

THE ACQUISITION OF (ONE KIND OF) WEAK DEFINITES IN L2 SPANISH

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RESUMO

Este estudo investiga a aquisição de definidos fracos (WDs) em construções existenciais (ECs) no espanhol europeu como L2 para falantes do alemão e do turco como L1. WDs comumente encontrados no espanhol europeu compreendem as leituras extremas (entre outras) (Lyon 1999:247):

- (1) *En esta librería hay los mejores libros.*
in this book store there-are the best books
‘Nessa livraria tem os melhores livros.’

WDs em ECs são possíveis tanto no alemão quanto no turco. No alemão eles parecem ser exatamente como no espanhol europeu. Isso é diferente para o turco. Como essa língua não tem o artigo definido, os WDs em algumas das leituras extremas são formalmente indiscerníveis dos indefinidos regulares e são presentes apenas semanticamente. Por isso, hipotetizou-se que a aquisição de WDs nas leituras extremas seria mais difícil para os falantes de turco como L1. Os resultados desse estudo que foram obtidos através de uma tarefa de Julgamento de Aceitabilidade com uso de computador não confirmaram essa expectativa. De fato, o desempenho dos dois grupos foi relativamente pobre mesmo que o efeito de definitude tenha sido adquirido relativamente sem esforço pelos falantes de L2.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the acquisition of weak definites (WDs) in existential constructions (ECs) in the L2 European Spanish of L1 German and L1 Turkish speakers. WDs commonly found in ECs in European Spanish comprise extremely readings (among others) (Lyon 1999: 247):

- (1) *En esta librería hay los mejores libros.*
in this book store there-are the best books
'In this book store there are the best books.'

WDs in proper ECs are possible both in German and Turkish. In German they look exactly the same as in European Spanish. This is different for Turkish. Since this language does not have a definite article, the WDs in some of the extremely readings are formally indistinguishable from regular indefinites and are only semantically present. Therefore, it was hypothesised that the acquisition of WDs in extremely readings should be more difficult for the L1 Turkish group. The results of this study which were obtained by means of a computer-based Acceptability Judgment Task consisting of a total of 80 items, however, did not confirm this. In fact, both groups performed relatively poorly even though the definiteness effect as such was acquired rather effortlessly by these L2 speakers.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Efeito de definitude. Sentenças existenciais. Leituras extremas. Alemão. Aquisição de L2. Espanhol. Turco. Definidos fracos.

KEY WORDS

Definiteness effects. Existential sentences. Extremely readings. German. L2 acquisition. Spanish. Turkish. Weak definite.

Introduction

Many languages that have articles show a so-called *definiteness effect*, also called *definiteness restriction* or “weak-strong distinction” (Milsark 1974 & 1977) according to which only indefinite, or weak expressions such as the indefinite article or weak quantifiers such as *many*, *some*, etc. can occur in proper existential sentences (ECs) whereas definite, or strong expressions such as the definite article, strong quantifiers such as *every* and *all*, demonstratives, possessives, proper names and pronouns are excluded.

Two types of weak definites (WDs) commonly found in ECs are “kind readings” (McNally 2011: 1842) as shown in (1) as well as “extremely readings” (Lyons 1999: 247) as shown in (2) both of which clearly evoke an indefinite reading. Even though English ECs abide by the *definiteness restriction*, the indefinite meaning of the WD renders them compatible with an EC:

- (1) There was every flavor of ice cream for sale.
(Musan 1996: 169)
- (2) There is the most intriguing girl in the garden.
(Lyons 1999: 247)

Milsark (1977) observes that any expression that can occur in an English EC has to be assigned a weak/indefinite reading, whereas expressions that cannot be licensed in English *there*-sentences have to be interpreted as strong/definite. *Every flavour of ice cream* as well as *the most intriguing girl* thus have to be considered indefinites, even though formally they look like definites. Since (1) and (2) qualify as proper ECs and can be uttered in an out-of-the-blue context, presenting new information, it would indeed be difficult to find a presupposed referent in the discourse for the two expressions in (1) and (2).

Note that the WDs found in ECs and investigated in this paper are not identical to ‘classical’ WDs such as in (3) and (4):

- (3) Lola went to the hospital and Alice did too.
(Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2010: 2)
- (4) Lola went to the hotel and Alice did too.
(Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2010: 2)

Whereas *to the hotel* in (4) implies that Alice went to the same hotel, *to the hospital* in (3) does not. DPs such as *to the hospital* in (3) have been referred to as “weak definite” (Schwartz 2012) or “indefinite definite” (Carlson et alii 2006). One characteristic that sets them apart from true definites is that they lack any presupposition of uniqueness (Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2002). However, the indefinite reading implied by WDs such as *the hospital* cannot be maintained when used in an EC:

- (5) *There is the hospital in this neighbourhood.

Therefore, WDs such as *the hospital* on the one hand and WDs in the shape of extremely and kind readings on the other have to be kept apart since they do not seem to stem from the same phenomenon. Extremely and kind readings do not represent the ‘classical’ case of WDs as they have been defined repeatedly in the literature (cf. Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts: 2010; Carlson et alii. 2006; Schwartz 2012). The reason they can be labelled WDs is because although they are definite in form, they escape the presupposition of uniqueness usually implied by definite expressions. However, what both kinds of WDs have in common is that they clearly differ from ‘regular’ definites (Carlson et alii 2006).

ECs in European Spanish, too, allow WDs:

- (6) En esta librería hay los mejores libros.
in this book-store there-are the best books
 ‘In this book store there are the best books.’

In this paper I will focus on the acquisition of WDs in the form of extremely readings in ECs in the L2 Spanish of L1 German and L1 Turkish speakers. Whereas there have been a few studies on the acquisition of the *definiteness effect* in ECs in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

(cf. White 2008, White et alii. 2012, Palacios-Martínez & Martínez-Insua 2006), up to now there has not been a single study explicitly testing the acquisition of WDs in ECs in an L2. Although White (2008) and White et alii (2012) have shown that the definiteness effect present in English ECs was acquired rather effortlessly by intermediate and advanced L2 speakers of English whose L1 was Turkish, Russian or Mandarin, to my knowledge there has not been a single study focusing on the acquisition of WDs in SLA.

A group of 14 L1 speakers of German and 10 L1 speakers of Turkish who were acquiring L2 European Spanish at the time of testing provided judgments on WDs in ECs. Both German and Turkish allow extremely and kind readings in ECs. They differ, however, in how they are marked morphologically. German extremely readings include a definite article:

- (7) In diesem Bücherladen gab es die besten Bücher.
in this book-store gave it the best books
 ‘In this book store there were the best books.’

Turkish also allows extremely readings in ECs. In (8) *en güzel* means ‘the most beautiful’:

- (8) Rio de Janeiro’da dünyanın en güzel plajlari var.
Rio de Janeiro.LOC of.the.world.GEN most
beautiful beaches.GEN exist
 ‘In Rio de Janeiro there are the most beautiful beaches in the world.’

Extremely readings without superlatives, however, can be interpreted both as extremely readings or ‘regular’ indefinite readings expressing ‘any’:

- (9) Hicbir fikrim yok.
Slightest idea mine not-exist
Interpretation 1: ‘I don’t have **the slightest** idea/There isn’t **the slightest** idea.’
Interpretation 2: ‘I don’t have **any** idea/There isn’t **any** idea.’

What is interesting is that the second interpretation does not imply any discrepancy between a formally strong expression and a semantically weak interpretation but is both formally and semantically weak. As far as the first interpretation is concerned, the WD is not actually present but only arises within the speaker’s interpretation.

The results of this study were obtained by means of a computer-based bi-modal *Acceptability Judgment Task* consisting of a total of 80 items. The test was originally designed to investigate the L2 speakers’ acquisition of the weak-strong distinction in ECs. Within the test, ECs containing WDs were included as control items. Although the test was not specifically designed to test the acquisition of WDs, the speakers’ judgments can provide a *first* look into how WDs are treated by L2 speakers of European Spanish.

I hypothesize that even though WDs are licensed in Turkish ECs, they will be more difficult to acquire for the L1 Turkish speakers than for the L1 German speakers since they are not always as straightforward in Turkish as they are in German. The L1 German group, on the other hand, has an advantage in that the phenomenon plays out exactly the same in their L1. Hence, it is likely that the L1 German group outperforms the L1 Turkish group.

1 Existential sentences and weak definites in European Spanish, German and Turkish

Many languages that have articles show a so-called *definiteness effect*, also called *definiteness restriction* or “weak-strong distinction” (Milsark 1974 & 1977) according to which only indefinite, or weak expressions such as the indefinite article or weak quantifiers such as *many*, *some*, etc. can occur in true ECs whereas definite, or strong expressions such as the definite article, strong quantifiers such as *every* and *all*, demonstratives, possessives, proper names and pronouns are excluded from proper ECs¹. English clearly displays this restriction:

TABLE 1: The weak/strong distinction according to Milsark (adapted from White 2008: 5).

Weak/indefinite	Strong/definite
<i>A</i>	<i>the</i>
<i>some, many, few, several</i> , etc.	<i>all, most, every, each</i> , etc.
cardinal numbers (<i>one, two, three</i> , etc.)	pronouns, proper names
zero articles (with bare plurals, mass nouns)	demonstratives, possessives (<i>this, that, my, his, her</i> , etc.)

I will not talk about the pragmatic properties of ECs in detail here but assume that the reader is familiar with the special pragmatics that sets them apart from other types of sentences. Roughly, ECs serve to introduce a new referent in the discourse and locate it within a “spatio-temporal context” (McNally 2011: 1837). For a summary see McNally (2011).

¹ For the purpose of this study, pseudo-existentials such as list readings or deictic sentences that in languages such as English as well as in German to some extent (cf. Czinglar 2000 & 2002) share the same surface structure as proper existential constructions will not be discussed in this paper. From their semantics it becomes clear that they cannot be considered proper existential sentences since they cannot assert the existence of an entity or be uttered in an out-of-the-blue context.

WDs that often occur in ECs are “kind readings” (McNally 2011: 1892) as well as “extremely readings” (Musan 1996: 169). Both are semantically weak although formally strong. As was shown, English ECs require indefinite DPs. The fact that WDs are licensed in English *there*-sentences underlines that their semantics has to be considered indefinite:

(10) There was every flavor of ice cream for sale.

(Musan 1996: 169)

(11) There is the most intriguing girl in the garden.

(Lyons 1999: 247)

White (2008) and White et alii (2012) have shown that both intermediate and advanced L1 Turkish and L1 Russian speakers acquired the definiteness effect present in English ECs rather effortlessly even though their L1s did not display any definiteness effect in negative existentials.

It will be interesting to see if the acquisition of WDs in ECs differs from the acquisition of the weak/strong distinction since WDs can be formally misleading in L2 acquisition. Investigating how foreign language learners interpret WDs can thus provide useful information and help determine the nature of WDs.

1.1 Weak definites in existential sentences in European Spanish

ECs in Spanish are expressed by the impersonal verb *hay* (14). They differ considerably from copular sentences in this language which are usually constructed with the verb *estar* ‘be’ (15), i. e. unlike in English, no confusion arises between proper ECs (*There is a black cat in the garden*) and deictic sentences (*Look! There’s the black cat again!*).

- (12) Hay una araña en el sótano.
there-is a spider in the basement
 ‘There is a spider in the basement.’
- (13) Una/La araña está en el sótano.
a / the spider is in the basement
 ‘A/The spider is in the basement.’

Prior to administering the final test to the European Spanish L2 speakers, the test was handed out to 13 monolingual² speakers of European Spanish to make sure that European Spanish abides by the weak-strong distinction as proposed by Milsark (1974 & 1977). Since the literature on ECs and the definiteness effect in Spanish is relatively sparse (cf. Leonetti 2008, Rodríguez-Mondoñedo in press, Suñer 1982), the judgments made by the native speakers were later used as the target for the experiment with the L1 German and L1 Turkish learners of European Spanish.

The indefinite article as well as weak quantifiers such as *muchos/-as* ‘many’, *algunos/-as* ‘some’ as well as cardinal numbers are fully licensed in proper ECs:

- (14) Arriba hay una fotocopiadora que funciona.
upstairs there-is a copy machine that works
 ‘Upstairs there’s a copy machine that works.’

² No Catalan-Spanish, Basque-Spanish or Galician-Spanish bilinguals were included in this test since the definiteness effect plays out differently at least in Catalan and Galician. Having them give judgments on existential sentences in European Spanish could have led to transfer from their second L1 and rendered the results erroneous.

- (15) En mi clase hay {muchos/algunos/cuatro}
estudiantes franceses.
in my class there-are {many/some/four} students french
'There are many/some/four French students in my class.'

The definite article as well as strong expressions such as strong quantifiers, possessives, proper names and demonstratives, on the other hand, render an EC ungrammatical:

- (16) *En Madrid hay la sala de conciertos más grande.
in Madrid there-is the concert hall most big
'In Madrid there's the biggest concert hall.'

- (17) ??En esta videoteca hay todas las películas.
in this video store there-are all the movies
'In this video store there are all movies.'

- (18) *Hoy no hay {tu hermana/María/esta chica} en clase.
today not there-is {your sister /María/this girl} in class
'Today there isn't your sister/Maria/this girl in class.'

The sentence in (17) was not deemed ungrammatical by all monolingual control speakers probably because *todas las películas* 'all movies' can have a weak reading as well as a strong one. If a strong expression allows for an indefinite meaning they can be licensed in an EC:

- (19) **Context:** Someone is looking for someone called Pedro Martínez and asks other people if they know where to find him. They respond:
No hay Pedro Martínez aquí.
not there-is Pedro Martínez here
'There is no Pedro Martínez here.'

ECs assert the existence of an entity and place it within a “spatio-temporal context” (McNally 2011: 1837). Usually, this is not necessary for definite entities since their existence is already implied by their definiteness such as the proper name *Pedro Martínez* in (19). However, when the context is special enough to establish a definite expression as indefinite they can, in fact, receive a weak reading. This fact is important because it shows that formal definiteness can be over-ridden by semantic indefiniteness which is, of course, also the case for WDs.

Just as in English, European Spanish licenses WDs like this in proper ECs when they show an extremely reading:

- (20) En esta librería hay los mejores libros.
in this book-store there-are the best books
 ‘In this book store there are the best books.’

However, the results of the judgment task carried out with the monolingual controls reveal that making use of an EC when using a WD is not always the preferred option. Unlike English in which the *there*-construction is used for ECs as well as a whole range of related phenomena such as deictic sentences (*Look! There’s the bus.*) and list readings (*What is there left to eat? – Well, there’s the cake we bought yesterday.*), European Spanish L1 speakers preferred verbs such as *tener* ‘have’, or verbs that denote the corresponding action more precisely such as *vender* ‘sell’ or impersonal constructions with *se*:

- (21) En esta librería {tienen/venden/se pueden comprar}
 los mejores libros.
in this book-store {have/ sell/ CL can buy} the best
books
 ‘In this book store they have/sell/you can buy the best books.’

Although this does not challenge the fact that WDs are very common in Spanish and that they are inherently indefinite, this preference for more precise verbs rather than using ECs with the impersonal verb *hay* when there is a WD shows that the weak-strong distinction in this variety of Spanish is fairly strict³ and that if speakers can avoid it they often do. However, the judgment task that was handed out to the monolinguals clearly suggests that extremely and kind readings in ECs are not perceived as violations of the grammar but are rather felt to not represent the most ‘elegant’ solution. ECs containing a strong expression such as proper names and possessives, in contrast, were usually deemed ungrammatical.

European Spanish has a lot of WD expressions that are highly productive both in written and spoken form such as *(ni) el más mínimo* ‘not (even) the slightest’ + noun and *el/la menor* ‘the slightest’ + noun:

(22) No hay ni el más mínimo error.

Not there-is even the most minimal error

‘There isn’t even the slightest error.’

(23) No hay el menor riesgo de que vaya a suspender.

not there-is the slightest risk of that going to fail

‘There isn’t the slightest danger of her failing (the exam)’

³ The same test was also handed out to 7 monolingual speakers of various Latin American Spanish varieties. Interestingly, the weak-strong distinction was shown to be less restrictive in most Latin American varieties. Only the strong expressions positioned at the very end of the definiteness scale (Birner & Ward 1998) such as proper names and possessives were shown to be ungrammatical, whereas strong quantifiers such as *todo* ‘all’ were shown to be accepted in proper existential sentences. These results imply that the weak-strong distinction should not be thought of as a binary opposition but rather as a scale. Another interesting result of the judgment task was that strong quantifiers were usually only accepted in existential sentences when the referent was [-animate].

However, not all strong expressions that can receive an extremely reading are licensed in European Spanish ECs. *Cada uno* ‘every (one of them)’ is not usually acceptable in ECs:

- (24) *En esta videoteca hay cada una de las películas.
in this video store there-is every movie
 ‘In this video store there is every movie (imaginable).’

As becomes clear from these examples, European Spanish shows a variety of contexts in which WDs are properly licensed. The next two sections will show how WDs play out in German and Turkish.

1.2 Weak definites in existential sentences in German

German ECs, just like in English and European Spanish, also abide by the weak/strong distinction:

- (25) Es gab {einen/einige/viele} Fehler in seiner
 Argumentation.
it gave{a/some/many}errors in his argumentation
 ‘There was/were a /some/many errors in his
 argumentation.’

- (26) *Es gab {den/alle/die meisten} Fehler in seiner
 Argumentation.
it gave{the/all/most} errors in his argumentation
 ‘There was/were the/all/most errors in his
 argumentation.’

WDs in German look formally like WDs in European Spanish and English as well:

- (27) In dieser Bücherladen gab es die besten Bücher.
in this book-store gave it the best books
 ‘In this book store there were the best books.’

Unlike Spanish and English, German has two existential constructions that cannot be used interchangeably but follow certain lexical restrictions. Whereas *es gibt* ‘there is/are’ is restricted to rather abstract DPs (*Es gibt Lücken in seiner Argumentation* – ‘There are gaps in his argumentation’) and generic references (*In Afrika gibt es Löwen* – ‘There are lions in Africa’), *da ist/sind* ‘there is/are’ is used for more concrete DPs (*Da sind Teller im Schrank* – ‘There are plates in the cupboard’) (cf. Czinglar 2000 & 2002). The latter is, in fact, identical to the German deictic construction *da ist/sind* (*Schau, da ist die Katze wieder!* ‘Look! There is the cat again!’) as is the case in English. However, there are regional variations as well as a third expression – *es hat*, literally ‘it has’ – which is only productive in the Southern parts of Germany as well as in Austria and Switzerland.

What is crucial is that in order for the L1 German group to acquire the fact that WDs are grammatical in ECs they need only to positively transfer this property to their L2 Spanish. Since extremely readings are possible in German and play out exactly the same it is likely that they will accept WDs in ECs in L2 European Spanish as well.

1.3 Weak definites in existential sentences in Turkish

Turkish positive ECs expressed by the impersonal verb *var* ‘there exist(s)’ show the same definiteness effect found in Spanish, German and English:

- (28) Bahçe-de birkaç çocuk var. (White et alii 2012: 7)
garden-LOC some child exist
 ‘There are some children in the garden.’

- (29) *Bahçe-de her çocuk var. (White et alii 2012: 7)
garden-LOC every child exist
 ‘There is every child in the garden.’

Whereas the indefinite expression *birkaç çocuk* ‘some child’ is fully licensed, the strong expression *her çocuk* ‘every child’ is not. However, although positive ECs do display a definiteness effect (30), negative ECs, formed by means of the impersonal *yok* ‘not exist’ do not (31) (examples taken from White et alii 2012: 59):

- (30) *Ali dükkanda var. (White et alii 2012: 59)
Ali store-LOC exist
 ‘There is Ali at the store.’

- (31) Ali dükkanda yok. (White et alii 2012: 59)
Ali store-LOC not-exist
 ‘There isn’t Ali at the store.’

Thus the essential difference between Turkish and Spanish lies in the fact that negative ECs lack the definiteness effect in Turkish, whereas positive ones behave just the same in both languages. Extremely readings containing a superlative (32) and kind reading (33) are also possible in Turkish:

- (32) Rio de Janeiro’da dünyanın en güzel plajları var.
Rio de Janeiro.LOC of.the.world.GEN most
beautiful beaches.GEN exist
 ‘In Rio de Janeiro there are the most beautiful beaches in the world.’

- (33) Her dondurma aroması var.
every ice cream.GEN flavour exist
 ‘There’s every flavour of ice cream.’

Other WDs, however, are less straightforward in that they do not include *en* ‘the most’. Since definiteness is not morphologically marked on articles in Turkish⁴ – the only article Turkish has is *bir* meaning both ‘a’ and ‘one’ – these sentences do thus not necessarily have to be analysed as extremely readings at all since there is no definite article. They are formally identical to regular indefinites expressing ‘any’:

(34) Hicbir fikrim yok.

slightest idea.mine not-exist

Interpretation 1: ‘I don’t have **the slightest** idea./There isn’t **the slightest** idea.’

Interpretation 2: ‘I don’t have **any** idea./There isn’t **any** idea.’

Under the second interpretation the WD in this sentence becomes a regular indefinite that is being negated within the sentence. The difficulty for the L1 Turkish group therefore lies in the fact that European Spanish ECs that contain a WD sometimes include *en* in their Turkish equivalents and sometimes they do not. *En* is a strong expression but is licensed in Turkish existential sentences. Extremely readings without *en* formally look like regular indefinites since the WD is only covertly present. The fact that the WD is formally absent in Turkish in many of the extremely readings makes it particularly difficult for them.

Comparing the three languages as far as extremely readings are concerned, one can clearly see that German and European Spanish group together whereas only some of the Turkish equivalents would be formally marked as WDs:

⁴ Definiteness marking with proper names and noun phrases is optional in Turkish. Whether or not a noun phrase is interpreted as definite is usually up to the listener. Sometimes a proper name or noun phrase is accompanied by a demonstrative, whereby definiteness is marked morphologically but this is not necessary to achieve a definite reading. Usually, whenever a noun phrase can be shifted around rather freely within a sentence as well as in the absence of any indefiniteness markers such as the indefinite article *bir*, ‘one/a’ it is interpreted as definite.

TABLE 2: Extremely & kind readings in European Spanish, German and Turkish.

	European Spanish	German	Turkish
1. extremely reading available?	√	√	√
2. Is there a formal WD?	√	√	not always

Even though Turkish allows WDs in proper ECs, these are often less straightforward since Turkish does not have a definite article. It is therefore likely that the L1 German group will outperform the L1 Turkish group in accepting WDs in proper ECs because whereas the patterns in German and European Spanish are formally identical; in Turkish they are not always identical.

2 The Study

The data used for this study has been obtained by means of a computer-based bi-modal *Acceptability Judgement Task* (AJT) and was a modified version of the AJT White et alii (2012) used for their study on the acquisition of the weak-strong distinction in the L2 English of L1 Russian and L1 Turkish speakers. Making use of an AJT is particularly rewarding for a study like this since it triggers *intuitional* data that is able to reflect the L2 learners' interlanguage, or intergrammar (White 2003: 17). The subjects were also asked to fill out a Spanish cloze test in order to obtain an idea of the overall proficiency level of Spanish of the subjects.

2.1 Participants & Methodology

14 L1 German speakers as well as 10 L1 Turkish speakers acquiring European Spanish were tested in Northern and Western Germany as well as in Istanbul, Turkey. All claimed to speak standard varieties of their respective L1, although some speakers claimed to speak a regional variety in addition to that. Many German L2ers had learned Spanish in high school, whereas some of them as well as most of the Turkish L2ers were studying Spanish at university. There were no absolute beginners in either of the groups.

2.2 Acceptability Judgment Task

The AJT used for this study was designed to investigate the acquisition of the weak/strong distinction and was based on the White et alii (2012) test design. The test was not specifically designed to investigate how WDs are acquired. However, since the test included ECs containing WDs, the data obtained by the German and Turkish L2 learners of European Spanish can give a first look at how WDs are acquired in Second Language Acquisition.

The speakers' performance on the DE in Spanish was tested by means of an AJT consisting of a total of 80 items. The test was bimodal, i. e. the items were presented both in written and in audio form (read by a male native speaker of Colombian Spanish). The subjects were given between 15 and 20 seconds for the evaluation of the items and were asked to say whether they thought the item was correct/natural or incorrect/unnatural within the given context. Then, according to their judgment they had to either repeat or correct the item.

FIGURE 1: Test design



Also, the speakers' overall proficiency of Spanish was tested by means of a Spanish cloze test consisting of 45 gaps. Various groups of test and control items were included in the judgment task:

TABLE 3: (Un)Grammatical test items.

1	5 items	grammatical	<i>hay</i> + indefinite article (<i>un, una</i> , bare) in positive existentials
2	5 items	grammatical	<i>hay</i> + weak quantifiers (<i>algunos, muchos</i>) in positive existentials
3	5 items	grammatical	<i>hay</i> + weak quantifiers (<i>ningún</i>) in negative existentials
4	3 items	ungrammatical	<i>hay</i> + definite article (<i>el, la</i> , etc.) in positive existentials
5	5 items	ungrammatical	<i>hay</i> + strong quantifiers (<i>todos, cada uno, la mayoría</i>) in positive existentials
6	5 items	ungrammatical	<i>hay</i> + possessives (<i>mi, tu, su</i> , etc.) in positive existentials
7	5 items	ungrammatical	<i>hay</i> + possessives (<i>mi, tu, su</i> , etc.) in negative existentials
8	5 items	ungrammatical	<i>hay</i> + proper names (<i>María, Julia</i> , etc.) in positive existentials
9	5 items	ungrammatical	<i>hay</i> + possessives (<i>María, Julia</i> , etc.) in negative existentials

As was shown, *hay* as used in proper ECs can only be followed by weak expressions in European Spanish. Strong expressions that are also definite/strong in meaning may not take *hay* in this variety at all.

7 items tested whether WDs were recognized as semantically indefinite although they were formally definite:

TABLE 4: Test items for weak definites.

10	7* items	grammatical	<i>hay</i> + weak definites in positive existential
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*5

The items in (10) were especially important since they revealed whether the speakers rejected *hay* + strong expression categorically or whether they were able to recognize the inherently indefinite nature of WDs despite the fact that they were formally strong. Since these 7 items were not actual test items but served as control items in the original study on the acquisition of the weak-strong distinction, they were not as varied as would be necessary to be able to obtain a complete picture about how WDs are treated but can give a first insight into how they are coped with by second language learners. All items contained the definite article.

10 more items tested phenomena often related to definiteness effects such as list readings sentences which look like existentials in languages such as English and German, taking *there is/are*, but which cannot take *hay* in European Spanish:

⁵ Originally, there were 5 items testing the acquisition of WDs in proper existentials. However, since 2 of them brought about difficulties for the speakers and were often mentioned as not easily understandable by the L2ers after completing the test they have been removed for the analysis.

TABLE 5: Control items testing list reading sentences

11	5 items	grammatical	List readings with <i>estar</i> (e. g. <i>También está el tren de las 9.30 b.</i> ‘Well, there’s the 9.30 bus’)
12	5 items	ungrammatical	List readings with <i>hay</i> (e. g. <i>También hay el pastel que nos trajo mi madre.</i> ‘Well, there’s the cake my mom has made me.’)

Further control items included sentences testing copular sentences with *estar* in deictic sentences. Since ungrammatical existentials consisting of *hay* and a strong expression can usually be rendered felicitous by changing *hay* for *estar* the L2 speaker’s use of the verb *estar* had to be controlled for. These were also designed to see whether a speaker categorically rejected strong expressions in any type of sentence (for whatever reason) and to make sure that they knew that non-existentials containing strong expressions are grammatical in European Spanish.

TABLE 6: Control items testing deictic sentences with *estar*.

13	5 items	ungrammatical	Deictic sentences with <i>estar</i>
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Further control items comprised the use of the definite and indefinite article since the understanding of the concept of (in)definiteness was absolutely crucial:

TABLE 7: Control items testing the use of the (in)definite article.

14	5 items	grammatical	General use of the definite article
15	5 items	ungrammatical	General use of the indefinite article

All items were piloted with 13 monolingual speakers of European Spanish prior to testing.

3 Results

In order to determine whether WDs have been acquired correctly, two things are in order:

1) The L2ers have to have understood the concept of definiteness and indefiniteness in general. Only if their use of the (in)definite article is correct, their judgments on ECs become reliable – otherwise they might just be generally unsure about the use of articles in any construction and about the concept of (in)definiteness; therefore only the judgments on ECs made by those speakers whose judgments on the general use of the articles were correct about 75% were included;

2) In order to evaluate whether WDs were actually troublesome for the L2ers, they have to have acquired the fact that only weak expressions are licensed in existential constructions in European Spanish and that strong expressions are ruled out. Otherwise their results might be accounted for by a general insecurity about ECs. Therefore, only those speakers whose judgments on grammatical ECs including weak expressions and on ungrammatical existential sentences containing strong expressions were correct about 75% were included in the analysis. This leaves us with 10 L1 German speakers and 5 L1 Turkish speakers out of 14 L1 German and 10 L1 Turkish speakers who took the test:

TABLE 8: L2 speakers who scored at least 75% both on the items testing the general use of the (in)definite article and for existential sentences containing weak or strong expressions (but not WDs).

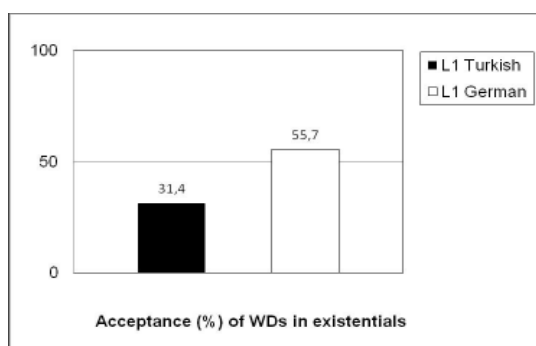
L1 German (n = 10)	Correct general use of (in)definite article	Correct judgments on existentials	L1 Turkish (n = 5)	Correct general use of (in) definite article	Correct judgments on existentials
EIL	90%	100%			
BIR	100%	97.7%			
NAD	100%	83.7%	EZG	90%	93.1%
RIL	80%	88.4%	GÜL	100%	93.1%
XAN	100%	90.7%	SED	100%	97.7%
BIA	80%	88.4%	BAR	90%	88.4%
MAG	90%	86%	MEH	90%	88.4%
RES	100%	81.4%			
JOA	100%	83.7%			
LEN	100%	88.4%			
Mean :	94%	88.9%		94%	92.1%

Among the 14 L1 German speakers as many as 10 L2ers have scored at least 75% in the general use of the (in)definite article. All of these speakers performed relatively well on the weak-strong distinction. The lowest percentage was 81.4% within the L1 German group. Of the 10 L1 Turkish speakers only 5 performed as required in the general article use. The average score of these 5 Turkish speakers, however, is 92.1% and thus slightly higher than the one of the Germans.

3.1 Overall results

Figure 2 shows the results of the acquisition of WDs in ECs by the 10 L1 German and 5 L1 Turkish speakers who were shown to understand both the concept of (in)definiteness as well as of ECs:

FIGURE 2: Acceptance of WDs.

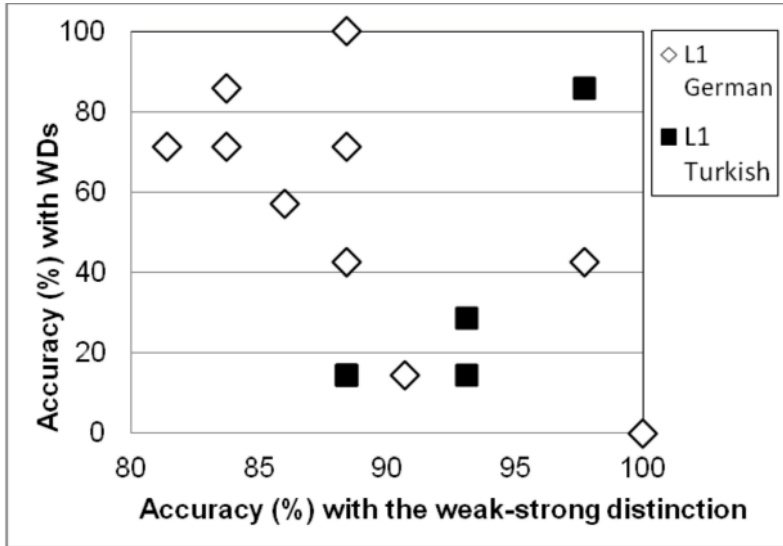


As can be seen in the diagram the L1 German group were more likely to correctly accept WDs in ECs (55,7%) than the L1 Turkish group who accepted them 31,4 % WDs in total. However, WDs were only accepted a little more over 50% by the L1 speakers of German although all of them performed well both on the general use of the (in)definite article and on the definiteness effect of ECs.

3.2 Weak definites and the weak-strong distinction

Figure 3 shows whether there is a correlation between an L2er's performance on the weak-strong distinction and their acceptance of WDs in proper ECs.

FIGURE 3: Accuracy with WDs and performance on the weak-strong distinction.



Interestingly, there is something like a reverse correlation for the L1 German group. The L1 German speakers who correctly accepted all items including WDs in ECs were not the ones who performed best on the weak-strong distinction in regular ECs. One L1 German speaker scored 100% on the weak-strong distinction but rejected all ECs containing a WD. The only L1 German speaker who accepted all items testing the acquisition of WDs did not score 100% but 83,3% on the weak-strong distinction. There was also one L1 Turkish speaker who performed 100% target-like on the weak-strong distinction but who rejected all ECs containing a WD.

As for the L1 Turkish speakers there does not seem to be a correlation. Also, not a single speaker of this group accepted all WD items. The highest number of acceptance was 85,7%. This speaker scored 92,9% on the weak-strong distinction.

3.3 Weak definites and proficiency level

Another variable that is often believed to have an influence on L2 & L3 acquisition is the speakers' proficiency level (Falk & Bardel 2010: 196ff.). The overall proficiency level of the L2 speakers investigated was obtained by means of a cloze test consisting of 45 gaps. Among the missing words there were both lexical as well as grammatical ones so as to ensure that the speaker's overall knowledge of Spanish was covered. The scores of the Spanish cloze test ranged from between 20 and 36 out of a possible 45 points for the L1 German group who fulfilled the criteria established at the beginning of this section as well as between 16,5 and 29 points for the 5 L1 Turkish speakers included in this analysis.

FIGURE 4: Accuracy with WDs and overall proficiency level.

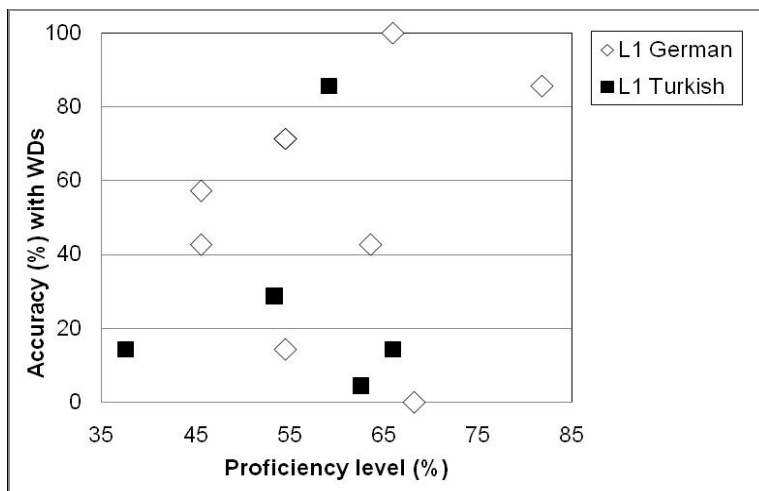


Figure 4 shows that there does not seem to be a correlation between the scores of the cloze test and the performance on WDs in ECs for the L1 German group. Also, the only L1 German speaker who accepted all items testing WDs was not the speaker with the highest score on the test and the L1 German speaker who scored highest on the cloze test was not the one who was most accurate on the WD items.

For the L1 Turkish group the situation is even less clear. Again, the speaker who most readily accepted WDs in existential contexts was not the one with the highest score on the test. Hence, no actual correlation can be postulated.

4 Discussion

As was shown in the previous chapter the L1 Turkish speakers less readily accepted WDs in ECs in European Spanish; their acceptance rate was about 31.4%. Even the speakers of this group who scored very high on the cloze test did not accept all test items. A speaker's performance on the weak-strong distinction in other ECs did not seem to have an influence on their performance on the WD items, either. With the exception of one speaker, no L1 Turkish speaker accepted more than 28.6% of the items. The fact that they acquired the weak-strong distinction quite well (accuracy rates on the weak-strong distinction ranged from 88.4% to 97.7%) but that they were far from target-like on the WD items suggests that they were overgeneralizing the weak-strong distinction to contexts in which it does not apply.

The L1 German speakers accepted WDs in ECs only a little more over 50%; their acceptance rate was 55.7%. This is quite surprising considering the fact that ECs including WDs look the same in German and European Spanish. The assumption that the L1 German group would display positive L1 transfer was thus only partly borne out: although, as expected, the L1 German group did outperform the L1 Turkish group, the extent of their outperformance was rather low.

However, the AJT only contained 7 items testing the acquisition of WDs in ECs. Since these items were construed as control items for the original study on the acquisition of the weak.-strong distinction, they were not sufficiently varied and did, of course, not represent the whole range of WDs possible in European Spanish ECs. The present study can therefore only give a *first* look into the acquisition process of this phenomenon in SLA. A more elaborate test design is necessary to obtain a more fine-grained picture of how WDs are acquired by foreign language learners. Such a test design should include WDs in existential as well as non-existential sentences and should include control items testing whether the concept of (in)definiteness as well as of the weak-strong distinction have been understood since otherwise the results might not be reliable. Considering the fact that in Turkish there are two possible WDs in ECs – one containing *en* ‘the most’ and one including a null WD – a sufficient number of items testing both structures should be included in the test. This way, it will be possible to see whether the lack of an overt WD in some Turkish ECs leads to more difficulties.

Although – as was shown in chapter 2 – WDs are usually not perceived as violations of the grammar by L1 speakers of this variety of Spanish, there are many other ways in which the same idea can be uttered. In fact, L1 speakers of European Spanish often resort to verbs that are more precise such as *tener* ‘have’, *vender* ‘sell’ or impersonal constructions with *se* ‘one’ such as *En esta librería venden los mejores libros* ‘In this book store they sell the best books’ or *En esta librería se pueden comprar los mejores libros* ‘In this book store you can buy the best books’ instead of making use of an EC. Hence, it is possible that both the L1 German and L1 Turkish speakers have not come across any WDs in ECs while learning Spanish.

Another factor that might be of importance is the fact that European Spanish was not the speakers’ L2 but their L3. Both in Germany and in Turkey English is the first foreign language learned/taught at school and proper L2 speakers of Spanish are practically non-existent unless they

attended a special kind of school or learned Spanish outside of school. English was, of course, not the only background language. Within the L1 German group many speakers claimed to also speak French, Italian and Portuguese. Within the L1 Turkish group frequent languages other than English were French and German. In L3 acquisition with the L3 being the language that is currently learned/studied and L2 referring to all other languages learned before, there are many more transfer sources. In order to rule out that the speakers transfer properties of one of their dominant background language, they would have to take a test about the phenomenon of the weak-strong distinction as well as of WDs in ECs in those background languages in which the phenomenon plays out differently from European Spanish as well. In the case of the weak-strong distinction and WDs in existential sentences, however, English can probably be ruled out as a transfer source since it works just like European Spanish and would have led to higher acceptance rates of WDs.

Investigating how WDs are treated by foreign language learners is thus not an easy task and requires a more elaborate test design specifically designed to investigate the acquisition of WDs.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the acquisition of WDs in ECs in the L2 European Spanish of L1 German and L1 Turkish speakers by means of a bi-modal computer-based Acceptability Judgment Task consisting of a total of 80 items. The results show that the L1 German and the L1 Turkish speakers were rather reluctant to accept WDs. This was particularly true for the L1 Turkish group who less readily accepted these items (33.4%). No correlations between the L2 speakers' acceptance of WDs in ECs and their performance on the weak-strong distinction as well as their overall proficiency level could be found. At least for the

L1 Turkish group part of the problem could be attributed to the fact that WDs are not always recognizable as such in Turkish. Interestingly, however, even those L1 Turkish speakers who performed well on the weak-strong distinction had problems with WDs in existential contexts. This underlines one more time that there might be an overgeneralization of the weak-strong distinction onto contexts in which it does not apply.

However, the present study can only be considered a first glance into the acquisition of WDs. A more elaborate test design investigating a wider range of different WDs in existential as well as non-existential sentences is necessary to obtain a more fine-grained picture of what the acquisition process for WDs in SLA looks like. Especially when studying L1 speakers of Turkish there should be a sufficient number of test items studying the acquisition of the two different structures found in ECs that contain WDs in Turkish. Also, possible other background languages of the speakers should be taken into consideration since European Spanish is usually not the first foreign language taught at school neither in Germany nor in Turkey.

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