerable group on learners, the learning process seems to be verb by verb per class, a finding compatible with what was found by Zyzik (2006). Furthermore, the difficulties with inchoative *se* even at the advanced level is another point of coincidence with that study, although studies such as Bruhn de Garavito (1999) show that competence on this grammatical feature is attainable at the near-native level.

## 9. Conclusion

In this work, it has been proposed that the acquisition of inchoative *se* in L2 Spanish can be explained by transfer of different aspects of the L1 at different levels of proficiency. The data presented suggests that transfer is moderated by the development of L2 competence, while clear support for Full Transfer, at least for the beginning level, was not found. Strong support for modular transfer of morphology was not found either. The individual variation reported here shows that it is a

patterned feature of L2 populations. More research on individual variation is necessary to uncover the patterns that underlie means and other group statistical measures.

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