Cross-linguistic influence in tense- aspect Spanish L3 acquisition

A study of Arabic Tunisian learners of L3 Spanish

Influencia interlingüística en la adquisición de tiempo y aspecto en el español como L3

Un estudio con aprendientes árabes tunesinos de español L3

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RESUMEN

Este artículo es un estudio transversal que examinó las producciones escritas de 30 tunecinos aprendientes de español L3 con L1 árabe y L2 francés de niveles B1 y C1, así como las de 15 hablantes nativos de español. Su principal objetivo es averiguar si existe una posible transferencia desde el árabe L1 o el francés L2 en la distinción y el uso de los pretéritos imperfecto e indefinido en español L3, basándose en la Hipótesis del aspecto léxico de Andersen (1986, 1991) . Los resultados no indicaron una correlación significativa entre los aspectos léxico y morfológicos en las producciones de los participantes. Además, un t -test de muestras independientes no nos permitió verificar una diferencia significativa entre los avanzados C1 y los nativos en el uso del imperfecto y el indefinido con verbos de estado, actividad, realización y logro. Por tanto, se concluyó que había una predominante transferencia positiva del francés L2, debido a la proximidad tipológica entre el francés L2 y el español L3.

Palabras clave: Adquisición de terceras lenguas, influencias interlinguísticas, tiempo y aspecto en español L3, arabófonos tunecinos

ABSTRACT

This article is a cross-sectional study that examined 30 Tunisian L1 Arabic- L2 French -L3 Spanish learners' written narratives at B1 and C1 levels, as well as 15 Spanish native speakers. Its main purpose was to find out whether there is a L1 Arabic or a L2 French transfer in learners Spanish preterite and imperfect distinction, based on Andersen's 1986, 1991 LAH (Lexical Aspect Hypothesis). The results showed no significant correlation between lexical and morphological aspects in the participants' productions. Moreover, an independent sampled t-test allowed us to verify no significant difference between the advanced C1 group and the native group regarding preterite and imperfect use with state verbs, activities, accomplishments and achievements. Thus, we concluded that there is a predominant L2 French positive transfer and no L1 Arabic negative transfer in preterite/imperfect distinction in the learners' written narratives, owing to the typological closeness between French L2 and Spanish L3.

Keywords: Third Language Acquisition, cross-linguistic influence, tense and aspect in L3 Spanish, Tunisian Arabic speaking.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the relatively recent field of Third Language Acquisition (TLA), few studies have investigated transfer phenomena effects in tense-aspect acquisition, especially from a L2 to a L3 typologically related language, as are Romance languages. Most of the research conducted to date has focused on transfer phenomena in lexis, phonology and syntax (De Angelis, 2007). This is probably derived from the traditional skepticism regarding cross-linguistic effects in tense-aspect L2 and L3 acquisition[1], on the one hand, and from the lack of a consensus when it comes to the theories and mechanisms underlying tense-aspect acquisition, on the other. While some studies examined the emergence of tense-aspect morphology within SLA time expression developmental sequence, others have addressed the question within the Generative Grammar approach mainly in L2 and subsequently in L3. This study aims to examine the acquisition/learning[2] of preterite/imperfect distinction among Tunisian Arabic native speakers with L2 French in L3 Spanish, at an intermediate (B1) and advanced (C1) level and to try to determine whether there is a positive influence between Romance languages, namely French and Spanish, when acquiring preterite/imperfect distinction. First, we present a brief overview of the theoretical fundaments underpinning Third Language Acquisition and transfer phenomena between non- native languages, then, we provide a review of the major theoretical approaches and empirical findings to L2 tense -aspect development and acquisition. The following section offers a short description of Arabic tense- aspect expression in contrast to French and Spanish, we specially highlight the differences between the two Romance languages and Arabic. Finally, we expose our study design, specifying our methodology and research questions; we examine in detail the main findings which lead us to the conclusions and to the identification of their limitations.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THIRD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND MULTILINGUALISM

The emergence and development of Third Language Acquisition (TLA) as a research area has psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic foundations. In effect, from a sociolinguistic perspective, the worldwide spread of the English language, the increasing mobility of people around the world, the recognition of minority languages and the concern to preserve them have generated social and educational situations where learning more than one foreign language is no longer considered exceptional, regardless of whether these languages are restricted to community use or of broader communication. There is, thus, a growing need for multilingual skills, which are enhanced by the multilingual education. In other words, if traditionally individual multilingualism was associated with a well determined social class and was linked to the idea of elitism, today, this type of education is no longer the exclusive heritage of the privileged classes, but an educational objective in many societies.

The psycholinguistic perspective, on the other hand, refers to TLA processes research. The relatively recent discipline has specific features that are derived, amongst other factors, from the fact that bilingual and multilingual learners present a type of competence substantially different from the monolinguals' (Grosjean, 1992; Cook, 1995; Jessner, 1999) and, therefore, it is assumed that their language acquisition process will also be different.

Despite the numerous common features shared by SLA and TLA, the underlying complexity of the multilingual acquisition entails that they cannot be explained by the same mechanisms. Indeed, third language acquisition is conditioned not only by the mother tongue, but also by all previously acquired languages. Similarly, the multilingual learner has a unique linguistic system which reflects the constant changes affecting the relationships between the languages involved.

While it is an undeniable fact that the study of Third Language Acquisition has just started out in the world of research by comparison with Second Language acquisition, the studies carried out in this field are multiplying, turning it into a fully established research area. These studies adopted various perspectives to elucidate the complex phenomenon of multilingual acquisition. Among the areas of research that have received the greatest attention, we can mention the influence of bilingualism in third language acquisition (Bild & Swain, 1989; Thomas, 1988; Cenoz and Valencia, 1994; Lasagabaster, 1997), early trilingualism (Hoffmann, 1985), linguistic transfer (Clyne, 1997; Hufeisen, 2000; Williams & Hammarberg, 1998) or the acquisition of an L3 in educational context (Hoffmann, 1998; Genesee, 1998). All these approaches have considerably contributed to the development and understanding of the field.

2.2 CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER IN THIRD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Under the generic designation of Linguistic Transfer[3], the term "transfer" has referred traditionally to the transfer of surface elements from one language to another, mainly from a native language into a target one. For many years, the potential influence that a given language might have on the acquisition of a second foreign language (additional language) has been studied within Second Language Acquisition and bilingualism. Most studies on linguistic transfer consider that L1 constitutes the main source of influence when acquiring a foreign language. However, in the case of bilingualism or multilingualism, this view is somewhat narrow and does not reflect the reality. In fact, when it comes to learning a second foreign language, that is, a L3, L4 or Lx, it is not a simple task to identify the source of the transfer.[4]

Thus, as a result of the recognition of TLA as an independent area of research in foreign language acquisition, the study of transfer took another path. This change is obvious even with regard to the definitions given by the researchers. The first definitions conveyed a restricted vision of the concept of transfer which could not account for the reality of the phenomenon, as, for example, the one proposed by Lado (1957: 318): "…the physical carry-over of (native language) surface forms to an L2 context" or Weinreich (1953:1) "Those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language".

Subsequently, the perspective that considered the mother tongue as the exclusive source of transfer was expanded to incorporate all the previous linguistic knowledge, including a learner "imperfect" knowledge in any previously acquired language: "Transfer is the influence resulting from differences and similarities between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired" (Odlin, 1989:27). Along the same lines, Sharwood Smith (1994:198) defines it as "...the influence of mother tongue on the learner's performance in and/or the development of a given target language; by extension, it also means the influence of "any other tongue" known to the learner on that target language".

Vildomec's (1963) study is commonly referred to as one of the pioneering investigations carried out in the field of multilingualism along with Ringbom's (1987). Vildomec (1963) not only was one of the first to systematize the study of transfer from non-native languages, but also noted the possible simultaneous influence of several languages at the same time. He states that: " if two or more tongues which a subject has mastered are similar (both linguistically and psychologically) they may "co-operate" in interfering with other tongues" (1963:212).

Despite that shift in paradigm, the empirical exploration of the topic is generally considered scarce, as De Angelis (2007:20) points out: "Empirical studies on non-native language influence are quite rare and on the whole far less common than those on native language influence".

The scarcity of studies can be explained by the fact that the investigation of cross-linguistic effects from native or non-native systems within the multilingualism framework is far more complex because it requires a greater understanding of a series of factors that are activated in the presence of at least three languages. For example, the effects of interaction of more than two languages, in the mind of a learner (multilingual competence) or also the concept of "simultaneous or sequential acquisition" (order of acquisition). Another issue that could arise in connection with multilingual acquisition is the "combined influence" (De Angelis, 2007) of two or more languages on a third one. In addition, there are other linguistic and sociolinguistic factors which further complicate research in this field.

In addition to proving the existence of an alternative route to the native language, also called "lateral transfer" (i.e. from L2, L3, Lx to an L2, L3, Lx), other more recent studies (König et al., 2005) showed the bi-directionality of cross-linguistic effects. In other words, transference can occur from a L1 to a L2 to a L3 and vice versa, i.e. from a L3 to a L2 to a L1.

In the last decade a great deal of robust research has been conducted contributing to a dramatic development of the field (Falk & Bardel, 2011; Rothman, 2011; Slabakova & García Mayo, 2015),

as well asfunctional approaches (Sanz, Park, & Lado, 2015). Several model have been proposed to explain morpho-syntactic transfer in L3 acquisition, such as The Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) (Flynn et al., 2004), The L2 Status factor (Falk & Bardel, 2011) and the Typological Primacy Model (TPM) (Rothman, 2011), among others. The Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) (Flynn et al. 2004) proposes that language learning is cumulative, that is all previously known languages may contribute to the process of acquiring new ones [5]. The L2 Status factor (Bardel & Falk, 2011) suggests that L2 can play a more important role as a transfer source in L3 acquisition than the L1, in morpho-syntax, due to a stronger impact of the *L2 status factor*, which in turn is due to the stronger cognitive similarities between L2 and L3 than between L1 and L3 (Bardel & Falk, 2012: 61) not only in the initial state but also in the intermediate L3 learners. Finally, the Typological Primacy Model (TPM) (Rothman, 2011) argues that L3 transfer is selective and that is essentially driven by the typological proximity between languages, regardless of the order of acquisition. Transfer effects can vary in terms of facilitation depending on actual or perceived (psychotypological) typological closeness of the language pairings involved.

To sum up, research has allowed a substantial progress in all aspects related to the influences between languages, stating that such phenomena can occur in all directions and be traced in almost all language areas (lexis, syntax, phonetics, etc.) and also at a conceptual level. Nevertheless, cross-linguistic effects in tense -aspect acquisition is little documented. In fact, it is especially notorious within SLA, the scarcity of studies related to transfer phenomena in the acquisition of grammatical morphemes expressing tense and aspect, as Javis and Pavlenko (2007) pinpoint it:

> Within the field of SLA, one of the most intensively investigated phenomena related to grammatical morphology is the expression of tense and aspect. Given the number of carefully designed studies that have examined this phenomenon, it would seem likely for the field to have uncovered a great deal of evidence for transfer. Yet, this has not been the case (Jarvis and Pavlenko, 2007:94).

The authors also suggest that while the transfer of morphemes is a limited phenomenon, in general, it seems to occur frequently when the languages involved are close lexically and morphologically (Jarvis and Pavlenko, 2007:96). However, the study of transfers in the framework of multilingualism requires special methodological challenges and still has insufficient empirical evidence. This is due, to a large extent, to the amount of factors affecting the process.

3. SELECTED LITERATURE REVIEW ON TENSE -ASPECT ACQUISITION

Several theories have been developed to explain how children and adult L2 learners acquire past-tense reference both in naturalistic and instructed contexts. Three main lines have been identified: the form oriented focus, the meaning oriented focus (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000) and, recently, the syntactic focus.

In the first line: the form oriented focus, we can find empirical research mainly focusing on the emergence of tense aspect morphology in L2 learners' production (Andersen, 1986, 1991; Giacalone Ramat, 1995, 1997). Within the same line, some studies attribute the distribution of past tense verb marking in learners interlanguage to lexical factors labeled as the *Lexical Aspect Hypothesis* (LAH) (Andersen, 1986, 1991; Robison, 1990,1995); others, owe it to contextual factors, that is, the *Discourse Hypothesis* (Lafford, 1996) or cognitive factors: the *Default Past Tense Hypothesis* (Salaberry, 1999) . The studies classified under the second line, the meaning oriented focus, as Meisel's (1987) study, examined the issue from another perspective; their interest was to determine the devices L2 learners use when expressing Past tense through the different stages of their interlanguage development. According to this line, there seems to be a consensus on the existence of three main acquisition stages when it comes to temporality acquisition:

- The pragmatic stage: at the beginning of the acquisitional process, learners are supported by pragmatic mechanisms to sort the events in the timeline: implied references, chronological order, intervention of the interlocutor.
- The lexical stage: having already sufficient lexical resources, learners are supported by lexical mechanisms: adverbial expressions of time and location, connectors, calendar references and infinitive verbs.
- Grammatical stage: in the last stage, the verbal forms carry inflected morphemes, first, in combination with the previously used mechanisms. Progressively, the morphological marks gain more frequency of use en detriment of the other mechanisms.

Among the most influential theories, Andersen's (1986,1991) Lexical Aspect Hypothesis can be considered as one of the most controversial theories. It states that "in early stages of acquisition , verbal morphology encodes only inherent semantic

distinctions (i.e. it does not encode tense or grammatical aspect)" (Montrul and Salaberry, 2003, p. 53). The LAH claims that the learner's selection of verbal morphology is based on the inherent lexical aspect of the verb predicate. It also states a clear prediction of the acquisitional path. The first past tense form to appear is usually the perfective form (preterite). The imperfective form (imperfect) is used later. There is also a tendency to associate imperfective past tenses with atelic verbs (state verbs: amar, saber, vivir and activity verbs: caminar, nadar) and perfective past tenses with telic verbs (accomplishment verbs: escribir una carta, comer una manzana and achievement verbs: entrar, salir). In addition, it is expected that this verbal distribution of tense-aspect morphological marking, that does not necessarily correspond to the target language, decreases gradually and correlatively depending on learners' proficiency level.

Several empirical studies carried out cross linguistically seem to support this hypothesis (Robison, 1995; Badovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995 for English; Hasbún, 1995 for Spanish; Salaberry, 1998 for French), although the subsequent research lines as mentioned earlier have also questioned some issues about it and tried to explain tense-aspect acquisition by other mechanisms.

In recent decades, a new theoretical proposal has come to light: the *syntactic approach* whose representation can be found in the works of Slabakova (2000, 2001 and 2005), Montrul and Slabakova (2002, 2003), Gabriele (2005) and Chin (2006). These studies attempted to investigate the acquisition of semantic interpretation of aspectual marking in L2 acquisition from a minimalist perspective, based on the principle that the interpretation of aspectual inherent semantics requires the ability to interpret the combination of syntax, morphology, and semantics. This approach explores the question from the points of view of form and meaning at the same time. "It is worth noting that even syntactic approaches such as minimalism acknowledge the relevance of the distinction of lexical and grammatical aspect and place great importance on lexical aspect in particular" (Salaberry, 2005, p.185).

As for cross-linguistic influence in Spanish and Romance tense aspect L3 acquisition and to the best of our knowledge, Salaberry's (2005) study is one of the very few that put in evidence a positive transfer between two non-native languages, namely L2 Spanish in Portuguese L3 acquisition, from a non minimalist perspective. The study examined the transfer of the conceptual semantic aspectual distinctions from one non-native Romance language to another non-native Romance language among English speaking learners.

A more recent body of empirical research conducted within the Generative Grammar framework has focused on the possible cross-linguistic influence in inherent semantic aspectual distinction and interpretation between perfective and imperfective past tenses in L2/L3 Romance languages acquisition, including Spanish (Foote, 2009) and among L1Chinese-L2 English-L3 Spanish learners (Chin, 2009). These studies suggest that the typological proximity between languages and the proficiency level in the target language are key factors in perfective/imperfective aspectual distinction in terms of facilitation regardless of whether they are native or non-native languages.

It has been suggested that Arabic speakers show more difficulties in acquiring past tenses in Spanish when compared to other groups of learners, especially at an intermediate level. For instance, Fernández (1997) conducted a large scale experiment in which she examined the L2 Spanish interlanguage of four groups of learners (Arabic, French, Japanese and German), including past tenses, at three different development stages of acquisition. She reported a greater proportion of errors in past tenses use in the Arabic learners' productions in comparison with the rest of the learners; they particularly overuse the simple perfective form of Spanish past tense (preterite). Interestingly, the French group have the smallest proportion of errors. Fernández (1997) attributed these results to transfer phenomena both for Arabic natives due to the differences in time expression between Arabic and Spanish, and for French natives due to the large similarity between Spanish and French verbal systems.

A similar tendency is reported, as well, in Mazyad (1999). His groups of English L2 Arabic speaking learners transferred the Arabic past tense patterns by using the simple past instead of the present perfect at the elemental and intermediate levels.

A closer look at the similarities and differences between Arabic, French and Spanish verbal systems, especially regarding past tense and aspect expression in the next section will provide a better understanding of the Arabic speakers' idiosyncratic behavior.

4. PAST TENSE AND ASPECTUAL CONTRASTS IN SPANISH FRENCH AND ARABIC

All Romance languages possess a clear morphological distinction between past, present and future tenses, on the one hand, and perfective and imperfective aspect which is restricted to the past domain, on the other. Spanish and French are no exception in that sense and function in a quite similar fashion when it comes to past tense expression.

The main past tenses in Spanish are: the *pretérito perfecto*, the *pretérito indefinido* (preterite), the *pretérito imperfecto* (imperfect) and the *pluscuamperfecto* (plusperfect). Their equivalents in French are respectively: the *passé composé*, *passé simple*, the *imparfait* and the *plus-que parfait*, as illustrated by the following examples.

(1) a. Pedro ha comido una manzana.
Pedro a mangé une pomme.
'Pedro has eaten un apple'.
b. Pedro comió una manzana.
Pedro mangea/a mangé une pomme.
'Pedro ate an apple'.
c. Pedro comía un manzana.
Pedro mangeait une pomme.
'Pedro ate/was eating an apple'.
d. Pedro había comido una manzana.
Pedro avait mangé une pomme.
'Pedro had eaten an apple'.

Whereas Arabic as a Semitic language offers two base forms that reflect aspectual contrasts: the perfective form (1), also called *suffixed form* (Sf) or ماضي /mādi/, because the verbal inflections appear at the end of the verb as a suffix; while the imperfective form, also called *prefixed form* (Pf) or مضارع /mudāri/ carries verbal inflections both at the beginning and at the end of the verb. The former is exclusively related to past tense and is perfective, while the latter transcends the temporal domains and has an inherent imperfective meaning, thus it could be used respectively (2a, b and c) in a past, present or future contexts by adding the auxiliary 'كان' /kāna/ (to be) in the suffixed form to obtain the past context and the lexical particles 'س' /sa/ or 'سوف'/sawfa/ to obtain the future context.

(2) قرأ خوان كتابا
/qara'-a huan kitaban/
read **Sf3sg-masc** John a book.
Juan leyó un libro.
Juan a lu/ lut un livre.
'Juan read a book.'

(3)a. كان خوان يقرئ كتابا
/kana huan ya-qra'-u kitaban/
be Sf3sg-masc John read **Pf3sg-m**asc a book.
Juan leía un libro.
Juan lisait un livre.
'Juan was reading/read a book.'
b. يقرئ خوان كتابا
/ya-qra'-u huan kitaban/
read **Pf3sg-masc** John a book.
Juan lee un libro.
Juan lit un livre.
'Juan reads a book.'
c. سيقرئ خوان كتابا
/sa ya-qra'-u huan kitaban/
sa read **Pf3sg-masc** John a book.
Juan leerá un libro.
Juan lira un livre.
'Juan will read a book.'

These differences make it difficult for Arabic native speakers to properly distinguish and use the Spanish past tenses. However, if these temporal and aspectual contrasts have already been acquired in a previous Romance language, it is highly likely that the typologically close Romance language to Spanish, French in this case, will help the Arabic students producing a positive transfer.

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5. THE STUDY

As mentioned above, previous research suggested that the developmental path of tense-aspect marking in Spanish L2/L3 production follow the flowing pattern: pragmatic elementsà lexical elementsà and, finally, morphological elements. Verb past tense morphological marking appears at the intermediate level and it is highly guided by the inherent lexical aspect, that is, telic events appear first and are associated with the preterite morphology, and atelic events appear at later stage and are associated with imperfect morphology. Nevertheless, if learners have already acquired the preterite/imperfect distinction in another Romance language, this pattern will not be verified, and the verb past tense marking in learners production will show no lexical aspect influence.

Considering the theoretical and empirical facts referred to, we propose two research questions to try to find out whether there is a positive French L2 influence in preterite/ imperfect Spanish L3 acquisition in Tunisian Arabic speaking natives with L2 French.

1. Do previously acquired languages, namely Arabic L1 or French L2, have an influence on the acquisition of preterite /imperfect distinction among Tunisian Arabic speakers Spanish L3 learners?
2. Is there a correlation between the lexical aspect and the morphological aspect of the verbs used in the participants' productions?

5.1 PARTICIPANTS

All of our non-native informants are under-graduate students who are studying a "Spanish language and literature" degree at the Higher Institute of Languages of Tunisia (ISLT), that is, in their country of origin. The sample consists of 30 Tunisian Arabic L1- French L2 speakers, aged between 21 and 25 years old. Arabic and French are their main languages of schooling from Primary education, through High School and up to College. Therefore our informants are considered bilinguals[6]. They have between 14 and 16 years of instruction, in Arabic; between 12 and 16 years of instruction in French and, finally, between 4 and 6 years of instruction in Spanish L3. None of the participants have had a learning experience in an immersion contexts or have travelled previously to a Spanish speaking country. At most, some mention that they have taken courses at the Cervantes Institute of Tunisia, as a complement to their university education. Finally, as far as contact with natives is concerned, most of them have had sporadic communications on the Internet.

The non-native subjects are divided into two levels: the second and third year of the Spanish degree. However, for the purpose of our study, all of them were subjected to a test, the placement tests used in the *Cervantes Institute of Tunisia,* which allowed their classification into intermediate B1 (15 informants) and advanced C1 level (15 informants).

In addition, 15 Spanish native speakers have also participated in the experiment. Some are Spaniards and some from various Latin-American countries (Argentina, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru). All of them had a university degree. Their data have been collected before the non-native ones.

5.2. DATA COLLECTION

The samples were collected in two weeks, during the autumn academic semester. However, as we already indicated, the native samples were collected prior to this. First, we invited the third year students outside of class hours. Each participant received a package of 4 tests to complete, plus a questionnaire aimed at collecting personal, linguistic and academic data in order to ensure the profile homogeneity of our participants both linguistically and in the instruction received. The tasks included: a placement test, a written narrative based on the picture story *The Little Red Riding Hood*[7] tale (Appendix), a morphology test (where they had to select one of the two past tense forms in a text : preterite or imperfect), and finally, a Grammaticality Judgment Test. No time restrictions were imposed, but it is estimated that our informants took about two hours to complete all the tests. On an another occasion, the same tests were handed to the second year students following exactly the same procedure. Nevertheless, as far as this article is concerned, only the narratives will be examined according to the research questions mentioned above.

5.3. RESULTS

Once all written narratives had been collected, we selected all past tense verbal utterances and classified them following Vendler's (1976) lexical aspect classification (Table1), in combination with de Miguel's (1999) guidelines:

	Homogeneity	Durativity	Dynamicity	Telicity	Example
State	+	+	-	-	Be, live, know
Activity	+	+	+	-	Swim, sing, walk

Accomplishment	-	+	+	+	Eat an apple, write a letter.
Achievement	-	-	+	+	Reach the top, find something

Table 1:Vendler's (1967) lexical aspectual categories

The interlanguage analysis looked at: 1. verbal forms' uses and distribution with a special attention to preterite and imperfect, 2. the semantic lexical aspect of preterite and imperfect tenses in learners productions and 3.the morphological and distributional accuracy of the preterite and imperfect in the learners' narratives [8].

5.3.1. B1 GROUP RESULTS

The results of the first task performed by the B1 level participants show that past tenses are predominant in the narration of past events (82% of the total verbal forms used). The use of the present tense is scarce compared to past tenses (16%). Nevertheless, the proportion of past-present tense confusions make us believe that the present tense is still acting as a base form in order to elude the lack or absence of knowledge of the past tense required, either when it comes to its use or its morphology.

Regarding the proportions of the past tenses, the imperfect and preterite are equally represented in learners narratives (49 %) and are the most frequently used past tenses. The pluperfect is hardly ever used, but in the few occasion where it appears, it is properly used (Table 2) [9].

B1 level (N= 15)			
	Total(%)	**Mean**	**SD**
Preterites	119 (49%)	7.93	4.67
Imperfects	118 (49%)	7.87	3.52
Others	4 (2%)	0.27	0.46
Overall total Past tenses	241(100%)	16.07	4.75

Table 2:Past tenses' proportions in the B1level narratives

As for the lexical inherent aspect, imperfect appears with all classes of predicates and not exclusively with atelic events. It is used predominantly with state events. The preterite is also used with all lexical predicates with a clear preference for telic events, mainly achievements (Table 3).

B1 Level (N=15)	**Preterite**				**Imperfect**			
	State	**Activity**	**Accomplish.**	**Achieve.**	**State**	**Activity**	**Accomplish.**	**Achieve.**
Total(%)	11(9%)	13(11%)	13(11%)	82(69%)	58(49%)	13(11%)	16(14%)	31(26%)
Mean	0,73	0,87	0,87	5,47	3,87	0,87	1,07	2,07
SD	0,88	1,25	0,99	3,04	2,07	0,83	1,16	2,25

Table 3:Lexical aspectual categories of preterite and imperfect predicates in B1 level narratives

To further ascertain whether there is a lexical aspect influence in preterite and imperfect use in learners' narratives, we used Pearson coefficient between the following variables: imperfects, preterites and the four lexical aspectual categories: states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. The results displayed in Table 4 indicate that the imperfect does not correlate significantly with any of the lexical aspect categories while the preterite has a significant strong correlation with telic predicates (the significance (2-tailed) is <0.05 for accomplishments and <0.001 for achievements).

B1 GROUP	Imperfect	Preterite	States	activities	accomplishments	achievements

Imperfect	Pearson Correlation	1	-,331	,433	,083	,135	,249
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,229	,107	,769	,632	,371
	N	15	15	15	15	15	15
Preterite	Pearson Correlation	-,331	1	,230	,249	,515[*]	,656[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,229		,409	,370	,049	,008
	N	15	15	15	15	15	15

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. **.Correlation is significant at the 0.01level

Table 4: Correlation between the lexical and morphological aspects in B1 level narratives

When examining the preterite and imperfect morphological and use accuracy, we noticed a greater difficulty when it comes to using these past tenses. In fact, the morphological inaccuracies are far less common. Errors proportion regarding imperfect use represent 38% of the total instances of imperfect, while it's only 1% for the preterite. This is mainly due to the overuse of the imperfect and its association with an absolute value as opposed to a relative value in learners narratives: (4) and (5). It is worth noticing that no grounding effect [10] was found in the overall narrative pattern. In effect, the B1 level participants use the preterite exclusively in the foreground and the imperfect in both narratives plans, i.e. foreground and background, hence the important proportion of confusions.

(3) "Después la caperucita roja cuando llegó, iba rápidamente al tesorería de su abuela" (NNB1.2)
'then when Red riding hood came (pret.3sg), went (imp. 3sg) to the treasury of her grandmother'
(4)"…se encontró muchas flores multicolores y empezaba a agrupar las flores…" (NNB1.8)
' she found(pret.3sg) a lot of flowers and started (imp.3sg) to collect the flowers'

5.3.1. C1 GROUP RESULTS

The most visible changes in the C1 level group narratives, compared to the B1 level, are: an increase in preterite utterances (60%) and the decrease of the present tense use (the base form). We can also notice a greater use of the pluperfect (Table 5). The preterite continues to occupy the foreground of the narratives and the imperfect dominates the background but it appears in the foreground as well, by which we can discard a grounding effect in the distribution of the past tenses used.

C1 level (N= 15)			
	Total (%)	**Mean**	**SD**
Preterites	199 (60%)	13.3	5.36
Imperfects	123 (37%)	8.2	3.67
Others	8 (3%)	0.5	0.74
Overall total Past tenses	330 (100%)	22.00	8.18

Table 5:Past tenses' proportions in C1 level narratives

A change is also seen in the decrease of the preterite and imperfect error proportions both in morphology and use. The imperfect confusions in the C1 group ((6) and (7)) represent 24% of the total instances and are qualitatively similar to those of the B1 level, revolving around the attribution of an absolute value to the imperfect. The observed phenomena are evidence of a progression toward a greater mastery of the past tenses object of our study.

(5)"Una vez, la madre de Caperucita Roja preparaba una torta, la ponía en una cesta y la daba a su niña para llevarla a su abuela enferma que habitaba cerca del bosque." (NNC1.8.)
'one time the mother of Red Riding Hood prepared (imp. 3sg) a pie, she put (imp.3sg) it in a basket and gave (imp.3sg) i

t to her child to take it to her sick grandmother who lived close to the wood'.

(6)"…pudó aprovechar con la herencia de su abuela y vivía tranquilamente con su madre." (NNC1.15.)

'…(she) could take advantage of the heritage of her grandmother and lived quitly with her mother'

As for the lexical aspectual categories of the preterite and imperfect predicates, there has not been a real change. The preterite and imperfect are used with all lexical aspectual classes. However, the general trend is a greater use of achievements and states with both tenses (Table 6). Indeed, both past tenses correlate strongly with the two lexical classes at the C1 level (Table 7). In short, we could not find an affinity neither between telic events and the perfective past tense form nor between the atelic events and the imperfective past tense form in detriment of the LAH.

C1Level (N=15)	Preterite				Imperfect			
	State	Activity	Accomplish.	Achieve.	State	Activity	Accomplish.	Achieve.
Total(%)	6(3%)	6(3%)	42(21%)	145(37%)	75(61%)	15(12%)	10(8%)	23(19%)
Mean	0,40	0,40	2,80	9,67	5	1,00	0,67	1,53
SD	0,63	0,91	1,37	3,72	4,58	1,00	0,82	1,68

Table 6:Lexical aspectual categories of preterite and imperfect predicates in C1 level narratives

C1 GROUP		Imperfect	Preterite	States	Activities	accomplishments	achievements
Imperfect	Pearson Correlation	1	,770[**]	,906[**]	-,059	,329	,814[**]
	Sig.(2-tailed)		,001	,000	,835	,230	,000
	N	15	15	15	15	15	15
Preterite	Pearson Correlation	,770[**]	1	,719[**]	,241	,487	,770[**]
	Sig.(2-tailed)	,001		,003	,387	,065	,001
	N	15	15	15	15	15	15

[*].Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. [**].Correlation is significant at the 0.01level

Table 7: Correlation between the lexical and morphological aspects in C1 level narratives

5.3.2. SPANISH NATIVE GROUP RESULTS

The observations made on the narratives of the two non native groups do not allow us to draw consistent conclusions, unless we also examine the native narratives. These are an essential reference when it comes to properly assessing the non- native productions. Quantitatively, the proportions of preterite and imperfect tenses used by the native group is very close to the C1 level group (Table 8).

Native group (N= 15)			
	Total(%)	Mean	SD
Preterites	231 (59%)	15.4	4.3
Imperfects	131 (34%)	8.7	5.0
Others	27 (7%)	1.8	1.6
Overall total Past tenses	389 (100%)	25.9	8.6

Table 8: Past tenses' proportions in native group narratives

In addition, the proportions of the lexical aspectual categories represented in the native productions follow the same pattern as the non native ones, with very close percentages to the C1 group level (Table 9).

Natives (N=15)	Preterite				Imperfect			
	State	Activity	Accomplish.	Achieve.	State	Activity	Accomplish.	Achieve.
Total(%)	24(10%)	10(4%)	45(20%)	153(66%)	78(59%)	26(20%)	11(9%)	16(12%)
Mean	1,60	0,67	3,00	10,20	5,20	1,73	0,73	1,07
SD	1,18	0,98	1,56	2,78	4,52	1,44	0,80	0,96

Table 9: Lexical aspectual categories of preterite and imperfect predicates in the native group's narratives

Similarly to the non-native groups, the imperfect does not correlate exclusively with atelic events. In fact, it correlates strongly and significantly with states ($p<0.001$) and has a significant correlation with accomplishments and activities as well ($p<0.05$). While preterite has also a significant strong correlation with achievements ($p<0.001$); it correlates equally with activities and accomplishments ($p<0.05$).

NATIVE GROUP		Imperfect	Preterite	States	Activities	accomplishments	achievements
Imperfect	Pearson Correlation	1	,441	,954**	,624*	,607*	,177
	Sig.(2-tailed)		,099	,000	,013	,017	,529
	N	15	15	15	15	15	15
Preterite	Pearson Correlation	,441	1	,475	,603*	,636*	,770**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	,099		,073	,017	,011	,001
	N	15	15	15	15	15	15

*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. **.Correlation is significant at the 0.01level

Table 10: Correlation between the lexical and morphological aspects in the native group narratives

5.4. DISCUSSION

In view of the previous results and to sum up the analysis of the native and non-native productions, we can say that the participants' narratives display the following characteristics.

Overall, the data show higher proportions of imperfect and preterite past tenses in both native and non-native narratives than the other past tenses. At the intermediate level (B1), learners still resort to the present tense to supplement the lack of knowledge of the required past tense and/or its morphology. This tendency decreases considerably at the advanced level (C1). The most commonly used past tenses are preterites followed by the imperfect and to a much lesser extent the other past tenses. At B1 level, the imperfect and preterite appear in equal proportions. The C1 level evolves towards a near-native pattern. This distribution progression is illustrated in Figure 1.

As for the grounding effect, we noticed a difference in preterite and imperfect distribution between the native and non-native groups. There is actually a greater respect of the pattern that associates the preterite to the narration's foreground and the imperfect to the background, in the control group in contrast to both non-native groups. In effect, although both groups use the preterite exclusively in the foreground, the imperfect appears in both narrative plans. This might be considered as evidence towards a discard of the grounding effect as a possible influence in the preterite-imperfect distribution in the learners' interlanguage.

Regarding the distributional and morphological accuracy of the imperfect and preterite in learners' productions, few morphological errors have been registered by and large (less errors in C1). In terms of use, the imperfect concentrated almost

all of the confusions. The main problem in relation to this tense is its use in absolute and specific contexts. However, in the broader picture, there is a visible progression between the two developmental stages towards a decrease in error proportions.
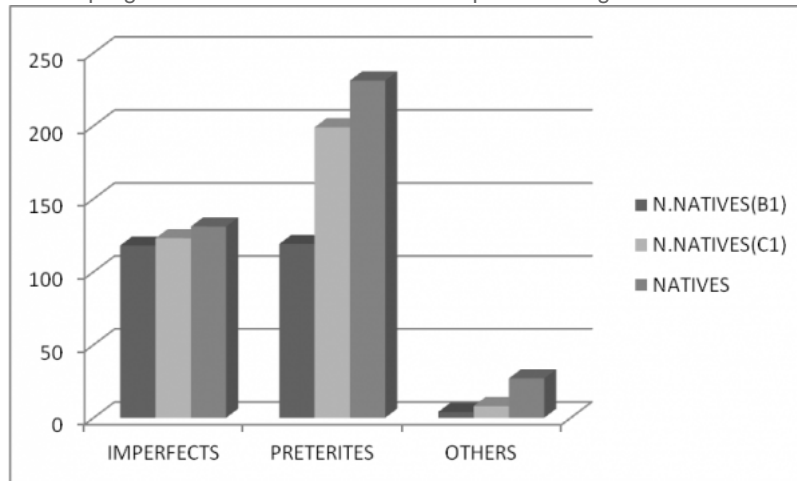

Figure 1:Past tense instances in native and non-native narratives

In addition, the analysis of the lexical aspectual categories with respect to preterite and imperfect show a wide similarity between native and non native groups. All participants use imperfect with both atelic and atelic events with a clear predominance of states and preterite as well with a preference for achievements (Figure 2). The results of Pearson coefficient for the three groups did not indicate an exclusive correlation neither between preterite and telic lexical categories (accomplishments and achievements) nor between imperfect and atelic lexical categories (states and activities).
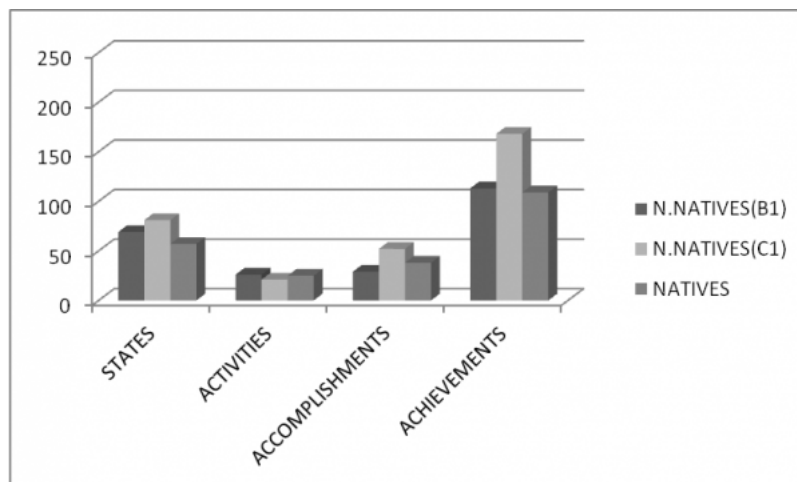
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Figure 2: Lexical aspectual categories of preterite and imperfect predicates in native and non-native narratives

Moreover, the total proportions of preterite and imperfect predicates with the the four lexical aspectual categories are very close between groups. As a matter of fact, an independent samples t-test shows that the difference between the following variables: imperfect/states, imperfect/activities, imperfect/accomplishments, imperfect/achievements, preterite/sates, preterite/acitivities, preterite/accomplishments and preterite/achievements is statistically not significant between the advanced C1 group and the native group, except for preterite/states (p= 0,002) (Table 11).

	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Confidence Interval of the Difference at 95%	
				Lower	Upper
Imperfect/states	-,120	28	,905	-3,605	3,205

Imperfect/activities	-1,622	28	,116	-1,660	,193
Imperf./accomplishments	-,226	28	,823	-,671	,537
Imperfect/achievements	,932	28	,359	-,559	1,492
Preterite/states	-3,464	28	,002	-1,910	-,490
Preterite/activities	-,629	28	,534	-,851	,451
Preterite/accomplishments	-,493	28	,626	-1,374	,840
Preterite/achievements	-,396	28	,695	-2,878	1,945

Table 11: Independent samples *t*-test between the C1 level group and the native group

The difference between the same variables between the two non-native groups is only significant for the preterite/accomplishment ($p<0,001$) and preterite/achievement. In short, we exlude the possible influence of lexical aspect in the the preterite and imperfect use and distinction in the written production of the L1 Arabic-L2 French-L3 Spanish learners. The fact that the non-native productions are not guided by the inherent lexical aspect might be due to a large extent and as we predicted earlier to the positive influence of their L2 French.

These findings seem to be consistent with Salaberry (2005) in the sense that it suggests a successful positive transfer in tense aspect marking between non-native Romance languages. However, we must bear in mind that the data collection instruments in Salaberry's (2005) study are different from ours, all the while being production tasks.

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6. CONCLUSIONS

This article analyzed the transfer of preterite/imperfect distinction in Spanish L3 acquisition among Tunisian Arabic L1- French L2 speakers. Based on Andersen's LAH, the study focused on written narratives and tried to determine whether the distinction of the two past tenses is guided by the inherent lexical aspect of the predicates. The analysis of the data of this study revealed that Tunisian Arabic speakers do not relay on inherent semantics of the verbs to properly use preterite and imperfect in their Spanish L3 productions, thus, they transfer successfully the past tense distinctions from the previously known Romance language, namely, French to Spanish.

The outcomes of this study show a clear evidence of tense-aspect morphemes' transfer as well as their semantic representation in production between two non-native languages typologically related within L3 acquisition.

However, our analysis was restricted to a production task which gives us only half of the picture when it comes to acquisitional processes. In effect, according to generative principles, both learner's production and comprehension should be assessed to get a thorough view of the process. In addition, the limited number of subjects does not allow a generalization of the results. Should this study be replicated, the reported facts should be taken into account. Finally, the finding of the present study can be used as well to contrast our participants' data with other groups of learners from other linguistic backgrounds, especially Arabic speakers without previous knowledge of Romance languages.

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ANEXO

APPENDIX

Érase una vez en el bosque…

¿Qué pasó con Caperucita Roja? Cuenta la historia

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