Acquisition of passive and impersonal *se* by Dutch L2 learners of Spanish

In Spanish the reflexive *se* is often used to express passive or impersonal meanings, as in (1) and (4), unlike in Dutch, in which passives are formed in a similar way as in English, by using an auxiliary verb (*worden*) and the addition of passive morphology to the verb (2). In Spanish, this latter type of passive formation is also possible, but not so usual (3).

In the present study we tested 18 18-24 year old Dutch L2 learners of Spanish, with a B1-B2 level of Spanish, on their mastery of Spanish *se*-passive and impersonal *se*, by means of a Grammaticality Judgment Task. We tested so-called "passive reflexive" constructions with an inanimate theme, which must agree with the verb (5)/(1), and so-called "impersonal *se*-constructions" with an animate theme, (4)/(6) and with no theme argument, as in intransitive verbs (7), in which case the verb must be in the singular default form.

We see passives as verbs with demoted external arguments who lost the ability to assign accusative case (Chomsky 1981; Burzio 1986). Unlike many approaches on Spanish *se*-constructions (Rivero 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin 1998, a.o.), we will consider both passive *se*-constructions (1) and impersonal *se*-constructions (4) as passives, and *se* as passive morphology, and not as impersonal pronouns. A difference between (1) on the one hand and (4) and (7a) on the other hand, is that the internal argument does not become subject in the case of (7a), because of the absence of an internal argument, and in the case of (4) because accusative case can be assigned to the object by the prepositional element *a*. In the latter cases the subject position will be occupied by a null expletive. Note that this analysis makes constructions such as (4) and (7a) syntactically (but not necessarily pragmatically) highly similar to Dutch passives such as (8), in which an intransitive verb is passivized.

The aim of this study was to investigate to what extent Dutch students of Spanish analyse Spanish *se*-constructions as passives, whether they distinguish between the so-called impersonal constructions with animate theme (no agreement with verb) and the passive constructions with inanimate theme (agreement with the verb), and to what extent L1 transfer plays a role in L2 acquisition. Concretely, we wanted to test the hypothesis that Dutch students of Spanish often misanalyse passive or impersonal *se* as the phonologically similar Dutch third person plural pronoun *ze* (they), which is often used in active impersonal constructions (9), or as the third person singular impersonal pronoun *men* (10).

As Figure 1 shows, Dutch students often reject sentences such as (11) (*Impersonal (argumento singular)*), which are grammatical in Spanish. These students also reject (4), and accept (6) (*Impersonal (argumento plural)*). This is expected if students analyse *se* as a plural pronoun, similar to Dutch *ze*. The students sometimes accepted correctly (1), but often failed to reject (5) (*Pasiva*). Likewise, they sometimes accept (7a), but mostly fail to reject (7b) (*Intransitivo*). The only construction in which student scored highly target-like was (3) (*Ser + Participio*). This points clearly at positive transfer from Dutch. An analysis of the individual results confirms the hypothesis that many students analyse *se* as Dutch *ze*. However, students do not generally seem to analyse *se* as Dutch *men*.

The results support Hulk & Van der Linden (1998) and Müller & Hulk (2001) on bilingual acquisition, who claim that transfer may show up in interface areas in which there is a superficial structural overlap between the two languages. The present results indicate that this may also apply to L2 acquisition.

(1)   Las casas se construyeron / Se construyeron las casas
        The houses SE builtpl.   SE built$_{pl}$ the houses
        'The houses were built.'
(2)   Het huis   werd gebouwd
        the house was   built
(3)   La casa   fue   construida
        the house was built
(4)   Se busca a   los niños
        SE seek ACC the children
        'The children are being looked for.'
(5)   *?Se construyó las casas
          SE built$_{sg}$ the houses
(6)   * Se buscan   a   los niños
          SE seeked$_{pl}$ ACC the children
(7)   a. Se duerme mucho en invierno
            SE sleeps much in winter
        b. *Se duermen mucho en invierno
            SE sleep$_{pl}$ much in winter
            'People sleep a lot during the winter.'
(8)   Er   wordt   's winters   veel   geslapen
        there is-being in-the-winter much slept
        'People sleep a lot during the winter.'
(9)   Ze   zoeken de kinderen
        they seek$_{pl}$ the children
(10)   Men zoekt de kinderen
        one seeks the children.
(11)   Se busca al   niño
        SE seek   the child

Figure 1.