

EVIDENCE FOR A PRINCIPLES AND PARAMETERS THEORY OF L2 ACQUISITION: TRANSFER AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE L2 ACQUISITION OF SPANISH RELATIVE CLAUSES¹

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ABSTRACT. *In the 80's many generative linguists working on acquisition of a second language adopted the so-called Markedness Theory, because it seemed to offer an insight into the problem of L2 acquisition by distinguishing between core grammar (what is invariably for all languages) and periphery (what is specific for each language). Liceras 1986, for instance, assumed Hirschbühler and Rivero's 1981 Markedness Theory for relative clauses and predicted some errors in the interlanguage of English speaking adults, namely, the use of a relative pronoun in all targeted Spanish relative clauses (producing sentences such as el hombre quien vino era americano which is however out in Adult Spanish). A markedness approach to L2 acquisition does not however account for L2 development. Below, there is an attempt of addressing the problem of L2 acquisition from a Principles and Parameters framework, similar to that in Tsimpli & Rousseau 1991. It is argued that the L2 learner does not start from scratch when acquiring a L2 language (Spanish) but from the functional lexicon instantiated for their first language (L1) (English). This theory does not however preclude L2 development.*

KEYWORDS. *Markedness Theory, Errors, First Language, Second Language, Acquisition, Principles and Parameters, Functional Lexicon, Second Language Development.*

RESUMEN. *En los años 80, muchos lingüistas generativistas interesados en la adquisición de segundas lenguas adoptaron la llamada "teoría de marcaje" porque parecía ofrecer una explicación al problema de la adquisición de segundas lenguas al diferenciar entre lo que es la gramática de base (lo que es invariable para todas las lenguas) y las opciones gramaticales de la periferia (lo que es específico de cada lengua). Liceras 1986, por ejemplo, asumió la teoría de marcaje de las oraciones de relativo en Hirschbühler y Rivero 1981 y vino a predecir que los hablantes adultos del inglés cometerían muchos errores (produciendo frases como el hombre quien vino era americano que es imposible en el español adulto). La teoría del marcaje extendida al problema de la adquisición de segundas lenguas no explicaba sin embargo por qué se puede hablar de desarrollo. Abajo se ofrece una teoría alternativa basada en una aproximación de Principios y Parámetros parecida a la de en Tsimpli & Rousseau 1991. Esta teoría da cuenta por un lado de los errores cometidos asumiendo que el hablante de la segunda lengua (L2) (español) no parte*

de cero, sino del léxico funcional de la primera lengua (L1) (inglés). Por otro lado, esta teoría no excluye la posibilidad de desarrollo en la segunda lengua.

PALABRAS CLAVE. Teoría del marcaje, errores, primera lengua, segunda lengua, adquisición. teoría de principios y parámetros léxico funcional, desarrollo de la segunda lengua.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Spanish Subject Relative clauses exemplified in (1) and (2) contrast with their English counterparts (in the glosses), in that the use of a relative pronoun is prohibited in Spanish but not in English:

- (1) a El hombre que vino era americano
<The man that came was American>
b *El hombre quien vino era americano
<The man who came was American>
c La mujer que ves allí es extranjera
<The woman that (you) see there is (a) foreigner>
d *La mujer quien ves allí es extranjera
<The woman who (you) see there is (a) foreigner>

At first sight, it is difficult to see what rules out the use of a relative pronoun in Spanish. In other words, the question is why Spanish differs from English in that a relative pronoun cannot alternate with a complementiser. Another non-trivial fact is that the Spanish relative pronoun *quien* is not always excluded: it is possible after a preposition, cf. (2), and with headless relative clauses, cf. (3).

- (2) a La mujer a quien cuidaba se puso todavía más enferma
<The woman P who (he/she) looked after got even more sick>
b Despidieron a la mujer con quien trabajaba
<They fired the woman with whom (he/she) worked>
- (3) Quien vino fue Juan
(who came was Juan)
“John was who came”

So far, a number of different ways have been proposed to deal with the contrast above in the generative literature. Most of these approaches are in accordance with the Principles and Parameters (P&P) framework, since they state what is language-invariant and what is language-particular. The general line is that languages are very similar at the semantic level of Logical Form. On this general assumption, differences among languages should not be sought on this level. It is rather unlikely that there are parameters that affect the form of LF representation or the computational process from Surface structure (S-structure) to LF. In addition, little evidence is available to the language learner bearing on these matters (Chomsky & Lasnik 1993).

In order to argue for a common language acquisition device in the language learner, one should find common principles applying to both first language (L1) acquisition and second language (L2) acquisition. In the ideal case, principles like Full Interpretation (i.e., there can be no superfluous symbols in the representation or superfluous steps in the derivation, Chomsky 1995: chapters 2-4). On the other hand, one has to account for the fact that the L2 learner has already fixed one parameter: that of its own L1 language (White 1986; Flynn 1987). According to our assumptions above, languages do not differ with respect to computational operations. Rather, they are characterised by different functional lexicons. Tsimpli and Roussou (1991), in particular, argue that the functional lexicon in the Language Faculty ceases to be accessible once L1 acquisition is complete. Consistent with this theory is the claim that the morpho(phono)logical component is dissociated from syntax proper, i.e. the computational system (Chomsky 1995). The present paper supports such a view by arguing that English-speaking adults incorrectly associate the Spanish complementiser *C* with the English complementiser *C* typically marked by the *Q* feature.

The organization of the paper follows. In section 2, I briefly describe the phenomenon of Relativisation on a par with the phenomenon deriving *wh*-questions. In section 3, I develop the general hypothesis that the CP of relatives is a complement of D (Kayne 1994). I also claim there is some type of parameterisation. On the basis of this, I comment on Licerias' (1986) experimental results in section 4. Section 5 deals with the new experiment. Section 6 is the conclusion.

2. RELATIVE CLAUSES AND WH-QUESTIONS

In transformational syntax, the process of Relativisation has implied movement to the complementiser (COMP) of either an overt *wh*-pronoun, or an abstract null Operator. (Chomsky 1977, cf. (4))².

- (4) a The man COMP who t came
 b The man COMP (whom) I saw t had blue eyes

Yet there are some differences between relative clauses and *wh*-questions. One difference is that in relative clauses the relation between an antecedent and an argumental trace (*t*) always holds regardless of the presence of an overt *wh*-phrase, as indicated by the bracketed relative pronoun *whom* in the COMP of the example (4b). In contrast, the use of a *wh*-phrase is always required by the formation of *wh*-questions:

- (5) a Whom did you see with blue eyes?
 b *Did you see with blue eyes?

A second difference is that *wh*-questions are associated with a question intonation, usually indicated by an interrogation mark, that is, however, absent in the relative clauses. Nevertheless, it seems desirable for explanatory adequacy to include the phenomenon of Relativisation into the set of syntactic configurations related to the Q feature (Chomsky 1995). This analysis is straightforward on the basis of Pied-Piping Relativisation, where a *wh*-phrase also obligatorily moves into the Q position (formerly called COMP):

- (6) a The man Q (to whom) they did not grant liberty t
 b *The man Q (-) they did not grant liberty t

3. ENGLISH VERSUS ROMANCE

3.1. *Kayne 1994*

Recently, Kayne (1994) has proposed that the CP of relatives is a complement of the D containing English *the*, which is not to be generable below the D containing the possessive marker *'s*. This analysis is based on the fact that although the English D *the* cannot have the DP proper of possessive constructions as a complement (7a), it can freely appear with a CP containing a relative complementiser, cf. (7a vs. 7b).

- (7) a */? I found the (two) pictures of John's / his
 b I found the (two) pictures of John's / his that you lent me

The consequence of the analysis is that the DP *two pictures of John's/his* must be found in the specifier of the complementiser. The conclusion is that the raising analysis of restrictive relative clauses by Vergnaud (1974) must be basically correct.

To be concrete, the exemplified relative clause (8) is assumed to have the structure in (9).

- (8) The picture of himself that Bill saw
 (9) The [picture of himself] COMP that Bill saw t

The example in (8) is relevant because it contains an anaphor in the relative head: *picture of himself*. Its interpretation is that of being under the c-command of the lower subject: *Bill*. This interpretation is straightforward if the relative head is a raised head. By assuming that Reconstruction is a property of movement, the raised anaphor is interpreted not where it appears but in the position of the trace. In this reconstructed position the NP *Bill* c-commands the anaphor *picture of himself* as required by the Binding theory (Chomsky 1981).

Crucially the structure in (9) is in fact the only one of those that have been proposed in the literature of relative clauses that is compatible with Kayne's (1994) Linear Correspondence Axiom. The problem that Kayne also notices is precisely relative pronouns. That is, if relative pronouns occupy the specifier of the complementiser, the analysis in (9) incorrectly predicts that a relative head and a relative pronoun are in complementary distribution:

- (10) a the picture which Bill saw t
b the person who Bill saw t

Kayne (1994) observes that such complementary effect is what one in fact finds in Romance languages. He cites the Italian and French examples in (11), where the relative pronouns *cui* and *qui* respectively compete with the raised heads *persona* and *personne* for the same position. Hence, the evidence of the examples:

- (11) a *la persona cui Bill ha visto (Italian)
b *la personne qui Bill a vue (French)
<the person who Bill has seen>

In order to deal with the examples in (10), Kayne (1994) proposes successive derivation. In particular, the assumption is that the relative heads *picture* and *person* are further raised into two additional specifiers of the also raised determiners *which* and *who*. The structures in (12) correspond to the examples in (10).

- (12) a the [picture C which t] C Bill saw t
b the [person C who t] C Bill saw t

For the cases of Pied-Piping Relativisation, it is insertion of a preposition that rescues those structures in (11). The preposition in the examples below provides extra "room" for the relative pronoun by making its specifier position available, cf. (13b) and (14b).

- (13) a la persona con cui Bill ha parlato (Italian)
b la [persona C con cui t] C ha parlato t
(14) a la personne avec qui Bill a parlé (French)
b la [personne C avec qui t] C a parlé t

Although the proposal is very attractive in the sense that it correctly distinguishes among determiners, there remain many unanswered questions. Over all, one may wonder about the independent reason for all these overt movements into internal specifiers, and, in particular, about the internal structure of the DP containing the relative pronoun and the relative head. It is finally unclear why the specifier of the English relative pronoun can be used by a raised relative head, whereas this is impossible with its Romance counterpart, cf. (10) vs. (11).

3.2. *Accounting for the difference*

The facts above clearly suggest that not all properties of overt movement are universal. In what follows, I want to suggest a parametric account of the movement vs. non-movement distinction whereby languages like English permit overt movement of any relative pronoun to satisfy the properties of C, whereas Romance languages (including Spanish) do not. To be precise, assuming that Relative pronouns should be analyzed as marked by the Q feature in all languages (Chomsky 1995), the specific proposal in (15) captures most facts above:

- (15) a the person who Q Bill saw t (English)
 b la persona avec qui Q a parlé t (French)

However, for subject relative clauses, we have seen that overt movement of a relative pronoun is ruled in Romance, recall the Spanish example (1b) and those in French and Italian in (11). For subject Relativisation, we may assume covert movement of a feature Q³. This non-unitary analysis straightforwardly explains the data above. Moreover, the acquisitional data to be discussed in the following sections are also predicted by such a non-unitary approach.

4. PREDICTIONS FOR ACQUISITION

If our theory of Relativisation above is correct, the use of a relative pronoun in Subject Relativisation is a clear mirror image of the English pattern. Liceras (1986) strongly argued that English speaking adults misuse the Spanish relative pronoun *quien*, and deal with the Spanish complementiser *que* as a “safe lexical unit” strategy. On the other hand, L2 learners seldom translate *who* as *quien*. This result might indicate that they are somewhat aware of the fact that *quien* is not a complementiser in the target language. Liceras, following Hirschbühler and Rivero (1981), proposes that the obligatory use of the complementiser *que* represents the marked fixing of this parameter of core grammar

In theories of L2 acquisition where the Subset principle does not hold (cf. White 1989), there is still an open question of whether or not the grammar principles are available to the L2 learner. According to the theory of Relativisation above, economy is the grammar principle that constraints the use of a relative pronoun in instances of Subject Relativisation in Romance. The experimental fact to look at is to what extent the L2 learner is aware of this.

If the L2 learners are clearly constrained by the option of their own L1 parameter (English), they will violate economy by overtly moving a relative pronoun to the front when producing relative clauses in their second language L2 (Spanish).

5. THE SPANISH EXPERIMENT

Thirty-eight English speaking high-schoolers with a mean age of 16 and a half took part in the experiment. All of them were learning Spanish as a foreign language. Three groups were tested, according to their instruction level: 13 students in the first group (having studied Spanish for two years), 19 students in the second group (having studied Spanish for three years), and 6 students in the third group (studying Spanish for three to four years).

The task was to fill up a multiple-choice questionnaire (see appendix below), presented as a time-measure grammaticality-judgment test. In order to facilitate the task, a previous session took place in which the relevant vocabulary was given. Even though each student had his own answer-sheet, the experimenter read each sentence aloud, to ensure a certain discipline in the task. Ten seconds elapsed between the reading of each sentence. The whole session lasted thirteen to fifteen minutes.

5.1. Materials

The questionnaire consisted of 32 items divided into 8 groups (four items per group). Each item consisted of a sentence with the same number of words. Each sentence contained a relative clause in a different syntactic position, appearing as the subject (in preverbal position), or the object (in a postverbal position), so that the student could not easily recognize the intention of the test. In each group, a number of correct and incorrect sentences were included. The control items were organised in six groups: two for subject relative clauses, two for object relative clauses, and two for pied-piping Relativisation (with a relative pronoun following a preposition). The two remaining groups were added as fillers (containing clefts and resumptive pronouns which will not be discussed in this paper).

Examples of the condition materials follow.

- *Subject/Object Relativisation*

(16) *To judge if the complementiser que is grammatically correct*

- | | | | | | |
|----|-----------|-------------|--------|---------------|-----------|
| a. | El hombre | que | habla | es | americano |
| | the man | that | speaks | is | American |
| b. | Vi | a un ladrón | que | el policía | perseguía |
| | (I) saw | a thief | that | the policeman | chased |

(17) *To judge if the relative pronoun quien is grammatically incorrect*

- | | | | | | |
|----|----------------|-------------|-------|----|-------------|
| a. | *El estudiante | quien | viene | es | australiano |
| | the student | who | comes | is | Australian |
| b. | *Visité | a una mujer | quien | yo | conocía |
| | (I) visited | to a woman | who | I | knew |

• *Clefts*(18) *To judge if the relative pronoun quien is grammatically correct*

- a María es quien tiene dinero en la clase
 M. is who has money in the class
- b Luis es a quien yo compro los libros
 Luis is to whom I buy the books

• *Pied Piping Relativisation*(19) *To judge if the relative pronoun quien is grammatically correct*

- a. Juan vive en una casa donde hay gatos
 J. lives in a house where there are cats
- b. Su esposa a quien nosotros conocemos es guapa
 His wife to whom we know is pretty

(20) *To judge if the complementiser que is grammatically incorrect*

- a. *No me gustan las ciudades que hay tráfico
 I hate the cities that there is traffic jam
- b. *Alfredo es con que yo viajo a Nueva York
 Alfredo is with that I travel to New York

5.2. *Results*

Table 1 in (21) below sums up the total frequency of the use of the complementiser *que* and the relative pronoun (*a*) *quien* according to all students' judgments with respect to subject/object relative clauses:

(21) *Table 1*

Subject/Object Relativisation	complementiser <i>que</i>	Relative pronoun (<i>a</i>) <i>quien</i>
Group1 (13 subjects)	65/78 = 83.3%	39/78 = 50 %
Group2 (19 subjects)	78/112 = 69.64%	62/114= 54.38 %
Group 3 (6 subjects)	32/36 = 88.8%	19/36 = 52.77%
Total	= 80.58%	= 52.38%

More specifically, tables 2 and 3 in (22) and (23) respectively show the type of relative pronoun judged as grammatically correct with respect to each subject and object relative condition.

(22) Table 2

Subject Relativisation	<i>que</i>	<i>quien</i>
Group 1 (13)	44/52 = 84.6 %	25/52 = 48.07 %
Group 2 (19)	51/76 = 67.10 %	43/76 = 56.57 %
Group 3 (6)	22/24 = 91.66 %	14/24 = 58.33 %
Total	= 81.12 %	= 54.32 %

(23) Table 3

Object Relativisation	<i>que</i>	<i>a quien</i>
Group 1 (13)	21/26 = 80.76 %	14/26 = 53.84 %
Group 2 (19)	27/38 = 71.05 %	19/38 = 48.71 %
Group 3 (6)	10/12 = 83.33 %	5/12 = 41.66 %
Total	= 78.38 %	= 48.07 %

Spanish Clefts, on the other hand, should be treated on a par with Pied-Piping Relativisation, since now the use of the complementiser *que* is out in the L2 Spanish.

According to the data in table 4 in (24) below, 50% of the examples including the complementiser were judged as grammatically correct. 73.4 % of the Pied-piped sentences including a relative pronoun were judged as grammatically correct as well. Hence, we wondered whether the students were guessing with respect to such pied-piping condition.

(24) Table 4

Pied-Piping	<i>que</i>	relative pronoun
Group 1	6/13 = 46.1 %	22/39 = 56.4 %
Group 2	6/19 = 31.5 %	46/57 = 80.7 %
Group 3	4/6 = 66.6 %	15/18 = 83.3 %
Total	= 48.0 %	= 73.4 %

Since there were a number of trials for each condition, students were sorted out according to their consistency in making grammaticality judgments.

First of all, consistency in the condition of subject relative clauses implied that the student would have to give three equal answers out of four for both the use of the complementiser *que* and the use of a relative pronoun. In group 1, eight out of the thirteen students tested were consistent. Five judged the relative clauses, including a relative pronoun, to be grammatical. Seven also accepted the relative counterpart with the complementiser. In group 2, ten of the students were consistent. Seven incorrectly judged the relative clauses containing a relative pronoun to be grammatical. Seven also accepted the relative counterpart with the complementiser *que*. Finally, in group 3, three out of the six students were consistent in their judgments. One systematically accepted the use of a relative pronoun in relative clauses, whereas all three accepted the use of the complementiser *que*. Table 5 in (27) summarizes the correct responses.

(27) Table 5 : Consistent answers for the subject relative condition

	Consistent subjects	<i>que</i> = ok	<i>quien</i> = *
Group 1	8/13 = 62.59%	5/8 = 62.50%	7/8 = 87.50%
Group 2	10/18 = 55 %	7/10 = 70%	9/100 = 90%
Group 3	3/6 = 50%	1/3 = 33%	3/3 = 100%

There is little doubt that those grammatical options instantiated in the first language are somewhat transferred to the grammar of the targeted L2. Yet, the fact that the students were increasingly doing well in rejecting the use of the relative pronoun *quien* with subject relative pronouns in the targeted L2 also suggests that there is development. This latter effect follows from our Principles and Parameters theory previously discussed, since it assumed that the L2 learner is able to develop a L2 grammar different from that of their L1. This is problematic for a markedness theory that amounts to arguing that those parametric options are never to be learned (Liceras 1986).

Considering the consistent answers with Pied-Piping Relativisation, we may also conclude that those consistent subjects were also aware of the fact that the use of the complementiser *que* is grammatically incorrect in the L2 grammar. The sentences to be judged are exemplified in (28) and the results according to the consistency variable are given in table 6 in (29).

- (28) a Alberto es con quien yo trabajo en verano
 <Alberto is with who(m) (I) work in summer>
 b *Alfredo es con que yo viajo a Nueva York
 <Alfredo is with that I travel to New York>

(29) Table 6: Consistent answers for the Pied-Piping condition

	consistent subjects	con quien=ok	con que=*
Group 1	11/13	9/11	9/11
Group 2	18/18	16/18	12/18
Group 3	5/6	3/5	5/5

Given such results, we may also speak of L2 development, since the L2 learners progressively rejected the use of a complementiser with the Pied-Piping relatives in (28), which is grammatically correct.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have put forward a parametric account of subject relative clauses, whereby languages like English exhibit an overt relative pronoun with subject relative clauses. Spanish and other Romance languages (Italian or French), on the other hand, opt for covert movement of a feature Q. We already knew from Licerias' (1986) study that English speaking adults had difficulty in recognising the obligatory use of the complementiser *que* with Subject Relativisation. Results of our experiment have also pointed out to the same conclusion. Yet, some unexpected development has been attested, since it is unpredicted from a strong markedness approach to L2 acquisition (see Licerias 1986). Given this, I have proposed an alternative approach to L2 acquisition, based on a Principles and Parameters research program that aims at dealing with both transfer (of already instantiated options of the L1 into the L2 grammar), and L2 development.

Two main pieces of evidence in favor of L2 development have been given. Besides the observed tendency to avoid the relative pronoun *quien* with subject relative clauses, we also noticed that L2 learners in the most advanced stages of acquisition avoided the complementiser *que* after a preposition when targeting Cleft relatives (containing a human antecedent). Further research is nonetheless required to establish the trigger for such development. We still have to face questions like whether L2 learners obey the same constraint that operates on the target parameter to avoid the relative pronoun *quien* with subject relative clauses, or whether development is, on the other hand, the result of class instruction.

NOTES

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2. In this paper I will use the terms COMP and C indistinctly for the complementiser. I will introduce the term Q when dealing with wh-questions à la Chomsky (1995). Then, I will make clear that Q is another term to designate the complementiser. I will also speak about a Q feature, but this is just a way of postulating parametric differences.
 3. For a more extended account of this parametric difference see Escobar (1998).

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APPENDIX: GRAMMATICALITY JUDGMENTS TEST

These sentences formed part of the multiple-choice test discussed in the Paper. They only test the preference of English speaking highschoolers for relative-clause construction in Spanish.

1. *Instructions about how to answer the questionnaire.* Listen to each sentence that the instructor will read from the list below. Once a sentence has been read, try as soon as possible to render your opinion of its correctness on a scale of 1 to 3 (see legend below):

- 1: it sounds like a good sentence;
- 2: 1 doubt;
- 3: it sounds like a bad sentence

List of Sentences: 1 2 3

(Object relative condition)

- I. a Vi a un ladrón que el policía perseguía
- b Observé a un chico a que la mama pegaba
- c Visité a una mujer quien yo conocía
- d Invité a una profesora a la que yo admiraba

(Pied-Piping condition)

- ii a Juan vive en una casa donde hay gatos
- b No me gustan las ciudades que hay tráfico
- c Visité un parque en donde hay patos
- d Juan vive en una casa en la cual hay ruido

(Subject relative condition)

- iii a El hombre que habla es americano
- b El estudiante quien viene es australiano
- c La secretaria quien trabaja es Luz
- d El doctor que opera es de Brasil

(Pied-Piping condition)

- iv a Alfredo es con que yo viajo a Nueva York
- b Esta bicicleta es la que Luis va al cole con
- c Ese profesor es con el cual yo estudié Latín
- d Alberto es con quien yo trabajo en verano

(Object relative condition)

- v a La mujer que nosotros conocemos es francesa
- b El chico quien ellos invitaron venía de Alemania
- c Su esposa a quien nosotros conocemos es guapa
- d El presidente al cual ustedes admiran está en prisión

(Filler)

- vi a María es quien yo vendo mi bicicleta
- b Luis es a quien yo compro los libros
- c Juan es a que yo escribo muchas cartas
- d Tricia es a la que yo llamo por teléfono

(Subject relative condition)

- vii a Encontré una estudiante que tenía calor
- b También había una chica quien tenía frío
- c Busqué una secretaria quien escribió la carta
- d Encontré un profesor que enseñaba francés

(Filler)

- viii a *Tengo un libro de castellano que lo leo por las noches
- b *He perdido una novela la cual la compré en España
- e *Buscaba una herramienta que la compré ayer
- d *Reservé un crucero el cual lo haría en vacaciones