The Effects of Comparative Explicit Instruction on Gender Marking of Possessive Adjectives and Pronouns

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Introduction

Learners acquiring a second language can receive input about the L2 grammar in a natural environment, and/or through explicit instruction (EI). The latter is quite common among adult L2 learners, but how necessary or useful EI is, is still an open debate. As argued by Henry, Culman, and VanPatten (2009) "not all EI is the same, not all structures are the same, and the interaction of EI, structure, and processing problems may yield different results in different studies". Explicit instruction has been argued to be particularly beneficial for grammatical phenomena where learners continue to perform non-target like (Izquierdo & Collins, 2008; McManus, 2013; and more). The current research investigates the effects of explicit instruction on a linguistic phenomenon that has been shown to be problematic also for more advanced learners, namely gender marking on possessive pronouns and adjectives. Specifically, we compare instruction in the L2 only to a comparative approach where instruction is provided in both the L1 and L2.

In this thesis, chapter one focuses on existing literature and past studies relevant to the current research, such as the generative approach to second language acquisition (SLA), L1 transfer in SLA, and theories about explicit instruction and comparative explicit instruction. Chapter two explains the focus of the research, with an outline of the topic of this study, an explanation of how possessive adjectives and pronouns work in English, and how their counterparts work in Spanish and Italian, and a presentation of previous research on this topic. Chapter three presents the research questions, methods, tasks, and participant descriptions. The results of each test are presented in chapter four, with an explanation of the two types of instructions the groups received, as well as the analysis of the final results. Finally, the conclusion is followed by the appendix with the tasks and a complete bibliography of works cited.

Chapter 1

1.1. The Generative Approach to Second Language Acquisition

Although language acquisition is "a natural extension of human linguistic ability", some might be really good at learning additional languages, others might be able to speak multiple languages and dialects despite cognitive impairment, while others appear to be poor language learners (Hawkins, 2008). This may lead to the belief that people should have a special talent to learn languages beyond the one(s) they acquire in infancy, but that is not the case. In most situations, anyone can achieve a good linguistic level in a foreign language to be able to communicate, if given time and opportunity (Hawkins, 2008).

Around the late 1960s and early 1970s, several linguists (Corder, 1967; Adjémian, 1976; Selinker, 1972; to name a few) focused their research on the errors that second language (L2) learners were making and showed that these errors were not random but systematic, providing clear evidence of rule-governed behavior. The concept of "interlanguage" was introduced to describe the grammar used by learners of a second language, that typically has some features of their first language (L1), some features of the L2, as well as overgeneralizations of features of the L2 (Selinker, 1972). These observations led to more research investigating the extent at which interlanguage grammars are like other grammars, and how much L2 grammars are constrained by Universal Grammar (UG).

Much of research in the 1980s looked into whether UG influences L2 acquisition, and to what extent (Chomsky, 1986; Montalbetti, 1983; Pinker, 1994; to name a few who studied this question); it focused on the so called "access", looking at UG and the possibility for it to still be available in second language acquisition (SLA), which later resulted in evidence in favour of the idea that UG is in fact available during SLA (White, 2003). SLA research also examined the role

of transfer, the influence of the mother tongue on secondary language acquisition (Odlin, 1989). Interlanguage grammars are influenced by L1 transfer and restricted by UG, and this influence of a person's L1 can affect the way they perceive and process language, which in turn can affect the way they learn a L2.

During acquisition, language learners have full access to UG (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), and are also assumed to transfer L1 grammatical structures onto the L2. L1 transfer can be beneficial and help acquisition, but it can also lead to negative effects obstructing target-like acquisition (for some time or indefinitely). The next section looks at L1 transfer in more detail.

1.2. L1 Transfer in Second Language Acquisition

1.2.1. The Initial State of L2 Acquisition

Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) proposed the Full Access/Full Transfer Hypothesis, claiming that the initial stage of L2 acquisition is the final stage of L1 acquisition. This means that the two initial learning periods are quite different from one another; it implies that the properties existing in the L1 grammar are immediately carried over to create the initial state of a new grammatical system at the initial input of the new target language (hence the term 'Full Transfer') (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). This is shown to be quite common in the earliest stages of acquisition, where L2 learners start by using structures of their L1 in their use of the L2, adapting L2 features once they receive relevant input. When learners realize that L1 structures do not work with the L2 input, through exposure to positive evidence or through instruction, learners update and adapt their interlanguage accordingly and use other options available to them through UG (hence the term 'Full Access') (Bowles & Montrul, 2008). According to Schwartz and Sprouse (1996), this restructuring process may happen quickly for some, or take a bit longer for others; at each developing stage, a different interlanguage (grammar) is created. The progress of L2

development depends on multiple factors, such as the initial state, the input, the apparatus of UG, and learnability considerations. Learners might not always notice some aspects of the L2, because they are either not communicatively problematic, they are conceptually similar to their L1, or they may not be acoustically salient enough to notice them. Even proficient L2 speakers sometimes use L1-influenced structures, but the rate at which they do so typically decreases as they become more proficient. Nevertheless, all speakers might continue to use L1 features in the L2, but only when the L2 features justify it (Antón-Méndez, 2011).

1.2.2. Causes of Persistent Transfer

L1 transfer may persist even after the learner reaches higher proficiency levels. Antón-Méndez (2011) found that some errors keep appearing regardless of proficiency, due to either difficulties with the acquisition of the particular form, like grammar or vocabulary (declarative knowledge), or difficulties with automatically implementing certain processes while trying to speak the language (procedural knowledge) (Ullman, 2005).

Another possible reason behind persistent errors is insufficient automatization, that is "when the second language requires the automatic implementation of a certain syntactic or morphological procedure that is not required in the first, and the automatization is difficult to achieve at all or is difficult to implement in a consistent manner, even when the procedure itself is not difficult to learn on theoretical basis" (Antón-Méndez, 2011: 319). The author made this argument in reference to gender agreement, which is the focus of her study; if the learners' L1 does not have gender agreement, or has very different rules for it compared to the target L2, then they might have difficulties acquiring and using it while speaking in the L2, even if theoretically it is not a complicated structure; an example could be romance languages compared to English. In most of these cases, only spontaneous speech production will be affected, while off-line tasks

may result in lower error rates. In either type of task, learners have to "switch off" the automatic grammatical feature they know from their L1, and only use that of the L2, and it can be a complicated process. These errors are the results of an automatic process that has been applied inappropriately. The following research examples will illustrate this theory, comparing different languages, as they might all lead to similar problems when learned as L2s.

Similarly to the focus of the current study, Antón-Méndez (2011) tested the production of the possessive pronouns his/her in proficient English as a second language (ESL) learners, native speakers of Italian, Spanish, or Dutch. In English and Dutch, the 3rd person singular possessive pronouns agree with the gender of the antecedent, while in Spanish and Italian possessives agree with the gender of the noun they accompany (possessum), like in the examples below:

Table 1 (my examples): EN – English, NL – Dutch, IT – Italian, ES – Spanish.

EN: Paul is eating dinner with **his** wife.	'his' and 'zijn' both agree in gender with the antecedent/possessor 'Paul'
NL: Paul is aan het eten met **zijn** vrouw.	
IT: Paul sta cenando con **sua** moglie.	'sua' and 'su' both agree in gender with the possessum 'wife' (moglie/esposa)
ES: Paul está cenando con **su** esposa.	

All participants were proficient speakers of English, with a mean proficiency rate of 4.6 out of 5 (measured by the Quick Placement Test[1]). The results showed that Dutch speakers made very few errors with possessive gender, either with an animate or inanimate possessum, as the two languages are similar and there would not be any negative transfer effects. Spanish and Italian speakers performed differently; while they had very few problems when the possessum was inanimate (ex. her book), they struggled significantly more when it was animate and the gender of the possessive pronoun did not match that of the possessum, as in the examples in Table 1. This was caused by negative transfer from the L1 to the L2, which learners had yet to

[1] The QPT is a computer-based test commercialized by Oxford University Press, designed to place students of English as a second language in the appropriate level according to their proficiency.

overcome even at a high proficiency level. With a similar study involving L1 to L2 transfer, Lemhöfer et al. (2008) tested proficient but unbalanced German-Dutch bilinguals (their proficiency in L2-Dutch was less native-like). Both languages are Germanic and with similar gender systems, except that Dutch has a two-way gender system and German has a three-way gender system, which could lead to transfer of gender properties. They tested cross-language gender effects in word recognition and production, as well as the effects of such differences on how similar a L2 word is to its L1 translation. In the first task, participants had to identify the gender of Dutch nouns and in the second task they had to identify the same items which were presented as pictures and had to be named in Dutch, some with their gender-marked determiners and some without (as divided by the examiners). Task 3 was a repetition of task 2, but was preceded by a training. The gender of the Dutch words was either matching or mismatching with their German translation. Additionally, the gender classification of some words was different in the two languages (ex. jurk/Kleid, 'dress'), or it was similar (ex. hond/Hund, 'dog'). Lemhöfer et al. (2008) showed that German–Dutch bilinguals were influenced by the gender of the word in their L1 when processing gender-marked noun phrases in the L2. The cross-linguistic influence was mainly due to participants 'not knowing for sure' which gender to use (as they commented in the post test interview), a consequence of imperfect gender acquisition in L2. This problem is heavily caused by L1 transfer, resulting in difficulties with nouns whose genders do not match in the two languages.

With these results, Antón-Méndez (2011) and Lemhöfer et al. (2008) concluded that even proficient L2 speakers can be influenced by automatic processes that they transferred from their first language, and that do not always match with the L2. Schwartz and Sprouse (1996) predicted that with sufficient positive evidence, L2 learners will eventually shift from the transfer stage and

look for other UG-constrained mechanism to use the L2, but in due course; as Bialystok (1979) explained, learners first make grammatical judgements through their implicit knowledge (what they already know from their L1 and/or UG, and from continued exposure to the target language), then move to their explicit knowledge (what they learn from input and instruction) when they have to make more fine-grained decisions. By making the learners aware of specific aspects of L1 to L2 transfer that would affect their L2 output in a direct and negative way, they may become consciously aware of these L1 influences, which might lead them to reject and overcome transfer errors. The more salient the evidence of the differences between the L1 and the L2, the more likely a learner is to identify those properties, and override transferred properties from the L1 (Hawkins, 2018). Similarly, Ionin and Montrul (2010) found that L2 learners might never be able to overcome L1 negative transfer of some linguistic properties without explicit instruction of the L1-L2 differences. In such situations, explicit instruction may be particularly useful.

1.3. Explicit Instruction

'Instruction' can comprise multiple ways of presenting facts about a language, but it especially provides learners with explanations about the properties of that language. According to White and Ranta (2002), learners benefit from pedagogical activities that promote an intensive awareness of language forms, either in the L1 or the foreign language(s), or both. Many studies found that input in the form of positive evidence alone is not sufficient for successful SLA and that focus on language form is necessary (de Graaf, 1997; DeKeyser, 1995; Rosa & Leow, 2004; to name a few). While Lightbown's (1985) first conclusion in her review was: 'knowing a language rule does not mean one will be able to use it in communicative interaction' and 'being able to use a rule does not mean that one will be able to state it explicitly'; after a couple of years

she revisited the issue of 'form-focused instruction' in L2 classrooms, and concluded that "metalinguistic instructional input does influence L2 acquisition" (Lightbown, 2000). 'Metalinguistic' is the term used to define the task of looking at language as an object; one must study its structure (the vehicle with which meaning is delivered), then focus on the attributes of its message (its meaning and contextual setting), then learn how to unite the two pieces of information to communicate properly. (Krashen, 1985). Without doubt, learners will benefit from some type of form-focused instruction, defined by Spada (1997) as "events which occur within meaning-based approaches to L2 instruction in which a focus on language is provided in either spontaneous or predetermined ways"; therefore, according to this author, focus on form should be added to regular meaning-focused instruction.

VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) explained the four stages to go from L2 input to acquired knowledge:

input → intake → developing system → output

The authors explain that the first stage includes all the expressions that the learner is exposed to, either naturally or through formal instruction. The 'intake' stage involves memory retention of those expressions, which will influence the developing mental grammar of the learner during the 'developing system' stage. The final 'output' stage is the learner's ability to produce utterances in the target language. The authors clarify that acquisition is possible when every stage is followed.

The type of input that learners receive is an important factor in determining how quickly and well they acquire the target-language properties. To date, the usefulness of providing L2 explicit instruction about specific linguistic features and subsequent practice of such input is still not fully understood. Hawkins (2019) suggests that metalinguistic knowledge (instruction) helps

learners, but processing instruction is more effective than traditional instruction; the first boosts both production and comprehension gains through thorough explanation and targeted practice, even though it is a method that involves mostly comprehension activities, while traditional instruction helps only with production boosts, as learners acquire the metalinguistic information from the teacher, then complete a set of exercises involving the target property. Instruction is "processed" when it is "put under the microscope" and every feature is analyzed in detail and practiced, until it is fully acquired. It is important to figure out how input relates to processing, which VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) referred to as input processing and which deals with presentation and timing of input. Their research is concerned with attention to form and its role as the learner goes from input to intake to output. VanPatten (2002) states that to overcome the differences between the L1 strategy and the L2 input, processing instruction tells the learner that the L1 cues do not work and informs them about L2 cues that they should pay attention to instead. In this way, learners are given enough opportunities to interpret the L2 in the appropriate manner. According to Doughty (2003), EI carves up the L2 for the learner, which allows them to segment the input for themselves.

Input can take multiple forms: natural interactions, positive or negative evidence. The first form is exactly what its name entails; positive evidence comes from input, exposure and instruction, while negative evidence is the correction of the learner's wrong utterances through instruction, in the case of direct negative evidence or through noticing the absence of certain constructions in the input (for indirect negative evidence). According to Gass (2003), positive evidence is the most necessary requirement for learning; without exposure to the structures, one cannot learn the language. She clarifies that this evidence can be authentic, from natural and real-life contexts, or modified like in learning materials (ex. textbooks), either simplified or

elaborated. The role of negative evidence is less clear, as it is not always available and it would be impossible to eliminate certain errors if they do not come to the surface first (Gass, 2003). Direct negative evidence can occur in two ways: pre-emptive (usually in a class context, before the actual error), or reactive through explicit overt correction, or implicit correction through a recast/repetition. Ellis et al. (2006) found that even if negative evidence is not crucial for the acquisition of some features of L2 grammar, it does help with the process of acquisition, just like grammatical explanations or rule presentations do.

More concepts related to the process of L2 learning are reviewed by DeKeyser (2003), such as consciousness, attention, noticing, and focus on form. When it comes to consciousness, or conscious learning, acquisition can be either implicit or explicit in this case as well; during the first there is no overt explanation of any rule and the acquisition happens naturally, while explicit instruction happens when instructors explain the forms and rules of the language to the students, or lets them find them by reviewing forms, through positive or negative evidence. During explicit instruction, the teacher draws the learner's attention to a specific form that otherwise would have gone unnoticed, which is why instruction is often form-focused. Sanz and Morgan-Short (2004) explain that form-focused instruction can include teaching either through grammatical explanation or negative evidence in the form of corrective feedback (CF); secondly, Bowles and Montrul (2008) suggested that only positive evidence might not be enough for the acquisition of certain L1-L2 contrasts or structures that are not present in the L1. For learners to be able to overcome these difficulties, Spada et al. (2005) hypothesized that it might be necessary to provide explicit instruction not only about the L2, but also focus on specific differences between the L1 and L2.

An example of a study who argued that explicit form-focused instruction is necessary, is Ionin and Montrul (2010), who tested Spanish L1 learners of L2 English on the interpretation of definite and bare nouns. The authors examined the use of definite articles with plural noun phrases (NPs) that have generic interpretations; Table 2 shows how English can express genericity with bare plural NPs, but not with a definite article, nor with plural demonstratives. However, Table 3 shows how in Spanish (and most other Romance languages) definite plurals can have both a generic and a specific reading, while bare plural are ungrammatical, and plural demonstratives only have a specific reading.

Table 2 (Ionin & Montrul, 2010)

a. Lions are dangerous.	[√generic reference, ∗specific reference]
b. The lions are dangerous.	[∗generic reference, √specific reference]
c. These lions are dangerous.	[∗generic reference, √specific reference]

Table 3 (Ionin & Montrul, 2010)

a. **Leones* lions	*son* are	*peligrosos* dangerous		
b. *Los* the(pl)	*leones* lions	*son* are	*peligrosos* dangerous	[√specific reference, √generic reference]
c. *Estos* these	*leones* lions	*son* are	*peligrosos* dangerous	[√specific reference, ∗generic reference]

Spanish L1 learners of English L2 will have to learn that definite plurals like 'the lions' cannot have a generic interpretation like in Spanish; they will have to eliminate the [+ kind formation] feature and retain the [+ definite] feature. It is a complicated process to go through, and there is a general understanding in SLA literature, confirmed by Ionin and Montrul (2010), that unlearning can be difficult as it cannot happen on the basis of positive evidence alone. Specifically, input alone will not tell learners that English definite plurals lack generic readings but focus on this form can help through explicit instruction.

1.4. Comparative Explicit Instruction

Henry *et al.* (2009) explained that "not all EI is the same, not all structures are the same, and the interaction of EI, structure, and processing problem may yield different results in different studies". That is, when there are repeating errors because the L1 and L2 express the same meaning differently, EI in the L2 with focused practice might not be enough, and additional EI about how the same construction works in the L1 with practice can help overcome acquisition problems. However, they also want to clarify that processing instruction itself does not 'cause' L2 acquisition; processing information through explicit instruction enhances focus samples so that they become available to learners' mental process of segmentation, categorization and storage. It is the latter that leads to acquisition (Henry *et al*, 2009). It has to be highlighted that this type of comparative EI can only enhance input where there is the possibility for an L2 learner to misinterpret the meaning of a form in the L2. Any prediction about this must take into consideration that there is a possible interlanguage variation in each individual, meaning that each learner might see similarities between the native and target language that might be different from someone else's (Odlin, 2003). Obviously, the effectiveness of explicit instruction depends on multiple factors, as some types of instructions are more complicated than others, and some language features are more complicated than others. EI is often most effective when used with features that are shown to be difficult to acquire through exposure to naturalistic input alone, like gender agreement for possessive pronouns and/or adjectives in English by L1 Spanish and L1 Italian speakers. Crucially, how the L1 and L2 differ affects whether (any) EI is beneficial.

In his report about the use of the L1 in SLA classes, Schweers (1999) concluded that a second language can be acquired through 'raising awareness' to the similarities and the differences between the L1 and the L2. Furthermore, Pellowe (1998) researched the use of cross-

lingual techniques to aid with the intake of features by making them more salient and noticeable. By highlighting L1-L2 differences, learners will be able to 'notice features in the input that otherwise would be ignored' and 'compare what they have noticed in the input with output derived from their current interlanguage grammars' (Ellis, 1997: 123). Additionally, Ferrer (2002) says that such EI will allow learners to notice the 'gap' between their inner grammar and that of the L2, and ultimately achieve higher levels of grammatical and communicative knowledge.

Several linguists have documented long term difficulties for students learning L2 properties that only share some features with their equivalent in the L1; an example is the study by Tolentino and Tokowicz (2014) who focused on the possibility to have L1+L2 comparative instruction and found it beneficial in the acquisition of unique forms in the L2. They proved this by testing three grammatical structures with cross-language similarities and differences: demonstrative determiner-noun number agreement (similar), singular noun phrase definiteness marking (dissimilar), and indefinite singular article-adjective gender agreement (unique), with English learners of beginner Swedish L2 (1st year university course). Initially, the authors found that instruction was particularly effective when it provided grammatical rule explanation, as both groups achieved positive results. However, in a delayed post-test (without prior instruction), the group who received both L1 and L2 EI achieved higher scores. The findings confirmed the authors' predictions as "instruction methods that focused attention on critical input through visual enhancement […] eventually alleviated the negative influence of L1, as shown by the performance of the L1+L2 instructed group on this feature type, particularly in later stages of learning" (Tolentino and Tokowicz, 2014: 301). Adding to the comparative EI literature, McManus and Marsden (2017) tested the role of EI comparing L1+L2 to L2-only instruction on

the acquisition of grammatical structures that work differently in two or more languages, through a pre- and post-test analysis, which resulted in the first type of EI to be more beneficial to successful SLA. This relates to the VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) study mentioned in section 1.3. about input processing, and how important it is to present the information in a way that helps learners notice differences between two languages, when both L1 and L2 are used at the same time to support the processing. Comparative EI guides learners to pay attention to forms, going from the input stage to the intake stage.

Chapter 2

2.1. Topic Outline

Hawkins (2018) explained that properties that are determined by Agree in the target language, like subject-verb or gender agreement, or any other dependency-marking form are difficult to acquire. Generally, L2 learners seem to use agree-marking morphology optionally, and this optionality can continue for a while. Unlike English, some other languages categorize nouns in multiple classes, referred to as genders. Romance languages employ grammatical gender. In such languages, determiners and adjectives come in different forms to express agreement with the gender of the noun with which they occur, or to which they refer. Differences between languages that lack grammatical gender (like English) and languages with grammatical gender (like Spanish and Italian) can cause problems for learners trying to learn gender agreement rules, as they might be inclined to use the structure in the same way their L1 does.

Lago *et al.* (2023) discuss gender agreement with possessives, as these structures often lead to errors in L2 production. In the L2 acquisition literature, errors with possessive constructions are usually attributed to a process different from gender interference: the misuse of L1 agreement mechanisms (Antón-Méndez, 2011). Romance language speakers often make gender errors with possessives, as their L1 establishes forward-looking agreement with a following possessee noun; this becomes a problem when they learn a language like English, where possessives establish agreement with a possessor noun. Finally, incorrectly gender-marked possessives such as "The dad put her little girl" suggests that Romance speakers establish agreement with the possessee (the girl), mistakenly transferring their L1 agreement rule to English (Lago *et al.*, 2023). The authors confirm that difficulties with L2 possessives are due to a universal preference to establish agreement locally within the noun phrase, which works in Spanish and Italian, but not in English.

2.2. Possessive Adjectives and Pronouns in Spanish, Italian and English

The current study focuses on native speakers of Spanish and Italian learning English as a second language, aiming to test if EI comparing the learner's L1 and L2 is more effective than EI that focuses only on the target language. These two groups will be compared to a baseline group who receives no instruction at all. Section 2.3. compares the three languages and predicts in which situations errors are more likely to occur. The specific focus is on gender agreement of the 3rd person singular, the rules will therefore be explained specifically for those foci.

2.3. Possessive Adjectives and Pronouns, 3rd Person Singular: English vs. Spanish and English

To express possession, English adds the possessive ''s' to the noun expressing the possessor, as shown in (1a). Spanish and Italian, however, mark possession by adding a preposition before the name of the possessor, respectively 'de' and 'di', as shown in (1b) and (1c).

Example 1: a. "This is Julia's book"
b. "Este es el libro de Julia"
c. "Questo è il libro di Julia"

There are two other ways to describe possession in English: with adjectives and pronouns. The 3rd person singular possessive adjectives in English are 'his' and 'her'[2], while in Spanish it is 'su', and in Italian they are 'suo' and 'sua'. The 3rd person singular possessive pronouns in English are 'his' and 'hers', while in Spanish they are 'el suyo' and 'la suya', and in Italian they are 'il suo' and 'la sua'. In both cases, the first option is masculine and the second is feminine.

[2] For the purpose of this study, the gender neutral form "their" will be excluded from this analysis, as the focus is only on the masculine and feminine possessives.

Possessive adjectives (PAs) clarify who or what owns (or 'possesses') something, and they go *before* the noun (the thing) they modify; they also avoid repetitions, as illustrated in the examples in (2).

Example 2:	a. "Julia is proud of her book"	not "Julia is proud of Julia's book"
	b. "Julia está orgullosa de su libro"	not "Julia está orgullosa del libro de Julia"
	c. "Julia è orgogliosa del suo libro"	not "Julia è orgogliosa del libro di Julia"

As one can see from the examples in (2), possessive adjectives work differently in English than in Spanish and Italian. In English, PAs agree with the natural gender of the possessor, not with the grammatical gender of the person, animal or object being possessed. Additionally, nouns in English do not have a grammatical gender. The adjective 'his' is used when the possessor is of masculine gender and 'her' is used when the possessor is of feminine gender. Hence, in example 2a, the correct form is '**her** book", as the possessor (Julia) is a girl.

In Spanish and Italian, PAs agree with the grammatical gender of the person, animal or object being possessed, not with the gender of the possessor. In Romance languages, the PA agrees with the gender of the noun they modify. In both (2b) and (2c), we can see that the possessor (Julia) is a girl, but the PAs used are both masculine: 'su' and 'suo'; this is because they agree with the object (book) which is a masculine noun. Note that, although the 3rd person singular form in Spanish is always 'su', Spanish PAs do agree with the following noun, as can be seen when we change the PA into the first person plural (see 2d):

Example 2: d. "Nosotras estamos orgullosas de nuestro libro"

we	are	proud	of	our	book
(fem)				(masc)	

Possessive pronouns (PPs) are also used to indicate who owns something, but they replace the noun expressing the possessor; they also avoid repetitions, like in the example in (3):

Example 3: a. “This book is ~~her book~~ hers”

b. “Este libro es ~~su libro~~ el suyo”

c. “Questo libro è ~~il suo libro~~ il suo”

Like adjectives, PPs work differently in English than in Spanish and Italian. In English, PPs agree with the gender of the possessor, not with the grammatical gender of the person, animal, or object being possessed. This is why in (3a) ‘hers’ is used, as it is referring to Julia’s book and Julia (the possessor) is a girl. In Spanish and Italian, PPs agree with the gender of the person, animal, or object being possessed, not with the gender of the possessor. In (3b) and (3c), ‘libro’ is a masculine noun in both languages, so the PP has to be masculine in both cases, even if the possessor (Julia) is a girl.

In instances where the natural gender of the possessor is different than the grammatical gender of the object being possessed, it is possible to predict if the learner has acquired the L2 rules, or if L1 transfer has occurred (White *et al.*, 2007). For example, a learner might struggle more in choosing the right PA in these cases:

Example 4: a. Paul is eating dinner with ___ wife.

b. Hugo ate all ___ pizza and Jane’s leftovers.

In (4a), the possessor and the possessum (object being possessed) do not have the same gender, specifically ‘wife’ is inherently a feminine noun. In this case, Spanish or Italian learners might want to use the feminine PA, like it would be in their native language. However, the correct form is the masculine PA ‘his’, as the possessor is a man. Similarly, in (4b) the genders of the possessor and the possessum are different; while ‘pizza’ is a feminine noun in both Spanish and Italian, the correct PA in English is ‘his’ agreeing with ‘Hugo’. The same could happen with possessive pronouns. For these reasons, this study will test learners’ ability to overcome transfer in cases where the possessum is animate or inanimate, and where the noun’s grammatical gender either matches or does not match that of the possessor.

2.4. Previous Studies on the Acquisition of Gender Agreement in Possessive Marking

The acquisition of gender has been widely studied. This section focuses on previous studies examining grammatical structures that work dissimilarly in the L1 and the L2, like gender agreement, or object marking. While it won't be an exhaustive presentation, the goal of this section is to review other studies and compare them to this research, analyzing similarities and differences, before highlighting how the current study contributes to the existing literature.

Santesteban *et al.* (2010) studied the effects of L2 agreement processing when the L1 and L2 have different agreement rules, as well as processing differences between conceptual and grammatical gender. The study focused on gender agreement of 3rd person possessive pronouns and adjectives in English (only his/her and his/hers), and the participants were ESL students whose native language was either French, Spanish or Greek. They were all at a high-intermediate proficiency level, between 5.5 and 5.9 (on a scale from 1 to 7 – 1 low, 7 high), and their results were compared to those of a control group of native English speakers. As we now know, Spanish and French (like Italian) differ from English in this case, while in Greek gender agreement works like in English. Pronouns and adjectives were only tested once, but separately, to check if there were any differences between the two structures. For each experiment, participants were asked to look at pictures one at a time, where two people were either talking or completing an action, then describe them as fast and as accurately as they could. Possessive adjectives were tested first, then possessive pronouns. Santesteban *et al.* (2010) found that L1 agreement rules did affect gender agreement processing in the L2 for both adjectives and pronouns and that the Spanish and French L1 participants struggled more with possessive adjective than pronouns.

A second relevant study is that by Antón-Méndez (2011), already mentioned in previous sections, who focused only on the production of the possessive pronouns *his/her*, by ESL native

speakers of Italian, Spanish and Dutch. As in English, in Dutch 3rd person singular possessive pronouns agree in gender with their antecedents. Participants had to read 128 sentences accompanied by pictures of people talking; they had to read each sentence separately, then describe what they read by reporting what the speaker(s) said. Each picture had 2 people talking to create two conditions – matched (i.e., same gender for possessor and possessum) and mismatched (i.e., different genders for possessor and possessum). These nouns were either animate (e.g., mother, father) or inanimate (e.g., dream, house), and either masculine or feminine, with 16 nouns in each of the four conditions. In the case of inanimate nouns, the gender was based on the grammatical gender in the native language. Antón-Méndez (2011) found that the Dutch participants had a maximum error rate of about 4%; however, Spanish and Italian participants made more mistakes especially with animate subjects, over 15% answered incorrectly when the possessor was masculine and the grammatical gender of the possessed object was feminine, and about 10% when the possessor was feminine and the grammatical gender of the object was masculine. The author concluded that even learners at high proficiency levels might still be influenced by L1 syntactic gender agreement, especially when the L2 has features that justifies it, but such transfer decreases as they become more proficient.

The next three studies will focus on the role of instruction. These studies have examined whether explicit instruction can help overcome the persistent transfer effects discussed in this section.

White *et al.* (2007), focused on two different types of language instruction used to aid the acquisition of the possessives *his/her* in English as a second language, by grade 8 students from Québec (Canada) and Catalonia (Spain). The students from Québec followed a 'communicatively oriented' learning program focusing on speaking and listening skills, while

those from Catalonia followed mainly a textbook-based and teacher-fronted approach. Both groups were divided again in two sub-groups: the Rule Group who received explicit instruction about possessives, and the Comparison Group who did not receive any kind instruction about possessives. For five weeks following the first test, each group was given 30-minute exercises, as a review for the Rule Group, and as testing for the Comparison Group. This research followed a pre-test/post-test design, with an oral 'meta-comment' interview as the post-test. White *et al.* (2007) found that explicit instruction did help with acquisition, as the results for the Rule Group improved even if not drastically (due to end of school year, time restrictions); it also proved that it might be difficult to make progress with possessives in a classroom context without explicit help like detailed explanations and reviews with practice of grammatical rules.

The study by Ahmadi (2016) analyzed the effects and effectiveness of contrastive form focused instruction on mastering L2 forms and focused on tense and aspect. The participants were all freshman year college students between 18 and 23 years old, they were all in an English degree program and all at a B1 proficiency level (intermediate). As a requirement, they had to be English as a second language learners (as opposed to English as a foreign language), and their L1 could only be Persian. There was also a control group of English speakers of the same age range. Both ESL groups participated in a grammaticality judgement test and a translation test before any instruction, then one group received explicit instruction about the grammar structures (progressive morphology with state verbs, the use of present perfect with definite past adverbials and the use of present perfect with locative state verbs with present simultaneous reading) in the L2 with practice exercises, while the other group received the same instruction but comparing the L2 to the L1. Eight weeks later, both groups took the same tests again. The results showed that there was not a significant difference on the grammaticality judgement test, but the

contrastive instruction did help students understand present perfect forms better, while the progressive forms were still confusing. The contrastive EI appeared to be more effective for the translation task as "translation is a contrastive activity in nature" (Ahmadi, 2016: 26).

Another important study to discuss is McManus and Marsden (2017). They investigated and compared the effectiveness of two types of explicit instruction: one providing both L1 and L2 explanations, and one with rules only about the L2; both cases followed by practice. Participants were tested three times, through a pre-test and post-test and delayed post-test structure, and received instruction between the first two tests. The 50 participants were native English speakers learning L2 French in semester two of a four-year BA honours degree in French in England. Participants were divided into three groups: one receiving L1+L2 instruction, one receiving L2-only instruction, and one receiving no instruction. The focus structure was the French *Imparfait*, which is used to talk about habitual actions in the past, and has no literal translation in English, where the past continuous is used instead. Participants completed two tasks, one online (self-paced reading) and one offline (context-sentence matching). After the post-test and the delayed post-test, the L1+L2 treatment was beneficial resulting in better results, helping with the nature of the learning problem, which was the mapping differences between the two languages. The results supported their initial statement that "the effectiveness of EI seems dependent on the nature of the EI, the target structure, and processing problem" (McManus & Marsden, 2017).

Finally, Wo and Ionin (2022) recently studied whether explicit instruction influences the second language acquisition of English inverse scope (double-quantifier configuration and quantifier-negation configuration). They also tested participants through a pre-test and a post-test (after a week), and reviewed the results with a delayed post-test (after a month). The L1-Chinese

L2-English participants were divided into two groups: those receiving explicit instruction and those not receiving it; a control group of native English speakers was included. Participants were first tested to make sure everyone was at an intermediate to advanced proficiency level, through a Picture Acceptability Judgement Task. For the tasks, participants in the study were asked to complete a grammaticality judgment task and a truth value judgment task. The important finding of this study was that although explicit instruction helped L2 learners acquire English inverse scope on the exact same constructions they were tested on, the effect did not extend to other scopally ambiguous sentences and the training did not necessarily lead to long-term retention of the acquired knowledge. The results show that after the first post-test, the participants who received EI outperformed the control group on the post-test, but the difference between the two groups disappeared on the delayed post-test. The study suggests that explicit instruction can be a useful tool in L2 instruction, but it may not be sufficient for long-term retention of the acquired knowledge. The authors argue that L2 instruction should also focus on providing learners with opportunities to use the acquired knowledge in meaningful communicative contexts.

Chapter 3

3.1. Current Study

This study extends the approach taken by McManus and Marsden (2017), where explicit instruction in the L2 only is directly compared to a contrastive comparison of the L1+L2, to the second language acquisition of the 3rd person gender agreement of possessive pronouns and adjectives, specifically his/her and his/hers. As discussed in section 2.3., the L2 grammars of Spanish and Italian L1 learners of English as an L2 are influenced by their L1, but explicit instruction could help them move past the negative transfer. The effectiveness of two types of explicit instruction will be examined: EI about the foci only in the L2 (English), and EI about the foci in the L1 (Spanish and Italian) compared to the L2. Previous studies on this topic have not examined whether L1+L2 comparison is more beneficial that L2-only instruction; expanding on White *et al.* (2007), this research has a group receiving explicit instruction in both L1 and L2, a group receiving no instruction, and a third group added and receiving instruction only about the L2.

VanPatten and Cadierno's (1993) research builds on the role of attention to form as the learner goes from input to intake to output. To overcome the differences between the L1 strategy and the L2 input, processing instruction tells the learner that the L1 cues do not work and informs them about L2 cues that they should pay attention to instead. In this way, learners are given enough opportunities to interpret the L2 in the appropriate way (VanPatten, 2002). EI in the L2 with focused practice might not be enough and additional EI about how the L2 works differently from the L1, with practice in both languages, can help overcome processing problems. It has to be highlighted that this type of comparative EI can only enhance input where there is the possibility for an L2 learner to misinterpret the meaning of a form in the L2.

3.2. Research Questions

The focus of this research is to test L2-only explicit instruction and compare it to L1+L2 explicit instruction, to determine the effectiveness of each type of EI and to assess whether there are different effects in each condition. I predict that using L1+L2 explicit instruction is more effective for learners than using L2 only, based on studies mentioned in previous sections. This supports the idea that incorporating L1 grammar in an ESL class can be advantageous.

Question 1: Does comparative explicit instruction and practice (with explicit feedback) help ESL Spanish and Italian L1 learners to use the focus possessive adjective and pronouns correctly more so than explicit instruction in the L2 alone?

- My hypothesis is that L1+L2 contrastive EI is more effective for ESL students studying this grammatical structure, considering suggestive results from previous studies.

Question 2: Do learners show similar trends between possessive adjectives and pronouns?

- My hypothesis is that participants might struggle more with possessive pronouns, as they do not have anything in the PPs proximity to hint at the right gender to use, as Lago *et al.* (2023) explained that there is a universal preference to establish agreement locally.

Question 3: Does explicit instruction translate into implicit knowledge? We test this by examining written test focused on form and oral tests eliciting spontaneous production.

- My hypothesis is that EI will translate into implicit knowledge, the way it happened in other studies mentioned in previous sections.

To test how explicit knowledge becomes implicit knowledge, a metalinguistic task (fill-in the blanks) will be compared to a less metalinguistic task (paraphrasing). If grammatical rules have been internalized, participants should show improvements also in more spontaneous tasks, like in

Santesteban et al. (2010) and White et al. (2007). It is, however, possible that participants need more than two weeks to fully acquire the L2 properties.

3.3. Methods

This study will follow the comparative EI method to test if possessive adjectives and pronouns can be better processed and acquired through L1+L2 EI, rather than L2-only EI. Therefore, I will also compare the results before and after both instructions, including a third group that did not receive any instruction, to analyze any improvement between a pre- and post-test.

For the comparative EI, I will use both L1s for each group, to present more examples and highlight how English differs from Spanish and Italian for these structures, but especially to support the explanation of the Spanish possessive adjective 'su' which, Antón-Méndez (2011) explains, does not overtly mark any gender, while in Italian the possessive adjective changes overtly. By comparing the two types of instructions, I will also compare the two foci structures to see if there are differences in acquisition and why that could happen. The next two sections will describe and explain the two tasks and the participants.

3.4. Tasks: Examples, Reasoning and Goals

Each participant will be tested on two separate days, and they will have to complete two tasks on each testing day, first a fill-in the blanks task and secondly a paraphrasing task. Participants will complete the first task independently, at the beginning of the testing day; the second task will be completed right after the first, but only one participant will be interviewed at a time, while the others wait for their turn. Participants were scheduled two at a time, so they did not have to wait too long between testing. On the first day, participants completed both tasks,

then the participants from two groups receiving instruction stayed for that part. Both tasks tested both grammatical structures in equal measure.

Task 1 – Fill-In the Blanks

Participants had to complete a total of 60 sentences by filling-in the blanks with either possessive adjectives or possessive pronouns; 20 of those sentences included distractors, which were not counted in the total points. This task took about 15 minutes. The goal of this task was to check if ESL learners can choose the right possessive without any given option to choose from and avoiding negative transfer. The sentences were divided in 4 groups of 5 sentences each (interspersed with distractors): sentences where the object was animate and its gender either matched or mismatched that of the possessor, and sentences where the object was inanimate and its gender either matched or mismatched that of the possessor. This helped understand if both possessives were problematic depending on animate or inanimate objects, or if the problem was the mismatching gender, or both.

The first part of this task focused on possessive adjectives, with 20 target items (either *his* or *her*) interspersed with 10 fillers (any other PA). Examples of these sentences are shown in (5):

Example 5:	a. Anne is my aunt; ____ daughter is my cousin.	animate + matching gender
	b. Paul is eating dinner with ___ wife.	animate + mismatching gender
	c. Max 'the hamster' is in ___ place.	inanimate + matching gender
	d. Hugo ate all ___ pizza and Jane's leftovers.	inanimate + mismatching gender

The second part of this task focused on the two possessive pronouns with 20 sentences missing either *his* or *hers*, with 10 distracting sentences with other PPs, as shown in (6):

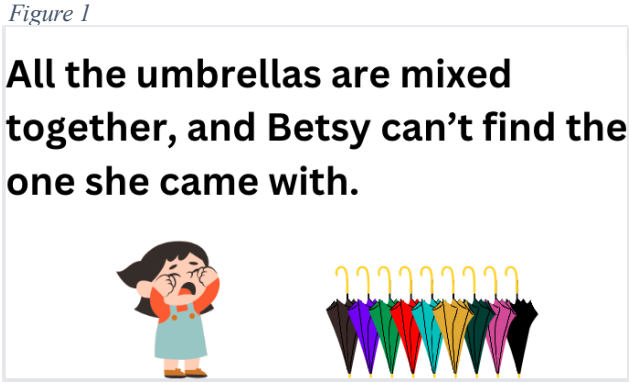
Example 6:	a. Gianna says that Silvia is a good friend of ___.	animate + matching gender
	b. Vivian found her mother, but Andrew can't seem to find ___.	animate + mismatching gender
	c. You can't eat Luisa's chocolate bar; it's ____!	inanimate + matching gender
	d. Camilla mentioned studies that agreed with ___.	inanimate + mismatching gender

The sentences where both the possessor and the possessee had the same gender (a. and c. in examples 5 and 6) should not have been a problem, as the possessives would have been the same if it agreed either with the possessee or with the possessor; animacy should not have been a problem in these cases. It became more interesting when the sentences had possessors and possessees that did not have the same gender, as learners had to overcome negative transfer and choose the possessive that agreed with the possessor, rather than the possessee. An added difficulty was the animacy, as learners might get confused when they find a possessee that is inherently of one gender (ex. wife), and the possessor is the opposite gender (ex. Paul); inanimate possessees did not carry this extra difficulty.

Task 2 – Paraphrasing/Free Speech

In this task, learners read a sentence, then they had to paraphrase it. They were asked to rephrase the sentence maintaining its meaning, using specifically either possessive pronouns or adjectives. Each sentence was presented with images representing what the sentence was about. An example is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1



There was no specific right answer, as participants could rephrase it any way they wanted, as long as they used possessives and the right gender; however, some acceptable answers were: "Betsy can't find **her** umbrella because they're all mixed together" or "all the umbrellas are mixed together, and she can't find **hers**". If participants did not use any of the target words in

some cases, then those answers were not counted as there was no data showing the correct or incorrect use of the grammar. The sentences also tested differences with animacy and same/mixed gender like in task 1. This task was explained with examples first, to make sure that every participant understood what they had to do; each participant completed this task in a private room with only the experimenter present (myself). This task took about 15-18 minutes per participant.

The paraphrasing task was meant to test learners' ability to use both possessives more spontaneously while talking, when they do not have much time to think or prepare the answer. The goal of this task was to test if they had internalized the L2 features and could use them in semi-spontaneous production, comparing it to a written task where they had time to think about the answer.

3.5. Participants and Groups Descriptions

The 15 participants speaking English as a L2 were contacted through email, but they were first approached by myself or my friends to make sure they were a good fit for this study, and that they were available to participate for the whole research time. Before being selected, participants had to prove that they had recently completed at least a B1 proficiency level (European standard) or a 5-6 CLB level (average of 5 in a IELTS test), to make sure that they were all at the same proficiency level.

6 participants were speakers of Italian L1 who formally started studying English after the age of 15/16, at school. Their age ranged from 22 to 26 years old, and they all lived in Italy at the time of testing. Nine participants were L1 speakers of Spanish who formally started studying English at the age of 16, at school. Their age ranged between 24 and 28 years old; they all lived in Colombia at the time of testing. The testing was completed online for all the participants.

To make the groups even, each group had 2 Italian and 3 Spanish L1 speakers; their age was not a differential factor as they were all at the same proficiency level and had not used English more just because of their age.

Chapter 4

The results of the study are presented in this chapter. Section 4.1 presents the results of both pre-tests for each of the three groups and the interpretation of these results. Section 4.2 explains how the grammar rules were explained to the two groups receiving explicit instruction. Section 4.3 focuses on the results of both post-tests for the three groups, with a clarification of the results. Lastly, section 4.3 presents a comparative analysis of the post-test results of the three groups of both tasks.

The results were collected in the same way for both the pre- and post-test, but differently for the two tasks. Task 1 was completed by each participant individually through a Google form that did not allow for changes to the answers after submission, and the results were collected automatically by Google. Task 2 was completed through Zoom, and I collected the answers by hand; the Zoom sessions were not recorded as requested by participants.

4.1. Pre-Test

The table for Task 1 shows the mean/average number of correct answers, as well as the standard deviation of those answers, which is how dispersed the data is in relation to the average; a low deviation means that data are clustered close to the average, while a high deviation indicates more dispersed data (Brenner & Subrahmanyan, 1988).

Table 1 shows the results of the pre-test for each group, in Task 1. The table shows the mean/average (M) and the standard deviation (SD) for each condition, for both PAs and PPs; the maximum accuracy value is 5 (i.e. the maximum number of correct answers per participant in each condition).

Table 3: mean and standard deviation results for Task 1 of the pre-test, for all three groups.

	Focus categories		L1+L2 group	L2-only group	No instruction group
Pre-test - Task 1	Possessive adjectives	Animate + matching gender	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.89)	M – 5 (SD – 0)
		Animate + mismatching gender	M – 4.2 (SD – 1.3)	M – 2.8 (SD – 1.78)	M – 2.4 (SD – 1.51)
		Inanimate + matching gender	M – 4.8 (SD – 0.44)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)
		Inanimate + mismatching gender	M – 4.2 (SD – 1.3)	M – 3.6 (SD – 1.14)	M – 4 (SD – 1.41)
	Possessive pronouns	Animate + matching gender	M – 4.8 (SD – 0.44)	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.89)	M – 5 (SD – 0)
		Animate + mismatching gender	M – 3 (SD – 1.41)	M – 2.4 (SD – 1.67)	M – 2.6 (SD – 1.81)
		Inanimate + matching gender	M – 3.8 (SD – 1.78)	M – 3.6 (SD – 1.67)	M – 3.4 (SD – 2.3)
		Inanimate + mismatching gender	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.89)	M – 3.6 (SD – 1.51)	M – 3.8 (SD – 1.78)

Before participating in this study, participants had to show their proficiency certificate, to prove their level met the participation requirement; and to ensure that all three groups were comparable. Although, the results showed some differences in performance across the three groups, it did not affect the possibility the validity of the results.

The results in Table 1 show that performances vary between the three groups, depending on the category, but they confirmed the overall predictions in the literature. For the PAs, sentences with matching genders were the least problematic, with all three groups scoring (near)

maximum accuracy with both animate and inanimate nouns. The results were similar with PPs, except that there was a higher error rate in the inanimate + matching condition compared to the same condition using PAs. Mismatching genders were more problematic for both PAs and PPs, but especially with animate nouns, where every group scored an average of 3 points or less, except for one group who scored more. Inanimate nouns were not as problematic, but all the groups scored around a 4-point average with both PAs and PPs.

To provide more details about the individual groups, the L1+L2 group had (almost) no problems when the nouns were animate and the genders were matching, but struggled more with mismatching genders, especially with PPs which is also their lowest average (M 3) in this task. Inanimate nouns were easier with PAs, but especially when the genders were matching; on the contrary, sentences with PPs were easier when their genders did not match with the inanimate nouns, and more difficult when the genders matched. The L2-only group had a few problems with animate nouns and matching genders, and they scored an average of 4.6 with both PAs and PPs; animate nouns became more problematic with mismatching genders, with their lowest averages in this task that were below 3 points, with both PAs and PPs. Inanimate nouns were not problematic at all when the PAs had matching genders, but the same cannot be said for PPs as they scored an average of 3.6. They scored the same average with inanimate nouns and mismatching genders, with both PAs and PPs, struggling with these conditions. Lastly, the No instruction group scored perfect averages were PAs and PPs were utilized with animate nouns of the same genders; the same can be said for inanimate nouns and mismatching genders, but only with PAs, as PPs with inanimate nouns were problematic when the genders were matching. Mismatching genders were especially problematic with animate nouns with both PAs and PPs, which led this group to score their lowest averages of the task (2.4 with PAs and 2.6 with PPs).

In this case, inanimate nouns where (somewhat) less problematic for this group, and their average scores stayed around 4 points.

Table 2 shows the results of the pre-test of Task 2 for each group. The results are divided in the same four categories per group, but the number of trials in each condition was not the same because of the following three reasons: first, more trials were included for the inanimate conditions, as we expected more errors here. Secondly, for some trials, whether a sentence was categorized as matching or mismatching depended on how participants rephrased such sentences. For example, in the sentence "Kelly's idea of fun is to read a book, while Edward's is to go to the gym", *idea* is a feminine noun in both Spanish and Italian. Participants could therefore either say "her idea of fun is reading a book, while his is to go to the gym" with matching genders or say "his idea of fun is different than hers" with mismatching genders. Finally, the genders of some words differed between Spanish and Italian, leading to some trials being categorized differently (matching or mismatching) depending on the speaker's L1. The total (Tot.) percentages combine the results of every speaker of each group, to show the level of accuracy of participants in each category combination as groups.

Table 4: results of Task 2 of the pre-test

	Category	L1+L2 group			L2-only group			No instruction group		
		2 IT	3 ES	5 tot.	2 IT	3 ES	5 tot.	2 IT	3 ES	5 tot.
Pre-test - Task 2	Animate + matching gender	N/A	66.7% 1 sentence	66.7%	N/A	100% 1 sentence	100%	N/A	100% 1 sentence	100%
	Animate + mismatching gender	50% 2 sentences	66.7% 1 sentence	57.1%	50% 2 sentences	66.7% 1 sentence	57.1%	50% 2 sentences	66.7% 1 sentence	57.1%
	Inanimate + matching gender	83.4% 3 sentences	60% 5 sentences	66.7%	66.7% 3 sentences	60% 5 sentences	61.9%	66.7% 3 sentences	60% 5 sentences	61.9%
	Inanimate + mismatching gender	40% 5 sentences	33.4% 3 sentences	36.8%	40% 5 sentences	44.5% 3 sentences	42.1%	50% 5 sentences	44.5% 3 sentences	47.3%

For this task, participants were instructed to use one or both possessives in each sentence, and they received a point only if both possessive and gender were used correctly. On the answer sheet, there were also two other possible answers that we could predict: either they did not use any possessive, or they answered 'I don't know'; while they did have these options, only 1 participant from the No instruction group gave one of these answers (the 'I don't know' option), likely because they followed the rule to use PAs and/or PPs.

In the presentation of the results, the sentences in each condition are combined to show the overall ability with that combination. For example, "5 sentences" in Table 2 indicates that there were 5 sentences per participant, a total of 10 answers for Italian L1 and 15 total for Spanish L1.

The animate + matching combination was chosen only by Spanish L1 participants in each group, and they all paraphrased the sentence correctly, except for 1 participant in the L1+L2 group. The other sentence with animate possessum and possessee had mismatching genders; all three groups of Spanish L1 participants scored the same total of 66.7%, with one wrong answer

in each group. The Italian L1 groups chose this combination for 2 sentences, and all three scored 50%, with 2 wrong answers in each group.

There was one sentence with the inanimate + matching genders combination, then Italian L1 participants chose that combination for 2 other sentences, and Spanish L1 participants chose it for 4 other sentences, in both cases the chosen sentences had a variable gender option. The L1+L2 group reached an overall accuracy score of 66.7%, with Italian L1 participants scoring 83.4% with 1 wrong answer, and Spanish L1s scoring 60% with 6 wrong answers. The L2-only group scored a total overall accuracy of 61.9%; in this case, L1 Italian speakers scored 66.7% and had only 2 wrong answers, while the L1 Spanish scored a 60% with 6 wrong answers. The No instruction group scored an overall accuracy of 61.9%, where Italian L1 speakers scored 66.7% with 2 wrong answers, and Spanish L1 speakers scored 60% with 6 wrong answers.

The combination of inanimate + mismatching genders was chosen the most by Italian L1 participants. Three sentences had this combination, and Italian L1 participants chose it for 2 other sentences where the gender option was variable. In this situation, the L1+L2 group scored the lowest overall with a total of 36.8%; Italian L1s scored 40% with 6 wrong answers, and Spanish L1s scored 33.4% with 6 wrong answers. The L2-only group scored an overall total of 42.1%, where the Italian L1 participants scored a 40% with 6 wrong answers, and the Spanish L1 participants scoring 44.5% and 6 wrong answers. The No instruction group scored the same overall of 47.3%, but in this group the Italian L1s scored 50%, and the Spanish L1s scored 44.5% with 6 wrong answers.

4.2. Instruction Explanation: L2-Only and L1+L2

The instruction was completed through Zoom, using the whiteboard feature to write examples, connections and explanations.

First, participants were introduced to how to mark possession in English, through the example below:

Example 1: a. "This is Julia's book"
b. "Este es el libro de Julia"
c. "Questo è il libro di Julia"

(1a) was explained to both groups, while those receiving L1+L2 instructions received an explanation with comparison of all three options (a, b and c).

For possessive adjectives, the example below was used:

Example 2: a. "Julia is proud of her book" not "Julia is proud of Julia's book"
b. "Julia está orgullosa de su libro" not "Julia está orgullosa del libro de Julia"
c. "Julia è orgogliosa del suo libro" not "Julia è orgogliosa del libro di Julia"

For the participants receiving L2-only instructions only (2a) was shown; I explained to them how the sentence needs a feminine PA because Julia is a girl and the books belongs to her, so we are replacing 'Julia's' (from (a) on the right). The participants receiving L1+L2 instructions saw a comparison between English and the two Romance languages; I explained to them how in those languages the PA takes the gender of the possessum (the object being possessed), but in English it takes that of the possessor (Julia), as we are replacing 'Julia's' (from (a) on the right). For the L1 Spanish participants, an example with *nuestro*/*nuestra* was added, to make sure they understood the difference in agreement. Participants from each group came up with their own simple examples, with both matching and mismatching genders, and received feedback.

Possessive pronouns were introduced with this example:

Example 3: a. "This book is ~~her book~~ hers"
b. "Este libro es ~~su libro~~ el suyo"
c. "Questo libro è ~~il suo libro~~ il suo"

The L2-only group saw only (3a), and I explained to them how English PPs also agree with the possessor instead of the possessum, so the feminine PP was used in this case. Participants

receiving L1+L2 instruction saw all three examples with comparisons; I explained how in English PPs, like PAs, agree with the possessor instead of the possessum, unlike in their L1. After these explanations, both groups came up with their own examples for PPs too, attempting sentences with matching and mismatching genders; they received feedback again.

For either possessive, animacy was mentioned indirectly; when participants gave their examples with an animate possessum (ex. wife) and they made a mistake, I would explain to them that even if the possessum is naturally of a different gender, the PA or PP still agrees with the possessor.

4.3. Post-Test

The post-test was completed exactly two weeks after participants completed the pre-test and received instruction (except for the No instruction group), and over two afternoons. Each participant complete Task 1 on their own, while Task 2 was completed on Zoom with the experimenter.

The table for Task 1 of the post-test, like for the pre-test, shows the mean/average number of correct answers, as well as the standard deviation of those answers, which is how dispersed the data is in relation to the average; a low deviation means that data are clustered close to the average, while a high deviation indicates more dispersed data (Brenner & Subrahmanyan, 1988). Table 3 shows the Task 1 results of the post-test for each group. The table shows the mean/average (M) and the standard deviation (SD) for each focus category, for both PAs and PPs; the maximum accuracy value is 5 (number of correct answers per participant in each category).

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation results for Task 1 of the post-test, for all three groups.

	Focus categories		L1+L2 group	L2-only group	No instruction group
Post-test - Task 1	Possessive adjectives	Animate + matching gender	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD –0)
		Animate + mismatching gender	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.54)	M – 3.2 (SD – 1.3)	M – 2.6 (SD – 1.14)
		Inanimate + matching gender	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)
		Inanimate + mismatching gender	M – 4.8 (SD – 0.44)	M – 4.2 (SD – 0.83)	M – 4 (SD – 1.41)
	Possessive pronouns	Animate + matching gender	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 4.8 (SD – 0.44)	M – 5 (SD – 0)
		Animate + mismatching gender	M – 4.2 (SD – 0.44)	M – 2.4 (SD – 0.89)	M – 2.6 (SD – 1.81)
		Inanimate + matching gender	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.54)	M – 3.4 (SD – 2.3)
		Inanimate + mismatching gender	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 4 (SD – 0.7)	M – 3.8 (SD – 1.78)

The results of the post-test show changes from the pre-test, especially for the two groups who received instruction; there are some minimal changes for the No instruction group.

All three groups scored a perfect 5 average on sentences with PAs with the animate and matching genders combination. However, only the L1+L2 group and the no instruction group received a perfect score for PPs with the same combinations. The animate and mismatching gender combination was more problematic for both grammatical structures; the L1+L2 group found sentences with PAs less problematic and achieved an average close to the maximum, while

the other two groups struggled more. PPs seemed to be even more problematic, with L2-only group scoring the lowest overall average of the task with a 2.4, 1.8 points less than the L1+L2 group, and 0.2 less than the no instruction group. All three groups scored perfect averages with PAs with the inanimate and matching genders combination, while with PPs only the L1+L2 group scored a perfect 5, followed by the L2-only group missing 0.4 points from a perfect score. The no instruction group struggled more. The inanimate and mismatching gender combination resulted in higher scores for both grammatical structures; PAs still caused some problems, but the L1+L2 group still scored a high 4.8 average, the L2-only scored a 4.2 average, and the no instruction scored a 4. PPs were less problematic especially for the two groups receiving instruction, with the L1+L2 group scoring a perfect 5, and the other scoring a 4 average, while the No instruction group scored a 3.8.

Table 4 shows the results of the post-test in Task 2 for each group. The results are divided in the same four categories per group, but the number in each category is not even as some categories needed more focus. For this task, some sentences had a 'variable' gender again, meaning that 5 of the 10 sentences could be rephrased with the possessum and possessee's genders either matching or mismatching. In the post-test, because of this 'variable' option, not every participant chose the same option, hence why in Table 4 the results have been separated again based on the participants' L1, clarifying how many sentences they uttered with each category combination. The total (Tot.) percentages combine the results of every speaker of each group, to show the level of accuracy of participants in each category combination as groups.

Table 6: results of Task 2 of the post-test.

	Category	L1+L2 group			L2-only group			No instruction group		
		2 IT	3 ES	Tot.	2 IT	3 ES	Tot.	2 IT	3 ES	Tot.
Post-test - Task 2	Animate + matching gender	N/A	100% 1 sentence	100%	N/A	100% 1 sentence	100%	N/A	100% 1 sentence	100%
	Animate + mismatching gender	100% 2 sentences	100% 1 sentence	100%	50% 2 sentences	100% 1 sentence	85.7%	50% 2 sentences	66.7% 1 sentence	57.1%
	Inanimate + matching gender	100% 3 sentences	86.7% 5 sentences	90.4%	66.7% 3 sentences	66.7% 5 sentences	61.9%	66.7% 3 sentences	60% 5 sentences	61.9%
	Inanimate + mismatching gender	80% 5 sentences	88.9% 3 sentences	84.2%	40% 5 sentences	66.7% 3 sentences	42.1%	50% 5 sentences	55.5% 3 sentences	47.3%

Following the pattern of the pre-test, in this task participants received a point only if both possessive and gender were used correctly.

Each participant chose the same category combination they chose during the pre-test. The only sentence with animate + matching gender combination was paraphrased correctly by every participant, all Spanish L1. The animate + mismatching genders combination resulted in the highest total scores for every group; The L1+L2 group scored a perfect 100%, while the L1-only group scored 85.7% with 1 wrong answer from one Italian L1 participant. The No instruction group scored a total of 57.1%, with 2 wrong answers from Italian L1 participants and 1 from Spanish L1 participants.

Both combinations with inanimate possessum and possessee were still problematic for some participants. With matching genders, the L1+L2 group scored a total of 90.4% with 2 wrong answers only from Spanish L1 participants; the L2-only group scored a total of 61.9%, where Italian L1 participants scored 83.4% with 1 wrong answer, and Spanish L1 participants

scored 66.7% with 5 wrong answers. The No instruction group scored a total of 61.9%, with 2 wrong answers from Italian L1 participants, and 6 wrong answers from Spanish L1 participants. Mismatching genders were the most problematic; the L1+L2 group who scored a total of 84.2%, where Italian L1 participants scored 80% with 2 wrong answers, and Spanish L1 participants scored 88.9% with only 1 wrong answer. The L2-only group scored a total of 63.1%, where Italian L1 participants gave 4 wrong answers and scored a total of 60%, and Spanish L1 participants gave 3 wrong answers and scored 66.7%. The No instruction group scored a total of 52.6%, where Italian L1 participants scored 50%, and Spanish L1 participants scored 55.6% with 4 wrong answers.

4.4. Analysis of the Results of the Three Groups

After a general look at the results of both pre-test and post-test, we can see improvements from both groups receiving instruction, even if such improvements were slim. The following sections analyze the changes in performance in detail. The results of Task 1 are analyzed in section 4.4.1. comparing the pre-test to the post-test results of the three groups. The results of Task 2 are analyzed in section 4.4.2, again comparing the results of the three groups.

4.4.1. Comparative Analysis of Task 1

Table 5 shows the pre- and post-test results for Task 1 from the three groups side by side, the mean (M) results in each condition, and the standard deviations, as well as the percentages of improvement (Improv.) of each group.

Table 5: Task 1 post-test results, comparison

Categories		L1+L2 group			L2-only group			No-instruction group		
		Pre-test	Post-test	Improv.	Pre-test	Post-test	Improv.	Pre-test	Post-test	Improv.
Possessive adjectives	Animate + matching gender	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	N/A	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.89)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	8.7%	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	N/A
	Animate + mismatching gender	M – 4.2 (SD – 1.3)	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.54)	9.5%	M – 2.8 (SD – 1.78)	M – 3.2 (SD –1.3)	14.3%	M – 2.4 (SD – 1.51)	M – 2.6 (SD – 1.14)	8.3%
	Inanimate + matching gender	M – 4.8 (SD – 0.44)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	4.2%	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	N/A	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	N/A
	Inanimate + mismatching gender	M – 4.2 (SD – 1.3)	M – 4.8 (SD – 0.44)	14.2%	M – 3.6 (SD – 1.14)	M – 4.2 (SD – 0.83)	22.2%	M – 4 (SD – 1.41)	M – 4 (SD – 1.41)	N/A
Possessive pronouns	Animate + matching gender	M – 4.8 (SD – 0.44)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	4.2%	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.89)	M – 4.8 (SD – 0.44)	4.3%	M – 5 (SD – 0)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	N/A
	Animate + mismatching gender	M – 3 (SD – 1.41)	M – 4.2 (SD – 0.44)	40%	M – 2.4 (SD – 1.67)	M – 2.4 (SD – 0.89)	N/A	M – 2.6 (SD – 1.81)	M – 2.6 (SD – 1.81)	N/A
	Inanimate + matching gender	M – 3.8 (SD – 1.78)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	31.6%	M – 3.6 (SD – 1.67)	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.54)	27.7%	M – 3.4 (SD – 2.3)	M – 3.4 (SD – 2.3)	N/A
	Inanimate + mismatching gender	M – 4.6 (SD – 0.89)	M – 5 (SD – 0)	8.7%	M – 3.6 (SD – 1.51)	M – 4 (SD – 0.7)	11.1%	M – 3.8 (SD – 1.78)	M – 3.8 (SD – 1.78)	N/A

The percentages of improvement in this task are relatively low, as participants had already achieved high scores in the pre-test. Only the groups receiving EI improved in most conditions, whereas the no-instruction group improved slightly only in one condition. The group receiving EI in both L1 and L2 achieved higher results in the post-test, compared to the group receiving EI only in the L2. Note, however, that the scores in the pre-test were also somewhat higher for the L1+L2 instruction group compared to the L2 only instruction group. The L1+L2 instruction seems to have been particularly more beneficial for possessive pronouns, as the largest improvements are found for these structures.

Animate nouns whose genders matched those of PAs or PPs were one of the least problematic combinations for the three groups; accordingly, there were no improvements for some of these combinations, as the groups already achieved perfect scores in the pre-test. On the other hand, where they did improve, such low gains allowed them to achieve (near) perfect scores. The same condition but with mismatching genders was the most problematic even after receiving EI. There is minimal to no improvement for all the groups, which did not allow them to attain perfect scores. The L1+L2 group achieved higher percentages of improvement, whereas the other two groups either did not improve or obtained low improvement scores.

Inanimate nouns were somewhat less problematic, with higher percentages of improvement in the post-test. When the genders of the nouns matched that of PAs, all the groups achieved perfect scores in the post-test; however, with PPs, only the L1+L2 group improved to a perfect score, whereas the L2-only group improved to an almost perfect score with a 4.6 average. There was no improvement for the no-instruction group, who maintained a 3.4 average. Trials where inanimate nouns and PAs or PPs had mismatching genders resulted in relatively low improvements. Only the L1+L2 group earned a perfect score with PPs and a near perfect with PAs (M 4.8); the low improvements of the L2-only group allowed them to obtain average scores of 4 and 4.2 points with PPs and PAs respectively. There were no improvements form the no-instruction group.

4.4.2. Comparative Analysis of Task 2

Table 6 shows the results of the pre- and post-test for Task 2 from the three groups. The post-test results and the percentages of improvement (Improv.) are side by side for easy comparison.

Table 6: Task 2 post-test results, comparison

Task 2									
Categories	L1+L2 group			L2-only group			No instruction group		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Improv.	Pre-test	Post-test	Improv.	Pre-test	Post-test	Improv.
Animate + matching gender	66.7%	100%	+32.3%	100%	100%	N/A	100%	100%	N/A
Animate + mismatching gender	57.1%	100%	+42.9%	57.1%	85.7%	+28.6%	57.1%	57.1%	N/A
Inanimate + matching gender	66.7%	90.4%	+23.7%	61.9%	71.4%	+9.5%	61.9%	61.9%	N/A
Inanimate + mismatching gender	36.8%	84.2%	+47.4%	42.1%	63.1%	+21%	47.3%	52.6%	+ 5.3%

Participants in all three groups received low scores in the pre-test of Task 2, which allows us to better examine the effects of instruction. After receiving EI, the results changed in the post-test and the percentages of improvement are much higher than those in Task 1, whereas no improvements are found for the no-instruction group.

Paraphrasing sentences with animate nouns whose genders matched those of PAs and PPs, was the least problematic of the conditions; in this instance, only the L1+L2 group improved and achieved a perfect score, while the other two groups maintained the perfect score obtained in the pre-test. Animate nouns with mismatching genders were most problematic; in the pre-test all the groups scored 57.1%, but only the L1+L2 group achieved a perfect score in the post-test, while the L2-only group improved to a high 85.7% and the no-instruction group maintained the pre-test score.

The trials with inanimate nouns resulted in different scores depending on the gender condition, but they were the most problematic overall. Participants paraphrased sentences with matching genders with relatively few mistakes; the L1+L2 group earned the highest result of

90.4%, but the L2-only group did not improve in the same way and scored 71.4%. The no-instruction group maintained the result achieved in the post-test. The three groups attained the lowest results of the task when paraphrasing sentences with inanimate nouns and PAs or PPs with mismatching genders, in both pre-test and post-test. The highest improvement was attained by the L1+L2 group with a final 84.2%, while the L2-only group scored a 63.1%, and the no-instruction group achieved a 52.6%.

In sum, the effects of instruction were most visible in Task 2 and the results suggest that instruction that compares the L1 to the L2 is more beneficial than instruction in the L2 alone.

Chapter 5

In this chapter, we discuss the findings in light of the research questions presented in section 3.2. and provide suggestions for further research.

5.1. Discussion

This study examined two types of explicit instruction with practice: one comparing the L2 to the L1, and one utilizing only the L2. Henry *et al.* (2009) argued that there are different types of EI, and not all work for every grammatical structure or processing problems; nonetheless, other researchers demonstrated that EI is indeed beneficial to help learners overcome continuous non-target like performances (Izquierdo & Collins, 2008; McManus, 2013; and more). Such performances are usually the result of L1 transfer, where L2 speakers transfer the rules form their L1 and adapt them to the L2 (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1996). L1 transfer can persist even for proficient speakers, who might have difficulties with declarative or procedural knowledge; Ullman (2005) describes the first as difficulty in the acquisition of particular forms, like grammar or vocabulary, while the second pertains to the automatization, the implementation of certain processes while speaking the L2. In these cases, only spontaneous speech is affected. We related this to Bialystok's (1978) theory of implicit and explicit knowledge; when learning a new language, learners use what they already know (implicit knowledge) and merge it with what they learn from input and/or instruction (explicit knowledge), therefore making learners aware of language differences or possible mistakes might help them overcome L1 transfer (completely or partially, with time). According to Krashen (1985), explicit learning and knowledge comes from formal instruction, while implicit knowledge comes from acquired knowledge through subconscious L2 input (i.e. spontaneous oral production). The author argues that language acquisition through the right type of input can occur without problems. However, Hawkins

(2019) suggests that processing instruction is even more effective compared to traditional instruction; when instruction is "processed", every feature is analyzed in detail and practiced until it is fully acquired. EI processes instruction for learners, helps them to segment it and acquire it. Henry *et al.* (2009) explained that while EI is effective, it may come in different forms and grammatical structures can also come in different forms, causing varied processing problems; thus EI can lead to different results if used with different structures. When learners continue to repeat the same error because the L1 and the L2 express the same meaning differently, practice and EI only about the L2 might not be enough; additional EI comparing the L2 to the L1 with practice can help overcome acquisition problems. Understanding how the same structure works in the L1 may help participants better understand the errors they make.

This thesis tested the learning improvements of three groups of ESL learners: one receiving comparative EI in both L1 and L2, one receiving EI only in the L2 and one receiving no instruction; all three groups completed a pre-test and a post-test. The focus was on the effects of EI on the instruction of gender agreement with possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns, comparing the learning improvements of Spanish and Italian L1 learners of L2 English. The two romance languages do not use this condition of Agree the way English does; the two romance languages mark agreement locally and the PA or PP takes the gender of the object they refer to (the possessum), while in English PAs and PPs agree with the natural gender of the possessor of the object, regardless of its position in the sentence. Animacy was an additional factor we controlled for; according to Antón-Méndez (2011), learners struggle more with nouns who are inherently of one gender (i.e. mother, father) and the gender of the required PA or PP does not match that of the noun. We tested participants' ability to use the correct PA or PP in sentences where the gender of either animate or inanimate nouns matches or mismatches. Other studies

focused only on PAs (Antón-Méndez, 2011; White *et al.*, 2007; and more) and found that learners struggle more when the genders of PAs and nouns do not match. This thesis investigated the same and added PPs. Our initial hypothesis was that, while every participant receiving EI would improve in each task, those receiving EI in both L1 and L2 would be able to achieve better results.

Comparing the results of the three groups, we can confirm that EI comparing L1 and L2 was indeed more effective, as participants in this group achieved (near) perfect scores in the two tasks. We can now answer the research questions, repeated below for convenience.

> Question 1: Does comparative explicit instruction and practice (with explicit feedback) help ESL Spanish and Italian L1 learners to use focus possessive adjectives and pronouns correctly more so than explicit instruction of the L2 alone?

Our hypothesis was that L1+L2 contrastive EI was more effective for ESL students studying these grammatical structures. It is important to mention that both groups receiving EI improved on the post-tests. However, the group receiving EI in the L1 and the L2 improved more than the group receiving instruction only in the L2, or no instruction at all. As we know from Henry *et al.* (2009), not all EI is the same, so the tasks prepared for this research were meant to show how comparative EI is helpful for the acquisition of our focus conditions. The fill-in the blanks in Task 1 was the least problematic task, especially because participants had time to think about the grammar rules they learned, which led the L1+L2 group to improve their already high results to perfect scores, while the L2-only group scored almost perfect scores in most conditions. This proved participants' declarative knowledge with vocabulary and grammar more than their procedural knowledge, as there they did not have to talk. Task 2 required spontaneous elicitations and participants found it more difficult, as they did not have much time to think about

the answer. The goal of task 2 was to prove participants' level of automatization after receiving EI and we did see significant improvements. Here we saw the highest gains especially for the group receiving EI in both their L1 and the L2, who scored perfect and near perfect results on the post-test; there were improvements for the group receiving EI only in the L2, but these were not as high as for the L1+L2 group. The group receiving no instruction did not improve on this task. We can confirm that comparative EI was in fact more helpful to ESL learners in this study.

Question 2: Do learners show similar trends between possessive adjectives and pronouns?

Our hypothesis was that participants might struggle more with possessive pronouns, as speakers do not have anything in the PPs proximity to hint at which gender to use (whether that hint is correct or not). Recall that Lago et al. (2023) explained that there is a preference to establish agreement locally in Romance languages. Since previous studies (i.e. White *et al*., 2007; Antón-Méndez, 2011; and more) focused only on one of the two structures, this study compared the two to find similarities and differences in their acquisition, since their use and rules are quite similar. The results of both tasks show that participants had more problems with PPs before and after instruction. Santesteban *et al.* (2010) found that ESL learners struggled more with PPs and allowed L1 transfer to guide their answers more often than with PAs, as this structure seemed more complex to acquire in English. Our thesis shows similar results, as in both tasks of the post-test, participants achieved relatively lower scores with PPs. One of the possible problems is locality, as Lago *et al.* (2023) explained and our study confirms. Additionally, PPs are usually placed away from any noun they might refer to; hence participants might struggle even more with locality. This is another difficulty added to the animacy and the matching/mismatching gender conditions. Finally, PPs are not used naturally in everyday speech

as much as PAs are, so participants might lack exposure to use and practice of these structures, thus making acquisition difficult even with EI.

> Question 3: Does explicit instruction translate into implicit knowledge? We test this by examining written tests focused on form and oral tests eliciting spontaneous production.

Our hypothesis was that EI will translate into implicit knowledge, but not completely. Participants might need more than two weeks to fully acquire the instruction as implicit knowledge, but some results might already be noticeable. Implicit knowledge comprises previous linguistic knowledge from the L1 and knowledge acquired through L2 exposure. The first task was a fill-in the blanks exercise where participants could take as long as they wanted/needed to complete, so they had time to think about the rules learned. While this was proof that they did acquire the structure, it did not necessarily confirm that it became implicit knowledge. Since the second task required more spontaneous speech that did not allow for much time for thinking, an accurate response is more likely the result of an internalized target-like L2 grammar. We do see improvements on this type of task, especially for the L1+L2 group, which could lead us to believe that EI does lead to implicit knowledge, but not completely as they did not achieve perfect scores throughout the conditions. We could confirm that more time is needed for the information to become implicit knowledge, possibly with more practice and a delayed post-test, or only another post-test, as McManus and Marsden (2017) did find a higher rate of improvement at a delayed post-test for the use of the French *Imparfait* by native English speakers. The results of Task 2 suggest that L1+L2 instruction has a positive effect on both declarative and procedural knowledge, as we have some suggestive evidence of a level of automatization in spontaneous speech production. The overall high results of the L1+L2 group show that the target forms are now (almost fully) part of their implicit and acquired knowledge;

the L2-only group did not achieve the same results. The group receiving no instruction showed no significant improvement.

5.2. Limitations and Further Research

Firstly, it should be emphasized that the findings and results are based on a small sample number; future research should include larger sample sizes to examine the generalizability of the findings. The level of proficiency was homogeneous as per participants' private proficiency test scores, but the results showed some differences between the groups; this could have been prevented if participants were divided into groups after the pre-test, to ensure equal starting proficiency across groups. Additionally, not every participant might have been exposed to English to the same extent, which could have mitigated the overall results. This difference requires more interpretation and it could be tested through an initial questionnaire that could help to group participants homogeneously. Lastly, participants might have reacted differently to the two tasks: while Task 1 was completed independently, Task 2 was completed in person and it could have caused anxiety and/or nervousness to some participants, which ultimately could have negatively affected their performance. Zheng and Cheng (2018), for example, tested how anxiety influences language performance in a foreign language classroom, confirming that cognitive test anxiety does negatively affect language skills, testing and achievements. A similar task that could have tested whether rules were internalized is a self-paced reading task. The advantage of this task is that it does not rely on the participant's spoken performance. In a self-paced reading task, participants read sentences with correct and incorrect PAs and PPs on a screen. The sentence appears incrementally and participants are asked to press a button to see the next word. This task measures the time taken to press the button, which gives an indication of the processing

difficulty at each stage. If the participant's internal grammar notices an ungrammaticality, reaction times should be slower than when no ungrammaticality is detected.

The purpose of this study was to test different combinations of the focus grammatical structures and, while it was possible in the first task, future studies should use a more balanced design and a longer experiment for Task 2, as the current design consisted of only 10 trials and most of them focused only on the problematic conditions. It is also important to note that some of the sentences used were changed for the purpose of the study, and while they were grammatically correct, English speakers might not utter those sentences in their daily speech; for example, the sentence "Carlo is always competing, but today, Hannah's results were higher than ___" could have been uttered in a shorter and simpler way, without the PP at the end: "Carlo is always competing, but today Hannah's results were higher". This relates to participants' exposure to the language and how often they hear people use possessive pronouns and/or adjectives.

There are some results that were not predicted: participants made mistakes even in the matching conditions; this could have happened because they had a different translation equivalent in mind than the word the experimenter intended (e.g. *il veicolo* (mas.) for 'the car' instead of the intended *la macchina* (fem.), or participants chose a default option (often the masculine gender in English, as per the test results).

Due to time constraints, participants did not participate in a delayed post-test, which could confirm if EI solidifies knowledge long-term the way it happened in the McManus and Marsden (2017) study, where only participants receiving EI in both L1 and L2 showed improvements even in the delayed post-test.

The data collected offers opportunities for more analyses that are beyond the purpose of this study, such as differences between learners with different L1s, which leads us to think about this research with English L1 participants. We could predict that English L1 learners of Italian or Spanish L2 might have the same problems our participants encountered, as they will have to learn that PAs and PPs have to match in gender with the possessum, not the possessee. More research should be done on the ability to generalize from one grammar rule to another (where both have some similarities) and analyze how learners react and perform in those instances.

Conclusion

To conclude, this thesis analyzed the types of EI on the acquisition of gender on possessive pronouns and adjectives. Previous studies found that comparative EI is more effective for the acquisition of structures that work differently in the L1 and the L2. While negative transfer could be a persistent problem even for proficient speakers, EI has been shown to help avoid such non target-like use when both L1 and L2 are used and compared. This study confirmed the efficacy of comparative EI for the acquisition of possessive adjectives and pronouns. Through a pre-test and a post-test structure, two different tasks were completed for different purposes; Task 1 was a fill-in the blank exercise to test participants' knowledge and understanding of PAs and PPs before and after EI, while Task 2 required participants to paraphrase sentences using PAs or PPs, a spontaneous speech act that tested participants knowledge and acquisition of the focus structures. Both groups receiving instruction improved after EI, while the group receiving no instruction achieved the same results in both tests. The post-test results of the three groups were compared to see if there were any differences in the improvements; while it was clear that EI did help both groups, only the one receiving EI in the L1 and the L2 received higher results, suggesting that such instruction is more beneficial. These results could have important implications for language teaching, as they show that the use of the L1 in a foreign language classroom may be advantageous and it should be included when possible.

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Appendix

Task 1 – Fill-in the blanks

Possessive adjectives

- Animate + matching gender

1. Anne is my aunt; ____ daughter is my cousin. (her)
2. Isabel and ___ sister are both doctors. (her)
3. Carlo wants to be a doctor like ___ grandfather. (his)
4. Jacob was playing with ___ son when it started raining. (his)
5. The bride walked down the aisle with ___ mother. (her)

- Animate + mismatching gender

6. John can't come to the party because it's _____ mother's birthday. (his)
7. Paul is eating dinner with ___ wife. (his)
8. Lucy is planning a big surprise party for ____ brother's birthday. (her)
9. David introduced me to ___ twin sisters, Dina and Demi. (his)
10. Rebecca showed me a picture of ___ new boyfriend. (her)

- Inanimate + matching gender

11. Max 'the hamster' is in ___ cage. (his)
12. Harry will convince you to buy anything with ___ charisma. (his)
13. Julia can't open the door because she forgot ___ keys as work. (her)
14. Kevin forgot ___ book on the plane. (his)
15. Santiago loses ___ temper easily these days. (his)

- Inanimate + mismatching gender

16. Edward made up ___ mind to graduate this year. (his)
17. Gina forgot ___ makeup at home, so she used Kyra's. (her)
18. Luisa forgot ___ umbrella at home, so she borrowed mine. (her)
19. Hugo ate all ___ pizza and Jane's leftovers. (his)
20. Emma was distracted during the whole game and kept missing ___ turn to play. (her)

- Filler sentences

21. These are our new cats; ___ names are Winter and Summer. (their)
22. Susan, what's ___ idea about the situation? (your)

23. I really like pizza; in fact, it's ___ favorite food! (my)
24. ___ mind stops working when I think about that. (my)
25. This restaurant is famous for ___ pizza. (its)
26. Rob and Jess play with ___ sister. (their)
27. Men never invite ___ wives to play golf. (their)
28. Frankie and Stevie invited ___ friends to have dinner together. (their)
29. I can't find ___ new shirt; have you seen it? (my)
30. Jenna has two brothers; ___ names are George and Bill. (their)

<u>Possessive pronouns</u>

- Animate + matching gender

1. David and I each have a brother: Carl is mine, and Andre is ___. (his)
2. Luke and I went to the zoo; my favorite animal was the zebra, ___ was the panda. (his)
3. Gianna says that Silvia is a good friend of ___. (hers)
4. I don't look like my sister at all, but Abigail looks exactly like ___. (hers)
5. Looking at the dancing ballerinas, Jane remembered how it has always been a dream of ___ to be one. (hers)

- Animate + mismatching gender

6. Susi's friends' favorite singer is Harry Styles, but ___ is Bruno Mars. (hers)
7. Vivian found her mother, but Andrew can't seem to find ___. (his)
8. That looks a lot like Christina's son, but ___ is actually older. (hers)
9. While Fabian's friends invited their girlfriends, he forgot to call ___. (his)
10. After we all introduced our sisters, Liam finally introduced ___ to us. (his)

- Inanimate + matching gender

11. You can't eat Luisa's chocolate bar; it's ____! (hers)
12. I turned off my lamp, but Rachell forgot ___ as always. (hers)
13. John shouted: "Give Tom the book; it's ___!" (his)
14. Carlo is always competing, but today, Hannah's results were higher than ___. (his)
15. After the fight, Gary went to his room, and Tamara to ___. (hers)

- Inanimate + mismatching gender

16. I finished my homework, but Jake is still working on ___. (his)

17. This isn't Cathy's car; she always leaves ____ in the garage. (hers)
18. Grace finally got her pizza, but Harry was still waiting for ___. (his)
19. Look at Danielle's eyes; I've never seen eyes as beautiful as ___. (hers)
20. Camilla mentioned studies that agreed with ___. (hers)

- Filler sentences

21. My phone won't let me make a call; can I borrow ___? (yours)
22. We inherited a house; now it's ___! (ours)
23. I think this are your glasses, because ___ are blue. (mine)
24. We were dancing against Paul and Fern; our dance was good, but ___ was better. (theirs)
25. Jonathan found his cat, but now it's ___ that we lost. (ours)
26. Sharon's parents claim that the house is legally ___. (theirs)
27. I haven't received my exam results yet, but everyone else received ___. (theirs)
28. Most people think a job like ___ is boring, but I love it. (mine)
29. We shared our opinions so far, what about ___ Sally? (yours)
30. I enjoyed my dessert, but Tina and Jay didn't seem to enjoy ___. (theirs)

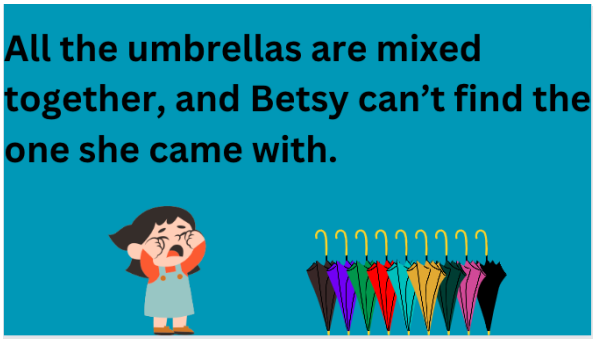
Task 2 – Paraphrase sentences

1. We saw Karen's mother at the wedding, but we did not see Gregory's. (animate + "mother" is feminine in IT/SP, so it depends on paraphrasing, it could be mixed and same gender)

- Ex: They saw her mother, not his.
- Ex: they did not see his mother, but they did see hers.

2. All the umbrellas are mixed together, and Betsy can't find the one she came with. (inanimate + mixed gender)

- Ex: Betsy can't find her umbrella because they're all mixed together.
- Ex: All the umbrellas are mixed together, and she can't find hers.



3. "Mary, is this your bike?" "No, mine is behind the house." (inanimate + same gender)

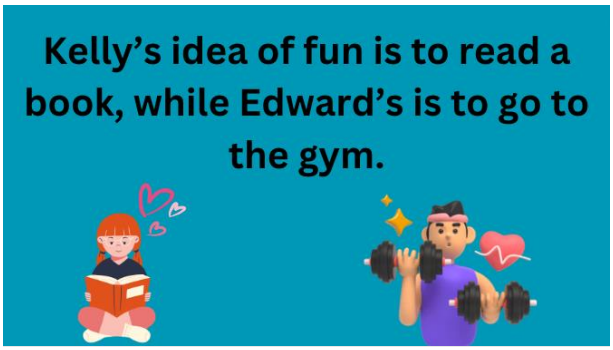
- Ex: That is not Mary's bike, hers is behind the house.
- Ex: That is not her bike. Her bike is behind the house.

4. "Dad, have you seen Barbie's passport?" "Yes, I took Barbie's passport instead of mine." (inanimate + mixed/same gender depending on paraphrasing, passport is masculine in IT/SP)

- Ex: He took Barbie's passport instead of his.
- Ex: He took her passport instead of his.

5. Kelly's idea of fun is to read a book, while Edward's is to go to the gym. (inanimate + "idea" is feminine in IT/SP so it depends on paraphrasing, it could be mixed or same gender)

- Ex: Her idea of fun is reading a book, while his is to go to the gym.
- Ex: His idea of fun is different then hers.

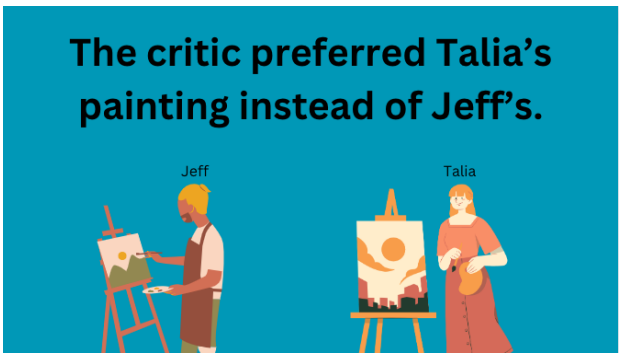


6. Roger's scarf is very similar to Carla's scarf. (inanimate + same as above)

- Ex: His scarf is very similar to hers.

7. The critic preferred Talia's painting instead of Jeff's. (inanimate + mixed gender)

- Ex: He preferred her painting instead of his.
- Ex: He did not like his painting as much as hers.



8. Rory's car is broken, but she can use Jake's. (inanimate + mixed gender)

- Ex: Her car is broken, but she can use his.
- Ex: She can use his car since hers is broken.

9. Lily is playing with the new dog she adopted. (animate + mixed gender)

- Ex: She is playing with her new dog.
- Ex: The new dog is hers and she's playing with it.

10. If we compare the two, David's plant is bigger than Fiona's. (inanimate + "plant" is IT/SP is feminine, so it could be mixed or same gender depending on paraphrasing)

- Ex: His plant is bigger than hers.
- Ex: Her plant is not as big as his.