

CROSSLINGUISTIC INFLUENCE IN THE ACQUISITION OF GREEK AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE BY SPANISH/CATALAN L1 LEARNERS: THE ROLE OF PROFICIENCY AND STAYS ABROAD

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The purpose of the present study is to investigate the influence of first language (L1) patterns on the acquisition of Greek as a foreign language (L2) by Spanish/Catalan L1 learners, as well as to determine whether L2 proficiency level and stays in the target-language country have an effect on such influence. More specifically, the current study aims to explore an under-researched crosslinguistic phenomenon which concerns the expression of EXPERIENTIAL STATES. In Spanish and Catalan, EXPERIENTIAL STATES tend to be expressed by means of periphrases composed by the verbs *tener/tenir* ("to have"), *dar/donar* ("to give") or *hacer/fer* ("to make") and a noun, whereas in Greek the equivalent experience tends to be expressed with a single verb (*experiential verbs*) (e.g., *tener hambre / tenir gana* vs. *πεινάω / pináo* "to be hungry", *me da vergüenza / em fa vergonya* vs. *ντρέπομαι / drépomei* "to feel embarrassed"). Native speakers of different languages tend to describe the same events or thought using different thinking-for-speaking patterns (Berman and Sloman 1994). These patterns acquired in childhood tend to be resistant to reconstruction in adult Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Slobin 1991, 1993, 1996a), and are often transferred by L2 learners (Cadierno 2004, 2008, 2010; Han and Cadierno, 2010). Following this line of inquiry, the present study aims to examine whether the dissimilarity in the L1-L2 patterns as regards construal of the EXPERIENTIAL STATE (Langacker 2008a) will result in cases of crosslinguistic influence (CLI). The present study takes as a point of departure Cognitive Linguistics' recent application to SLA studies (Cadierno 2004; Cadierno and Lund 2004; Robinson and Ellis 2008a; Tyler 2012a). It also discusses its hypotheses and findings in light of *conceptualization transfer* (Jarvis 2007, 2011) and the *thinking-for-speaking hypothesis* (Slobin 1991, 1993, 1996a).

The participants (N=114) were Spanish/Catalan learners of Greek in a formal language setting in Spain. They belonged to five different proficiency levels (from A2 to B2.2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference) and had experienced stays in Greece of various durations. Native speakers of Greek (N=30) were also recruited to provide a baseline for comparison. A battery of instruments (including a grammaticality judgment test (GJT), a written description task, an oral description task, a questionnaire and interviews with the teachers of the language schools under analysis) were

designed first-hand for the purposes of the study. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed.

The results of the analyses demonstrated that there were significant differences in the way Spanish/Catalan learners of Greek and Greek native speakers construed the EXPERIENTIAL STATES under analysis. Even at advanced proficiency levels, traces of L1 influence were still detected, and the divergence with the native speakers was still significant. This finding suggests that the acquisition of these verbs constitutes a problematic area for Spanish/Catalan learners of Greek. L2 proficiency appeared to be important mainly for the low proficiency levels. L1 influence decreased as proficiency increased. Nevertheless, for the higher proficiency levels in the sample, proficiency did not play such a determining role, since significant differences were not found among these levels. Results indicated that the acquisition of experiential verbs progresses linearly up to a certain level and then stabilizes. The study also showed certain task effects, in the sense that CLI was more clearly exhibited in the recognition task (GJT) than in the production tasks. Stays in the target-language country were found to be beneficial for the acquisition of the patterns under analysis. Participants who had spent more time in Greece were more aware of the target forms and showed fewer instances of L1 transfer. However, the impact of stays abroad was more apparent in the case of pattern recognition (as measured in the GJT), than in the case of actual production (as measured in the picture description tasks). This doctoral dissertation concludes by suggesting that explicit instruction of the patterns under analysis (i.e., direct crosslinguistic comparisons in order to sensitize learners' awareness) and/or the combination of formal instruction "at-home" with stays in the target language country could potentially lead to a better acquisition of the experiential verbs under study.