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Knowledge of expletive and pronominal subjects by learners of Spanish ⁽¹⁾

Cristóbal LOZANO

Department of Language & Linguistics
University of Essex

Abstract

A number of studies investigating second language acquisition (SLA) from the perspective of Principles and Parameters Theory (P&P, CHOMSKY, 1981, 1995) have focused on the *pro*-drop parameter, and have argued that older second language learners are sensitive to the different properties it purportedly covers (e.g., AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX, 1998; LICERAS, 1989; PHINNEY, 1987; WHITE, 1986). In this paper we extend this work by investigating two of its syntactic corollaries, namely, referential pronominal subjects (ProS) and expletive pronominal subjects (ExpS). In so-called [+*pro*-drop] languages both may be realised as an empty element (*pro*). While on the surface these forms are identical, referential subject *pro* is different from expletive subject *pro* both syntactically and semantically; syntactically because referential *pro* co-exists with a set of overt subject pronouns (yo 'I', tú 'you', etc), whereas there are no overt expletive pronouns; semantically because referential *pro* is distinguished for 3 persons, number and gender features, whereas expletive *pro* would

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appear to be a third person, singular, gender-neutral pronoun. We will examine whether older L2 learners are sensitive to these differences by using paired grammaticality judgement tests (PGJT). Results are consistent with the claim that learners have different mental representations for ProS and ExpS.

1. Universal Grammar

Over the last two decades, some of the constructs and theories of First Language Acquisition (FLA) have been applied to Second Language Acquisition (SLA). In particular, a number of SLA researchers have been exploiting the generative paradigm, following CHOMSKY's (e.g., 1981, 1986, 1995) proposals. This general approach to language constitutes what is known as the theory of Principles and Parameters (P&P).

1.1. Principles and Parameters

CHOMSKY (1981, 1995) envisages the language faculty as a set of universal principles and language-specific parameters inside the native speaker's mind. This is an innate device which sets limits on any actual grammar the child can acquire. Linguistic input in the form of positive evidence will set a given parameter to either a [+] value or a [-] value, as is the case of the pro-drop parameter. Note that although the P&P theory was originally designed to account for FLA phenomena, researchers soon realised its implications for SLA.

1.2. The pro-drop parameter

Some researchers (CHOMSKY, 1981; JAEGGLI, 1982; PERLMUTTER, 1971; RIZZI, 1982) report on a series of properties that, although apparently unrelated, divide languages into two groups. These properties form what is known as the *pro*-drop parameter (or null subject parameter). Soon studies started to appear (e.g., HYAMS, 1987) claiming

that children set all the properties of the parameter once one of the properties (null subjects) has been set. In other words, Hyams showed that the parametric properties cluster together in FLA, so once one property is acquired, the others will automatically follow. Let us examine in more detail this clustering of properties.

1.2.1. Null subjects

Languages like Spanish, Italian or Greek optionally allow referential pronominal subjects (henceforth ProS) to be dropped in finite clauses as in (1b), where the empty place occupied by the dropped pronoun is represented by *pro* (hence the name *pro*-drop parameter). We will call these constructions null ProS. On the other hand, overt ProS is also possible as (1a) shows. Languages like Spanish are classified as [+pro-drop], yet languages like English always require an overt ProS (2a), hence the ungrammaticality of (2b), where there is a null ProS. This second type of language is classed as [-pro-drop].

(1) Spanish	a. El/ella salió	(overt ProS)
	b. <i>pro</i> salió	(null ProS)
(2) English	a. He/she left	(overt ProS)
	b. * <i>pro</i> left	(null ProS)

1.2.2. Expletives

In [+pro-drop] languages, expletive subjects (henceforth ExpS) are not realised phonologically in existential or meteorological constructions (i.e., predicates containing verbs like *hay* 'there is, there exist', *llover* 'to rain'), as shown in (3a) and (4a). We will call these constructions null ExpS. However, overt ExpS (realised by Spanish *lo* 'it') are not permitted, as (3b) and (4b) show.

On the other hand, in [-pro-drop] languages, existential and meteorological constructions do require an overt ExpS (like English *it* and *there*) as in (5b) and (6b), even if it is semantically empty, while null expletives are ungrammatical as (5a) and (6a) show.

- (3) Spanish a. *pro* llueve (null ProS)
rains
'It rains'
b. * *Lo* llueve (overt ProS)
'It rains'
- (4) Spanish a. *pro* hay muchos estudiantes en la clase (null ExpS)
is a lot of students in the classroom
'There are a lot of students in the classroom'
b. * *Lo* hay muchos estudiantes en la clase (null ExpS)
It is a lot of students in the classroom
'There are a lot of students in the classroom'
- (5) English a. * *pro* is raining (null ExpS)
b. It is raining (overt ExpS)
- (6) English a. * *pro* are a lot of students in the classroom
(null ExpS)
b. There are a lot of students in the classroom
(overt ExpS)

Therefore, it can be said that, despite their overt similarities, the two types of *pro* (ProS and ExpS) behave syntactically differently, as suggested in early work by SUÑER (1982). They carry different features. Referential *pro* in (1b) carries features for [person], [number] and [gender], yet expletive *pro* in (3a) and (4a) only carries third person singular features [3S]. A further distinction is that ProS can be *optionally* dropped, whereas ExpS is *compulsorily* null. These differences are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Different types of *pro* in Spanish

	Type of pronominal	
	Referential	Expletive
Dropping	[±]	[-]
Features	[person] [± singular] [± masculine]	[3] [+singular]

Given the fact that *pro* is an empty element with different features in each of its uses (referential vs. expletive), it seems reasonable to ask whether Spanish L2 learners will be sensitive to this distinction. We will address this issue in the experimental section of this paper.

1.2.3. The rest of the properties

There are more properties of the *pro*-drop parameter, but these are not the focus of this study. For more detailed views on the *pro*-drop parameter, see CHOMSKY (1981), DEMONTE (1991), HAEGEMAN (1994), JAEGGLI (1982) and RIZZI (1982,1997).

2. Previous research

Perhaps the earliest attempt to test the *pro*-drop parameter in SLA was executed by WHITE (1985) in a pilot study, and WHITE (1986) in a more detailed study. In the latter, she investigated (i) whether the L1 *pro*-drop parameter setting influences SLA; and (ii) whether the properties of the parameter cluster together in SLA. Two groups of subjects were used: 37 French natives (French being a [-*pro*-drop] language) and 32 Spanish (+2 Italian) natives (Spanish and Italian being [+*pro*-drop] languages). Both groups were acquiring English as an L2. The method consisted of a grammaticality judgement test. The sentences contained two properties of the parameter (null subjects and SV inversion, though we will review here the former only). White predicted that if Spanish (and Italian) speakers were using their L1 parameter setting, then they would be more tolerant of null subjects (which are ungrammatical in English but grammatical in Spanish and Italian, as shown earlier). Results seem to confirm her predictions as Spanish (and Italian) natives were more tolerant towards sentences with null ProS (89% of acceptance) than French natives (61%). The conclusion reached was that 'L1 parameters influence the adult learner's view of the L2 data, at least for a while, leading to transfer error.' (WHITE, 1986:69).

LICERAS's (1989) study was the first to test the pro-drop parameter from a [-pro-drop language], English L1, into a [+pro-drop] language, Spanish L2. She tested the clustering of the properties in SLA, though she excluded from her study ProS (therefore, we will analyse her findings about expletive subjects only). Data indicate that only a minority of beginners (20%) accepted ungrammatical overt ExpS in Spanish, while none (0%) of the advanced students accepted it. As it will be shown later, a similar trend is found in our study. In LICERAS' (1989:126) words: 'pleonastic *pro* [i.e., expletive *pro*] is incorporated in the learner's grammar at the very early stages.' As for the clustering of the pro-drop properties in Spanish SLA, LICERAS (1989:129) argues that the properties do not have the same status in SLA, thus suggesting that there is no clustering. Similar findings are reported by RUÍZ DE ZAROBÉ (1998), who employed Spanish natives learning English. She also found that there does not seem to be clustering of properties in English SLA. We will come back to the issue of clustering in the experimental section of this study.

As for ProS, PHINNEY (1987) reports that English learners of Spanish 'show that they have learned to omit pronominal subjects, even in the lowest group' (PHINNEY, 1987:234). These findings lead in the direction of the findings that will be presented in this study.

The studies reviewed so far have focused on parametric differences between L1 and L2. However, BINI (1993) investigated the acquisition of ProS by L1 Spanish learners of L2 Italian. Both languages belong to the [+pro-drop] group, and therefore behave parametrically alike. Learners were interviewed and recorded by the researcher. They were asked to talk about personal experiences. Surprisingly, learners overused overt ProS (particularly *io* 'I'), which is not the norm neither in their L1 nor their L2. BINI (1993:137) suggests several explanations for this phenomenon: overt pronominal subjects may be used by learners to fill in the silences during the conversation; or perhaps learners use them to gain time to think without interrupting the conversation.

It is worth pointing out that Bini's results are production data and may not faithfully reflect learners' competence. It would be interesting to administer grammaticality judgements to a similar set of students (with [+pro-drop] L1s and L2s), rather than interviews, so as to better tap learners' competence.

A recent study by AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX (1998) focuses on the acquisition of null ExpS and null ProS in Spanish SLA by English native speakers. They hypothesised that, as both constructions are part of the pro-drop parameter, learners would increase their target-like knowledge of both constructions simultaneously. Learners were required to complete two tasks: (i) a comprehension task, where they had to match sentences containing ProS and ExpS with the appropriate drawing: either generic (requiring a null expletive) or referential (requiring an overt pronominal); and (ii) a production task where learners were presented with a cloze test containing 20 sentences with a blank at the beginning of each. They were requested to fill the blanks in with an overt pronoun (either ProS or ExpS) or with no pronoun at all. AL-KASEY and PÉREZ-LEROUX' results indicate that learners start off by erroneously matching overt ProS to generic pictures (23% for beginners), though rates decrease with proficiency level (8% for advanced) towards the Spanish native norm (2%). The authors conclude that 'results clearly reveal a stage in L2 acquisition of Spanish in which SSL [Spanish Second Language] learners often misanalyse overt pronouns in sentence-initial position as expletive pronouns.' (AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX, 1998:172). As for the null ExpS, they are acquired along with null ProS, thus suggesting that (i) both constructions are part of the same parameter; and (ii) null ProS do not occur until null ExpS have been acquired. The focus of our study will be wider than AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX', as we will encompass null/overt both ProS and ExpS.

In another grammaticality judgement test, DAVIES (1996) also found that L2 English learners (with different L1 backgrounds: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Italian and Spanish, all null subject lan-

guages) do not show differences with respect to null ExpS and null ProS, thus supporting AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX' (1998) findings.

Note that the studies reviewed above fail to test whether (i) learners treat overt/null ProS differently from overt/null ExpS; and (ii) learners know that both overt and null ProS are interchangeable in Spanish, yet only null ExpS is possible. Our study intends to bridge this gap in the literature.

3. Method

In this section, we will first hypothesise about the type of knowledge L2 learners might have with regard to the two different types of constructions analysed above (ProS and ExpS). Then, it will be detailed the linguistic background of the learners employed in this study. Finally, we will describe the instruments used to gather the linguistic data.

3.1. Hypothesis

As pointed out in the literature review, there is a lack of SLA studies focusing on the different behaviour and acquisition of ExpS vs ProS in Spanish. It could be initially assumed that learners are not be sensible to this distinction, as both constructions contain an empty element (*pro*) that represents a null subject: in the case of ExpS, null subjects are compulsory, yet in the case of ProS null subjects are optional. However, we will maintain the contrary and will argue for the following:

(H₁) Learners will show awareness of the parametric difference between the two types of *pro* (null ProS and null ExpS) from the earliest stages of acquisition.

(H₂) More specifically, learners will treat grammatical expletive null *pro* differently from ungrammatical expletive overt *pro*. Yet they will treat both grammatical pronominal null *pro* and overt *pro* similarly.

(H₃) As proficiency level rises, learners will increase their acceptance of grammatical null ExpS yet they will decrease their acceptance of ungrammatical overt ExpS. On the other hand, learners acceptance of both grammatical overt and null ProS will be native-like from the earliest stage of acquisition.

Note that this difference in the behaviour of both types of *pro* (H₁ and H₂) is predicted by syntactic theory (amongst others, DEMONTE, 1991; HAEGEMAN, 1994; RIZZI, 1997; SUÑER, 1982). If we assume that these differences derive from UG, it could be also assumed that learners may be sensitive to them. The last hypothesis (H₃) stems from the fact that some SLA researchers (e.g., LICERAS, 1989; PHINNEY, 1987) claim that ProS is resettable instantaneously or from the earliest stages, whereas ExpS is resettable over time.

Our hypothesis do not necessarily discard parametric transfer from L1 into L2. Indeed, the focus of this study is not language transfer, but rather whether learners show knowledge of the [±overt ProS] setting and the [-overt ExpS] setting in a [+pro-drop] language like Spanish.

3.2. Subjects

According to their L1, subjects (henceforth referred to as learners) were classified into two groups: (i) native speakers of English (NSE), experimental group; (ii) native speakers of Spanish (NSS), control group. The NSE group consisted of a total of 34 subjects who participated in the first task, and 23 in the second task. They all were native speakers of English and were studying Spanish as a second language at the University of Hertfordshire (UK) as part of their humanities degree. Overall, 2/3 of the NSEs were female, with an average age of 20 years for all groups. Originally, before the tests took place, the NSEs were distributed in three classes, according to length of exposure to Spanish L2 (which corresponded to academic year). In this study, they were nominally subdivided into three groups (*ex post*

facto design), according to length of exposure to the target language, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Experimental subject's nominal classification into groups

Group	Academic year	Years of exposure to L2
NSE1	1 st	½ years
NSE2	2 nd	1 ½ years
NSE3	3 rd	2 ½ years

Since the learners were studying Spanish in England, extra linguistic input outside the classroom was minimal or non-existent, thus rendering homogeneous groups as far as rate of linguistic exposure was concerned.

A group of five NSSs served as control group. They were finishing their degrees at the same university and had been studying English up to Cambridge First Certificate level. The ratio of females for the NSS was 3/5.

3.3. Instruments

This study uses data from a larger study (LOZANO POZO, 1999) where several tasks were employed to ascertain learners' knowledge of the four properties of the pro-drop parameter. We will, however, report here on the new findings of only two properties, namely, ExpS and ProS.

Learners were asked to participate in two tasks, each consisting of what we have termed a paired grammaticality judgement test (PGJT). This is akin to the traditional grammaticality judgement test (GJT), which has been extensively employed in SLA research (see, amongst others, DAVIES, 1996; LICERAS, 1989; MOLINA VALERO, 1997; RUIZ DE ZAROBÉ, 1998; WHITE, 1986), though it poses serious doubts for some researchers (CHRISTIE & LANTOLF, 1992; COOK, 1986:11).

The only difference between PGJT and GJT is that the former (used in the present study) presents learners with a pair of written stimuli (sentences) simultaneously, one sentence in the pair contains the [+] value of the parameter, the other the [-] value. For example, consider sentence (7) below, where (a) contains the [-] value of the parameter (i.e., overt ProS), whereas (b) contains the [+] value (i.e., null ProS). Recall that both sentences are grammatical in Spanish. Yet in configurations like (8), sentence (a) contains the [-] value (i.e., overt ExpS), which is ungrammatical, whereas (b) contains the [+] value (i.e., null ExpS), which is grammatical in Spanish.

- (7) a. Yo voy a la universidad en coche
I go to the university in car
'I go to uni by car'
b. Voy a la universidad en coche
Go-1S to the university in car
'I go to uni by car'
- (8) a. * Lo nieva en Finlandia en invierno
'It snows in Finland in winter'
b. Nieva en Finlandia en invierno
Snows in Finland in winter
'It snows in Finland in winter'

The use of PGJT has the advantage of determining which grammatical representation learners possess since 'the grammatical/ungrammatical opposition is binary and is to be determined by a particular grammar.' (CHRISTIE & LANTOLF, 1992:23).

The first task (see appendix focused on ExpS, whereas the second (see appendix focused on ProS, as well as the rest of the properties of the pro-drop parameter, which are not the focus of our study).

For each pair of sentences, subjects had to decide whether they were both wrong, both right or one wrong/one right (that is, any combination of 'right/wrong' was possible).

In order to discard as many extraneous variables as possible and to ensure the reliability of the tests, prior to the administration of the tasks, pilot tests were conducted to reduce any semantic or syntactic flaws during the administration of the final tests. It is worth mentioning that both pilot and final tests yielded similar results (LOZANO POZO, 1999), which strengthens the internal validity of our study. The order of right/wrong sentences was altered randomly to avoid subjects' detection of a possible fixed presentational order. The length of the sentences was also controlled so that they contained a minimum of 4 words and a maximum of 8. All vocabulary items belonged to the learners' coursebook (GONZÁLEZ & al., 1995) and had been covered in class. Distractors were also included so as to divert subjects' attention to the target constructions. Time was controlled during the task, so subjects had an average of 15 seconds per pair of sentences, amounting to an average total of 3 minutes per task.

3.4. Scoring

The scoring procedure consisted of giving a '0' or '1' score to subjects for every stimulus. If a grammatical sentence like (9a/b) was accepted as right, '1' was given. If rejected as wrong, '0' was given. In the case of ExpS where both a grammatical and an ungrammatical sentence were presented. If ungrammatical (100a) was accepted, the subject was given a '0' score. If rejected, he/she was given a '1' score. If grammatical (100b) was accepted, a '1' was given. If rejected, a '0' was given.

- (9) a. Yo voy a la universidad en coche
 b. Voy a la universidad en coche
- (10) a. * Lo nieva en Finlandia en invierno
 b. Nieva en Finlandia en invierno

The numbers of ones and zeros was added up for each subject and then divided by the number of stimuli to get a percentage value. For example, if a subject scored a total of '3' out of five presented stimuli,

he/she would get a '60%' score. All these percentage figures, which were obtained using the statistical package MS Excel (version 98), were later analysed in SPSS (version 8.0), which yielded the final results.

4. Results

We will present first the results belonging to ExpS (task 1) and later those belonging to ProS (task 2). Prior to the application of statistical inferential tests, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed to check the sample's normality of distribution. All groups in all tasks were normally distributed ($p > .05$) for all conditions, except for the group NSE3 in the overt ExpS condition ($p = .021$) and in the null ExpS condition ($p = .005$). The inferential test consisted of a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). In each task, we tested the main effects for group (NSE1, NSE2, NSE3) and for type of *pro* (null, overt). We were not concerned about the interactions since we did not hypothesise about them.

4.1. Task 1: expletive subjects

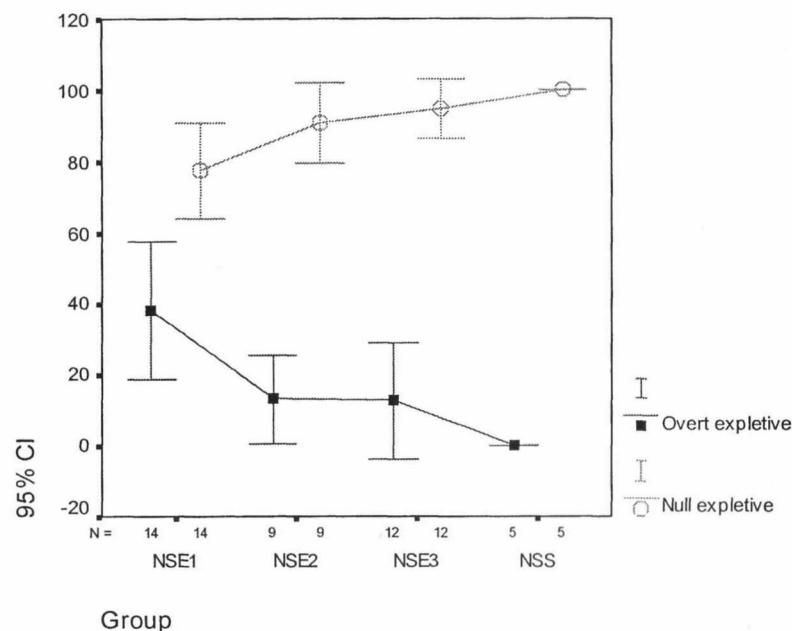
Within-groups results show that learners reacted differently to the two types of ExpS (null vs. overt), as presented in the error bar chart in Figure 1 (next page). Recall that scores range from 0% to 100%, although the error bar charts show scores ranging from -20% to 120% due to the length of the error bars.

The observed results indicate that NSE1 start off by treating null vs. overt expletives more closely than the rest of the groups, though the vertical separation of the bars for all groups in the graph suggests a statistically significant difference, which was later confirmed in the inferential tests ($F(1,32) = 105.939$, $p < .001$). In other words, all groups treat overt ExpS differently from null ExpS.

Note that the higher the proficiency level, the more different the acceptance between overt and null expletives. Learners' acceptance of ungrammatical overt ExpS decreases towards the Spanish

natives' norm (38% for NSE1, 12% for NSE2, 12% for NSE3 and 0% for Spanish natives). On the other hand, their acceptance of grammatical null ExpS increases towards the Spanish natives' norm (77%, 90%, 94% and 100% respectively). These data reveal a statistically

Figure 1: Acceptance rates of ExpS



significant linear trend ($F(1,32)=105.939$, $p<.001$), which confirms H_3 . In other words, what we can observe here is a cline in the resetting of one property of the parameter towards the native norm. This implies that resetting ExpS is not as instantaneous as resetting ProS (see next section), but is rather a gradual process over time.

It is worth mentioning that the ExpS scores are never statistically significant between learners ($F(1,32)=.581$, $p=.565$). In other words, none of the groups differ statistically from each other in each condition. This suggests a fairly consistent behaviour by the three

groups of learners for each setting of the parameter. A Bonferroni post-hoc test further reveals no significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group ($p=1.000$ for all comparisons).

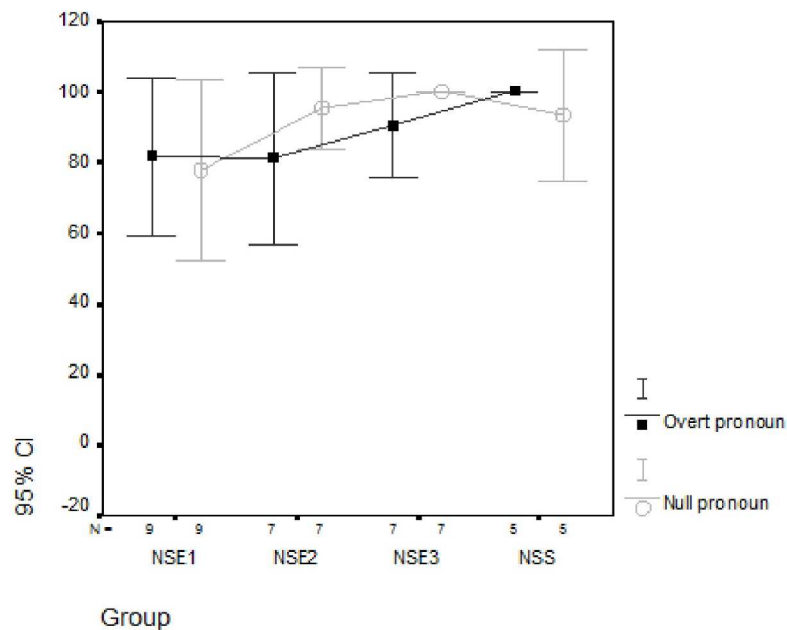
Note that learners start off by accepting ungrammatical overt ExpS (38% for NSE1), though this mean rate decreases with proficiency level. In this case, learners seem to be transferring the parametric setting from their L1 English to their L2 Spanish, since in English overt ExpS is obligatory, as discussed in sentences (5) and (6) above. For a detailed account of expletive transfer, see AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX (1998).

To summarise, results in task 1 support our hypothesis H_2 , that is, learners are sensitive to the distinction between null vs. overt ExpS from the earliest stages of acquisition. H_3 is also confirmed since learners seem to gradually reset ExpS over time.

4.2. Task 2: pronominal subjects

As opposed to the results obtained for the ExpS, learners seem to treat *equally* both ProS (overt and null) from the earliest stages of acquisition, as Figure 2 (next page) shows. In this case, we want to obtain non significant results since grammatical theory predicts that both a null ProS and an overt ProS are equally possible in a [+pro-drop] language like Spanish, as explained earlier. Indeed, a comparison of both constructions reveals non-significant results ($F(1,20)=.916$, $p=.350$). This corroborates H_2 .

These results imply that learners show knowledge that both overt and null ProS are equally plausible in Spanish. Also note that the mean acceptance rates range between 80% (NSE2) and 90% (NSE3) for overt pronouns, and 77% (NSE1) and 100% (NSE3) for null pronouns. These rates confirm that learners highly tolerate both structures.

Figure 2: Acceptance rates of ProS

It should be noted that, similarly to what occurred with ExpS, there are no statistical significant differences between learners in any of the two conditions (overt and null ProS), being $F(1,20)=1.716$, $p=.205$. This again confirms a similar behaviour between groups. A further Bonferroni post-hoc test indicates that there are no significant differences between the experimental groups and the control group ($p=.378$ for NSE1–NSE and $p=1.000$ for NSE2/NSE3–NSS).

To summarise, it can be said that learners are equally tolerant with both overt and null ProS (as is the case with native Spanish speakers) from the earliest stage of acquisition, thus confirming H_3 . This is supported by the fact that there is not a significant linear trend ($F=.916$, $p=.350$).

4.3. A comparison of grammatical and ungrammatical constructions

A cross-tasks analysis was carried out. A two-way ANOVA was run to test whether indeed learners acceptance rates of grammatical constructions was similar whereas their treatment of grammatical vs ungrammatical constructions was different, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Acceptance rates of grammatical vs ungrammatical Constructions

(a)	null ExpS = null ProS $F(1,24)=.247$, $p=.625$
(b)	null ExpS = overt ProS $F(1,24)=.440$, $p=.514$
(c)	*overt Exp \neq null ProS $F(1,24)=108.495$, $p<.001$
(d)	*overt Exp \neq overt ProS $F(1,24)=80.701$, $p<.001$

These results reveal that:

- (i) Grammatical null ExpS shows a similar linear trend as grammatical null ProS, hence the non-significant results in (a) above.
- (ii) Similarly, grammatical null ExpS also displays a similar linear trend as grammatical overt ProS in (b).

These two findings suggest that grammatical constructions with *pro* are accepted similarly by learners. This may be an indication that these constructions are part of the same parameter, thus supporting AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX' (1998) claim that null ExpS and null ProS belong to the same parameter. But note that we are further extending the claim by proposing that overt ProS also belongs to the parameter. Following with our comparisons, note that:

- (iii) On the other hand, ungrammatical overt ExpS is different from grammatical overt ProS, hence the significant results in (c).
- (iv) Ungrammatical overt ExpS is also statistically different from grammatical null ProS in (d).

Summarising, it can be concluded that learners treat all grammatical *pros* similarly, yet ungrammatical *pro* differently from grammatical *pros*.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Results are consistent with the grammatical distinction between ProS and Exps drawn in studies like DEMONTE (1991), HAEGEMAN (1994), RIZZI, (1997), SUÑER (1982). Not all sentential subjects in Spanish have the same syntactic status, and this is reflected in the interlanguage of Spanish L2 learners.

As discussed in the literature review, our results are supported by previous findings in the sense that expletive *pro* is early incorporated in the learner's IL (LICERAS, 1989; PHINNEY, 1987). Furthermore, DAVIES (1996) and AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX' (1998) studies show that learners distinguish between null ExpS and null ProS, which our data also confirmed. We have further shown that not only do learners distinguish between null vs overt ExpS and between null vs overt ProS, but also between ungrammatical overt ExpS and grammatical null/overt ProS. We thus complete a research gap in the literature: the L2 learners' knowledge of two types of *pro* in Spanish.

It is necessary to elucidate the common assumption that pronominal subjects can either be dropped or be overt. Some studies suggest that the dropping rates of pronominal subjects are different in matrix clauses and in embedded clauses (PHINNEY, 1987:234, and, in a more detailed study, LICERAS & DÍAZ, 1999). For a detailed view on dropping constraints, see DEMONTE (1991:207) and LUJÁN (1999). What is important to realise here is that more studies are needed to

establish some criteria for the use of overt/null ProS, so that L2 learners can be taught precisely under what conditions ProS can be used in Spanish.

Our data are also supported by more recent findings (AL-KASEY & PÉREZ-LEROUX, 1998), who argue that null ExpS and null ProS form part of the same parameter. As we have shown, (i) learners clearly distinguish between the two types of *pro*, and (ii) all grammatical *pros* are accepted at similar rates.

This study findings can be also interpreted from a pedagogical viewpoint. MOLINA VALERO (1997) showed that the four properties of the pro-drop parameter are quicker to reset by learners if they receive explicit instruction on the properties than if they receive mere input in the form of positive evidence. Our study suggests that null ProS is resettable from the earliest stages without need of explicit parametric instruction (though for a different view arguing against resetting in L2, see TSIMPLY & ROUSSOU, 1990). This can be taken as supporting evidence for those arguing that mere positive evidence will be enough to reset the parameters in SLA.

6. Conclusion

The three hypothesis presented in this study have been supported. As H₁ predicted, results show that learners do distinguish between the two types of *pro* (ExpS vs ProS). As H₂ predicted, learners are sensitive to the radical difference between the two types of ExpS (overt vs null), yet they are aware of the similarities of the two types of ProS (overt and null). The last hypothesis, H₃, is also confirmed by results since with proficiency level, learners increase their acceptance of grammatical null ExpS yet they decrease their acceptance of ungrammatical overt ExpS. On the other hand, learners highly accept, from the earliest stage of acquisition, both grammatical overt and null ProS. These findings could be taken as an indicator of the gradual resetting of ExpS yet the instantaneous resetting of ProS.

Finally, if L2 learners show knowledge between the two different types of *pro*, it is then plausible to propose that they have two different mental representations. It could be the case that learners are sensitive to the different features of the two *pros* (pronominal vs expletive), as exposed in Table 1. This proposal needs further empirical research testing whether learners indeed have internalised different representations of *pro* features at different stages of acquisition.

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Appendices

Task 1

Decide whether the following sentences are right or wrong.

At the end of every sentence, please tick ✓ if correct, or cross ✗ if incorrect.

You do not need to make corrections in this exercise.

1. (a) Éste es tu dormitorio. Es pequeña
(b) Éste es tu dormitorio. Es pequeño
2. (a) Nieva en Finlandia en invierno
(b) Lo nieva en Finlandia en invierno
3. (a) Me acosto a las 11 de la noche
(b) Me acuesto a las 11 de la noche
4. (a) Lo hay muchos ordenadores en la biblioteca
(b) Hay muchos ordenadores en la biblioteca
5. (a) Luisa se levanta a las 7.30
(b) Luisa se levantas a las 7.30
6. (a) Hay una catedral antigua en Sevilla
(b) Ello hay una catedral antigua en Sevilla
7. (a) Ello hace calor en Miami

- (b) Hace calor en Miami
8. (a) Hay cuatro clases de español cada semana
(b) Lo hay cuatro clases de español cada semana
9. (a) Lo llueve mucho en Inglaterra
(b) Llueve mucho en Inglaterra
10. (a) Gusta beber cerveza, pero no vino
(b) Me gusta beber cerveza, pero no vino
11. (a) David es delgado y alto
(b) David está delgado y alto
12. (a) Alberto y Silvia viven en Colombia
(b) Alberto y Silvia vive en Colombia

Task 2

Decide whether the following sentences are right or wrong.

At the end of every sentence, please either tick ✓ if correct, or cross ✗ if incorrect.

Remember that all these combinations are possible:

(a) ✓	(a) ✗	(a) ✓	(a) ✗
(b) ✗	(b) ✓	(b) ✓	(b) ✗

You do NOT need to correct the sentences.

1. (a) El apartamento está cerca de la piscina.
(b) El apartamento están cerca de la piscina.
2. (a) Creo que el profesor está enfermo.
(b) Yo creo que el profesor está enfermo.
3. (a) ¿Quién crees que ganará la lotería?
(b) ¿Quién crees ganará la lotería?
4. (a) Ha llegado Juan esta mañana.
(b) Juan ha llegado esta mañana.
5. (a) Pedro dice María es inteligente.
(b) Pedro dice que María es inteligente.
6. (a) Ayer comió María mucha tortilla.
(b) María comió ayer mucha tortilla.
7. (a) ¿Quién dices que va a llamar?

- (b) ¿Quién dices va a llamar?
8. (a) Estudia matemáticas los viernes.
(b) Ella estudia matemáticas los viernes.
9. (a) ¿Quién crees que es inteligente?
(b) ¿Quién crees es inteligente?
10. (a) Tu hermano tiene dolor de estómago.
(b) Tu hermano tengo dolor de estómago.
11. (a) Esta mañana llegaron muchos estudiantes.
(b) Muchos estudiantes llegaron esta mañana.
12. (a) Creo que Lola es de Liverpool.
(b) Creo Lola es de Liverpool.
13. (a) Yo voy a la universidad en coche
(b) Voy a la universidad en coche
14. (a) Felipe cree el examen es difícil.
(b) Felipe cree que el examen es difícil.
15. (a) Ellos vive cerca de Cambridge.
Ellos viven cerca de Cambridge.

Cristóbal LOZANO
Department of Language & Linguistics
University of Essex, Colchester
CO4 3SQ UK
clozan2@yahoo.com

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