

The Expression of Affected Arguments in L2 French: Evidence of Conceptual Transfer from Spanish-speaking Learners

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Abstract

The paper describes how affectedness is expressed in French, Spanish, and L2 French by Spanish-speaking learners attending to two parameters: the thematic role under which affected arguments are realised, and the interaction between grammatical and lexical means at play. 63 participants completed an offline task in which they were presented with a series of vignettes and had to retell what happened to a blue-dressed cartoon figure.

The corpus of the study consists of 252 responses: 84 were elicited in L2 French, 84 in L1 French, and 84 in L1 Spanish. The results reveal that French expresses affected arguments as subjects in the 'se faire' passive constructions (e.g., *Il s'est fait agresser*), whereas Spanish expresses affectedness through the realisation of objects depending on causative verbs within SVO sentences (e.g., *El coche impactó al ciclista*) and OV(S) sentences (e.g., *A él lo atropelló un coche*). Our findings suggest that the instantiation of affected arguments is highly grammaticalised in French, whereas Spanish relies more on the semantics of the verb. As for L2 French, our results are coherent with previous SLA findings regarding the learner's overuse of structures available in both native and target languages but dispreferred by target language speakers (Benazzo/Andorno 2017). Regarding conceptual transfer, the results of our study suggest that the status of a given language as L1 or as L2 plays a crucial role in the dissimilar expression of affectedness across related Romance languages such as French and Spanish.

Keywords

undergoer, affectedness, thematic roles, RRG, intra-typological variation, transfer