# Measuring Ability to Acquire Novel Variation in L2 Spanish

Daniel Ross, Department of Linguistics, UIUC

## Background

Siegel (2010) – a thorough review of Second Dialect Acquisition research; a D2 can be in some ways harder to acquire perfectly than an L2, but as in SLA, children often perform much better in SDA.

Han (2004) – discusses the many views about fossilization (what it is and what it means; methods of study); regardless, children are less affected.

Schwartz (2003) and others – not all domains are equal; for example, syntax may differ from morphology and both may differ from phonology.

Falk and Bardel (2010) – L2 can influence L3 acquisition both lexically and grammatically, but potentially in different ways. More research is needed.

Montrul et al. (2010) – similarity between L2 and L3 affects influence.

Jessop et al. (2007) – an overview of using repetition in SLA research, noting most importantly that a delay in repetition suggests re-processing.

## Hypotheses

A non-native end-state is the result of input not having a strong effect (or in some cases, but *not all*, insufficient input). This research will investigate how input affects different groups, predicting that:

(1) lower proficiency speakers will respond more to novel input; and

(2) younger speakers will respond more to novel input.

## Participants

For the pilot study discussed here, the 8 adult participants included 6 L2 speakers of Spanish (English L1) and 2 native speakers; the L2 speakers were divided into two groups of 3 (by low and high proficiency test scores). All three groups contained one male participant.

## Methods

•Written 100-item Spanish proficiency test, including both multiple choice items and fill-in-the-blank C-test items.

•Recorded session (about 45 minutes) including:

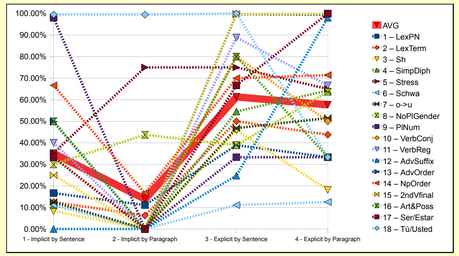
- •Spanish language background questionnaire
- •Spanish speaking sample (3 topics, 1 minute each)
- •Swahili repetition as control for working memory
- **•Artificial Spanish Dialect repetition**

Participants heard three passages produced by applying 18 systematic changes to standard Spanish, resulting in ungrammatical or unusual forms. There were three passages, and each was repeated four times:

**Implicit stage:** Participants were asked to concentrate on the meaning. For each paragraph, participants heard and repeated it first **(1)** by sentence, then **(2)** by passage.

**Explicit stage:** Participants were asked specifically to imitate the dialect (in all ways). Again, repetitions were **(3)** by sentence then **(4)** by passage for each passage.

## Results

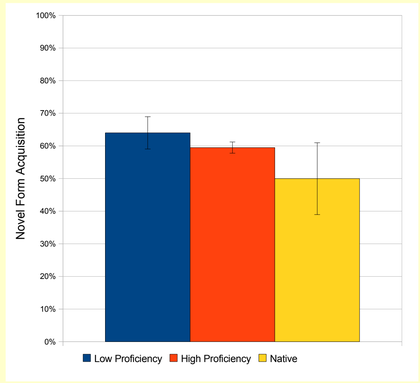



Example of one individual's results, showing development during the experiment.

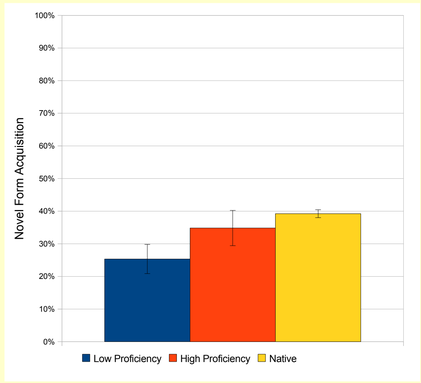
| ID | Type | Name | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lexicon | LexPN | New Proper Name lexical items, such as names of people or places. |
| 2 | Lexicon | LexTerm | New jargon terms, such as the name of a scientific field or instrument. |
| 3 | Phonetics | Sh | ll,y -> sh, context-free; as in Argentinian Spanish |
| 4 | Phonetics | SimpDiph | Simplify many diphthongs, the sort that developed in Spanish not from Latin. Based on Italian, ue->o, ie->e. |
| 5 | Phonology | Stress | The stressed syllable of an utterance-final word is extra-heavily stressed (longer, louder). |
| 6 | Phonology | Schwa | Phonological merge of [a,e] word-finally to schwa ['acquired' if noncontrastive], except lexically stressed final letters. |
| 7 | Phonology | o->u | /o/ becomes [u] word-finally. |
| 8 | Gender | NoPlGender | as/es/os -> schwa+s in plural; no gender distinctions in plural |
| 9 | Morphology | PlNum | Plural numbers are inflected with -s, such as cuatros/cincos. |
| 10 | Morphology | VerbConj | -mos -> -m in 1P; change verbal conjugation |
| 11 | Morphology | VerbReg | Some irreg. verbs will be conjugated regularly. Specifically, those that are irregular only for 1S (eg, tengo = teno). Also, hay = ha. |
| 12 | Morphology | AdvSuffix | The adverb suffix is -mén instead of -mente. |
| 13 | Syntax | AdvOrder | Adverbs go between V and DO, as in "eat often apples"; like French |
| 14 | Syntax | NpOrder | All noun modifiers except articles go after the noun (eg numbers, demonstratives, adjs, quantifiers). |
| 15 | Syntax | 2ndVfinal | Secondary verbs in periphrastic VPs go to end, as in German. |
| 16 | Syntax | Art&Poss | Use an article with possessive pronouns; "il mio libro" of Italian. But in this Spanish: "el libro mio" |
| 17 | Semantics | Ser/Estar | Merge ser and estar; only ser is used. |
| 18 | Pragmatics | Tú/Usted | Invert the uses of Tú and Usted, so that Tú is formal and Usted is informal. |

Each variable was present in each passage at least one time; the total number of instances for each variable ranged from 3 through 56. The significant variation in the range is due to the type of variable: for example, (18) is a pragmatic variable so it was only included 3 times total, but (7) is a general phonological variable so it has approximately 56 instances. Gray items were excluded for missing data or confounds.

The primary score was based on the number of instances for each variable that the form was copied from the artificial dialect compared to the number of tokens for that variable. This was compared to proficiency scores. Lexical items were counted based on the number of instances in the input because production is equivalent to learning.

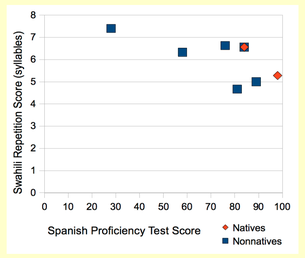


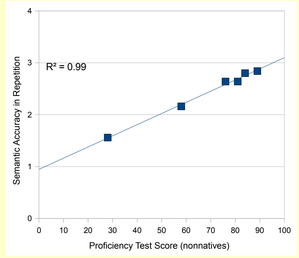

Results (nonlexical)

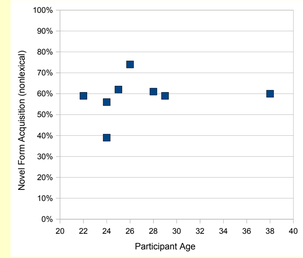



Results (lexical)

This data can also be analyzed for other variable-type effects, and I am planning to do that once more data has been collected. Based on the existing data, it is clear that not all variables pattern the same way.




## Discussion

•Based on the limited data currently available, the graph does seem to support the hypothesis that less proficient learners are more open to new forms (both in noticing and reproducing them), when compared to higher proficiency learners and native speakers.

•The exception to this is that new lexical items (names and terms) were more easily acquired by more proficient speakers.

•A potential confound (coincidental) may be that the Swahili repetition scores and proficiency scores appear to inversely correlate. More data is needed.

•Ability to accurately repeat the meaning of the passage did correlate strongly with proficiency, which generally verifies the proficiency scores.

•No age effects among the adults were found, at least not in this data. Including a wider age range (for example, older adults), and of course children will be required to see if there is an age effect.

## Conclusion and future directions

•More data is needed for anything to be conclusive.

•Controlling for other factors (individual variation, other languages known, etc.) will be helpful.

•The data can also be analyzed by variable type.

**•This summer I will be working with Spanish L1 children and adults in Ecuador to see whether there are similar effects for age on the L1.**

**•I will also continue with a larger experiment for L2 adults here.**

•If both age and proficiency effects are found, future research involving L2 children would also be useful in relating how age and proficiency effects.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Professor Tania Ionin, to Noelia Sanchez-Walker for checking my Spanish, and to all of my participants for working through this challenging experiment and for their feedback.