The Development of Complex Syntax and Mood-Selection Abilities by Intermediate-Level Learners of Spanish
Author(s): Joseph Collentine
Source: *Hispania*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Mar., 1995), pp. 122-135
Published by: American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/345232
Accessed: 20/10/2008 14:37

The Development of Complex Syntax and Mood-Selection Abilities by Intermediate-Level Learners of Spanish

Joseph Collentine
East Carolina University

Abstract: Foreign language learners of Spanish seemingly cannot master mood selection—the indicative/subjunctive distinction—by the end of the intermediate level of instruction (within four semesters). Yet their courses ordinarily reserve a considerable amount of time for the study of mood selection. An analysis of two oral-production tasks suggests that, by the end of the intermediate level, learners are not likely to reach a stage at which they have the essential *linguistic foundation* to fully benefit from instruction in mood-selection. These learners still struggle to generate complex syntax, such as subordinate clauses. The strain of processing complex syntax probably leaves learners with an insufficient amount of energy to process morphology, thus resulting in poor mood-selection accuracy. Results of the investigation imply that, in addition to assisting learners with the morphological aspects of mood selection, instructors should seek ways to assist learners with the syntactic aspects, namely, with the production of complex syntax.

Key Words: complex structures, Givón, grammar, morphology, second language learning, Spanish, subjunctive mood, syntax

Introduction

It is rare in speech that foreign language (FL) learners of Spanish properly select mood even after the considerable amount of time that courses customarily devote to its study (Terrell, Baycroft, and Perrone 1987). This predicament has been a constant source of "frustration" (VanPatten, Dvorak, and Lee 1987: 6) for instructors, perhaps resulting from faulty expectations: Spanish educators apparently assume that most aspects of mood selection are learnable within the time frame during which many university students satisfy their FL requirement (i.e., by the end of the sophomore year, or the so-called intermediate level).[1] VanPatten (1987) notes, however, that our expectations and the realities of FL acquisition are often incompatible:

Many foreign language teachers still believe that if they could explain a certain syntactic or morphological phenomenon in just the right way and then practice the structure sufficiently with their class, the students would somehow acquire the form. Second language acquisition research has shown us repeatedly that this is not the case ... [There] is quite a bit of evidence that there are certain stages that learners must pass through in their acquisition of grammatical structures regardless of method, text, teacher, error correction, or even first language. (61)

Is it then reasonable to anticipate that, by the end of the intermediate level, our learners will reach a developmental stage at which mood-selection instruction can be effective? How might we modify our approach to mood-selection instruction to reflect a greater awareness of the morphosyntactic stages through which learners pass before the end of the intermediate level? Since an adequate treatment of both of these questions would require more space than is allowed here, this article will consider the first question. The results of two data-collection tasks suggest that intermediate-level learners do not reach a point in their development at which they would have the appropriate *linguistic foundation* with which to fully benefit from mood-selection instruction. In particular, these learners still seem to struggle with the production of complex syntactic structures, such as subordinate clauses. Such processing difficulties probably leave learners with less

energy for the production of morphology, which would largely account for their poor accuracy in the selection of mood.

Research on Mood Selection and the Spanish Curriculum

Given the substantial amount of time that FL curricula have traditionally dedicated to mood selection, there is surprisingly little FL research addressing questions related directly to the subjunctive. Lee (1987), one of the few to follow this line of investigation, has challenged the assumption that learners must study the subjunctive to be able to comprehend discourse in which it appears. He presented a reading passage containing several subjunctive forms to two groups of students: one group had studied the subjunctive and the other had not. There was, however, no significant difference between the amount and the type of information from the passage that the two groups recalled.

Another commonly held assumption has been disputed by Terrell, Baycroft, and Perrone (1987): if learners do not use the subjunctive where it is needed, native speakers will have difficulties understanding them. Terrell et al. showed that native speakers actually have few problems comprehending learners who do not use the subjunctive appropriately.

Terrell et al. (1987) is also the only available study attempting to determine the reason for which learners seem to benefit so little from mood-selection instruction when they participate in speaking tasks. Using Krashen's Monitor Model (1982), Terrell et al. argue that students of Spanish in American universities "learn," rather than "acquire," the subjunctive (1987: 27). Yet, the principal theoretical assumptions upon which Terrell et al. made their conclusions have been widely disputed, diminishing the predictive power of their conclusions. Specifically, some believe that it is methodologically impossible to determine whether subjects of an experiment draw on "learned knowledge" or "acquired knowledge" when they form utterances (Ellis 1985, McLaughlin 1978). Thus, an alternative explanation is warranted.

An investigation of the development of mood-selection abilities must consider two aspects of learners' performance. Naturally, one must examine learners' morphological abilities, or the accuracy with which they produce the indicative and the subjunctive in obligatory contexts. It is also essential to consider learners' syntactic capabilities. Although the indicative surfaces in all syntactic environments, the subjunctive tends to surface only in subordinate clauses (Terrell and Hooper 1974, Takagaki 1984). Accordingly, the present investigation will measure the extent of the morphological as well as the syntactic development of learners completing the intermediate level.

The Spanish Subjunctive: Focus of the Inquiry and Assumptions on Mood Selection

A complete study of the development of mood-selection abilities would consider a myriad of syntactic structures and semantic fields. Through the intermediate level, learners study the subjunctive in imperatives (e.g., *¡No hagas eso!*), adjectival clauses (e.g., *Busca una casa que sea pequeña*), adverbial clauses (e.g., *Volveré cuando me sienta mejor*), and nominal clauses (e.g., *Quiero que me hagas un favor*), the last of which are often referred to as NP (i.e., noun-phrase) clauses. This study focuses on learners' abilities to select mood in NP clauses.

Palmer (1986) notes that *mood* is only one of the various ways by which a language conveys *modality*. Modality is a semantic notion, manifested in all parts-of-speech.[2] Sentences (1–3) illustrate that the modality known as "inference" (Palmer 1986: 64) surfaces in adverbs and adjectives, as well as in verbs.

(1) *Aparentemente* está enferma.
(2) Es *aparente* que está enferma.
(3) *Parece* que está enferma.

Mood, on the other hand, is a grammatical category of verbs—hence, the indicative

and subjunctive moods.

Palmer (1986: 136–53) provides a description of the modalities that most commonly appear in the main—or independent—clause of sentences that have a NP clause.[3] Most teachers would expect learners to use the indicative in a NP clause whenever one of the following five modalities appeared in a main clause: belief, evidence, inference, knowledge, or reports of statements.

(4a) Belief:
    Creen que vienes con nosotros.
(4b) Evidence:
    Ven que vienes connosotros.
(4c) Inference:
    Es evidente que vienes con nosotros.
(4d) Knowledge:
    Saben que vienes con nosotros.
(4e) Report of a Statement:
    Dicen que vienes con nosotros.

Most would also agree that learners should use the subjunctive in a NP clause whenever one of the following five modalities were to surface in a main clause: doubt/denial, evaluations, reactions, reports of commands, or volition.

(5a) Doubt/Denial:
    Dudan que vengas con nosotros.
(5b) Evaluation:
    Es bueno que vengas con nosotros.
(5c) Reaction:
    Les sorprende que vengas con nosotros.
(5d) Report of a Command:
    Dicen que vengas con nosotros.
(5e) Volition:
    Quieren que vengas con nosotros.

A sentence with the syntactic structure of the examples in (4) and (5)—containing anindependent and a dependent NP clause—will be referred to as a NPS herein.

The Assessment of Learners' Mood Selection Abilities

There are several issues to consider in studying and accounting for the mood-selection abilities of FL learners. The first consideration is methodological: what type of data best represents the extent of a learner's development at a given point in time? The second is theoretical: by what measure, or model of acquisition, does one determine the extent of a learner's morphosyntactic development at a given point in time?

Methodological Considerations in Assessing Learner Development

Tarone (1988) notes that FL learners vary between pidgin and native-like speech, due to shifts in style, or speech patterns. These two extremes are called the *vernacular style* and the *careful style*, respectively. Learners employ the vernacular style when they must reserve their energies for the semantic content of their utterances. Learners use the careful style when their attention centers on form, or grammatical accuracy. The vernacular usually appears in conversational speech. In such situations, there is little time to plan both the content and the form of utterances, and so content tends to prevail. The careful style surfaces in grammar exercises; regardless of the amount of time that one has for planning, attention here centers on form. Naturally, greater time for planning (e.g., when one writes a composition) allows students to concentrate on both content and form.

During the production of utterances, learners have at their disposal (at least) two linguistic systems, whose utilization depends on the degree to which one focuses on content or form (Tarone 1988). The system known as the interlanguage (IL) is the learner's knowledge of the FL language (Selinker 1972). The IL is a distinct source of knowledge from the native language, or L1 (Ellis 1985, Flynn 1986, Rivers 1990). When subjects use the vernacular style, they almost exclusively draw on the IL (Tarone 1988). The careful style results from drawing on various linguistic systems almost simultaneously, such as both the IL and the L1.

In summary, to best measure development at any juncture of a student's training, researchers must induce production that draws primarily on the IL. To isolate production to the IL, subjects must use the vernacular style, which they will most likely employ if they focus on content, and if they have relatively little time for planning utterances.

A Model for Measuring Learner Development

Givón (1979, 1990) proposes a model of language development that is especially helpful in determining the extent of a learner's morphosyntactic development. Givón describes two extreme stages on a developmental continuum along which learners presumably progress if they manage to acquire native-like competence: a *presyntactic stage* and a *syntactic stage*. Table 1 describes the behaviors that characterize these two extremes.

Three of these behaviors are particularly germane to the study of complex syntax and mood selection. It is essential to determine whether learners' utterances tend only to contain a "loose conjunction" of clauses, or whether utterances can also have "tight subordination;" mood selection is largely a phenomenon of dependent clauses. The "ratio of nouns-to-verbs" in utterances is another important consideration; it seems reasonable to assume that, before substituting whole clauses for nouns (e.g., *Quiero agua/que me hagas un favor*), one must have the ability to produce several nouns per clause. The extent to which learners can use or attend to "grammatical morphology" is another crucial consideration in a study of mood-selection development.

In the presyntactic stage, learners exhibit pidgin-like speech. Delivery is slow, and utterances tend to comprise a topic and a comment (e.g., *Yo trabajo, *Venir Juan* for *El que viene es Juan*). In morphologically rich languages such as Spanish, presyntactic-stage learners rarely use grammatical suffixes purposely. To illustrate, they might correctly say *yo quiero* not because they are

making subject-verb agreement, but rather because they have concatenated two memorized 'chunks,' /jo + kjero/. Thus, it would not be surprising for one to say something like *nosotros *quiero*, a concatenation of /nosotros + kjero/.

At a point between the presyntactic and syntactic stages (i.e., around the midpoint of this developmental continuum), learners begin to connect clauses and to make limited use of morphology.[4] To depict the relationship between two or more events/ states, students here tend to use either parataxis (e.g., *Carlos es cómico ... me gusta*) or coordination (e.g., *Me gusta Carlos porque es cómico*).[5] Moreover, during this period, many verbs have both a subject and an object, yielding a higher ratio of nouns-over-verbs. Learners begin to use inflections intentionally, although without sophistication. For instance, students may attend to person, number, and aspect; but they may disregard tense or mood (e.g., *Ayer *juegan en el parque*).

Learners reach the syntactic stage once they can produce syntactically sophisticated utterances, and once they can manipulate the target language's morphological system. One is now able to produce complex syntax, such as subordinate structures (e.g., *Me gusta que Carlos sea tan cómico*), and the typical clause has several nouns (e.g., *Juana le dio un reloj a Papá*). Moreover, learners at this stage possess refined morphological abilities; for instance, they regularly show a sensitivity to temporal nuances (e.g., *Antes de ayer, nunca habíamos visitado San Antonio*).

This model does not propose that, once learners reach the syntactic stage, they no longer exhibit behaviors characteristic of the presyntactic stage. In fact, Givón (1979) observes that proficient speakers of any language employ syntactic as well as presyntactic stage operations. They demonstrate presyntactic-stage behavior when they have little time to plan utterances, such as in face-to-face conversations. Speakers use syntactic-stage operations when they have more time to plan utterances, as well as when cohesion is imperative, such as in extended

discourse (e.g., narratives, descriptions).

What stage in Givón's developmental continuum must learners reach to be able to appropriately select mood in unplanned discourse? The indicative/subjunctive distinction is largely one of subordinate clauses. Additionally, to select mood, learners need to have mastered the basics of verbal inflection (i.e., the concept of 'conjugating' a verb), and they must also be able to choose from various morphological paradigms (i.e., from various 'sets' of conjugations; for example, the present indicative and subjunctive, as well as the preterite and the imperfect). Clearly, then, learners must have reached the syntactic stage.

Research Questions

Using oral-production tasks, this investigation will attempt to determine whether FL learners of Spanish completing the intermediate level operate closer to the presyntactic or to the syntactic stage of the developmental continuum. To that end, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. Are intermediate-level learners of Spanish generally limited to producing simplistic syntax, such as single-clause utterances and coordinate structures; or, can they also readily produce complex syntax, such as subordinate structures?
2. What is the ratio of nouns-to-verbs in the speech of intermediate-level learners?
3. Can intermediate-level learners use grammatical morphology elaborately, as evidenced by their ability to select mood in NP clauses?

Furthermore, since learners of Spanish study mood selection in various semantic contexts, a fourth question is of particular interest to Spanish educators:

4. Does the modality (e.g., volition, doubt/denial, belief) of an utterance affect the accuracy with which intermediate-level learners select mood?

Methodology

As mentioned above, the best measure of the extent of a learner's overall IL development elicits the vernacular style, forcing subjects to focus on content while giving them little time for planning utterances. However, greater time for planning is required even by native speakers to produce the complex syntax and morphology characteristic of the syntactic stage (Givón 1979, 1990). This predicament makes the study of mood selection problematic: on the one hand, learners will demonstrate the extent of their morphosyntactic IL development while being spontaneous; on the other hand, learners need generous amounts of time to produce the syntactic structures that require learners to attend carefully to mood, namely, subordinate clauses.

Thus, the results of two tasks are reported below. The first task, involving conversational interaction, gathered data on the vernacular style. It is predicted that this experiment will provide limited insights into the extent to which intermediate-level learners can select mood. Still, this first task will provide a tentative indication of the ability of these learners to produce complex syntax spontaneously. It will be most beneficial, however, in the determination of the average ratio of nouns-to-verbs in the speech of learners at this level.

The second task—a controlled oral-production task—specifically attempted to induce utterances with NP clauses. Although the subjects in this task had more time to produce utterances than they normally would in face-to-face conversations, the experiment did meet one of the requirements for invoking the vernacular: it was designed to focus the subjects' attention on the content (rather than the form) of their utterances. Thus, this second task will be considered the primary source from which conclusions will be made with respect to the research questions posed above.

Task 1: Conversational Task

Task 1 consisted of individual, ten-

minute conversations between the re-
searcher and FL students of Spanish (N=40)
who were completing the intermediate level
at Arizona State University in the Spring of
1987. In the conversations, the researcher
prompted the subjects to answer questions
of a factual nature. The researcher also at-
tempted to lead the subjects to produce
narrations and descriptions. Questions re-
lated to the content areas studied during the
semester, which ranged from everyday sur-
vival themes (e.g., transportation, money
matters, and numbers) to factual/current
events (e.g., press, media, cultural, and
moral issues).[6] Furthermore, since the in-
dicative/subjunctive distinction was the sin-
gularly most emphasized *grammatical* as-
pect of the course, the researcher intention-
ally elicited the relevant syntactic struc-
tures (e.g., *¿Qué quieres que haga el
presidente para la gente sin vivienda?*).

Task 2: Controlled Oral-Production Task

Task 2 elicited oral responses from stu-
dents of Spanish (N=38) who were complet-
ing the intermediate level at the University
of Texas at Austin in the Spring of 1992. The
task had three purposes: (1) to elicit NPSs,
or sentences with a NP clause; (2) to elicit
utterances characterized by the modalities
described above (e.g., belief, inference,
doubt/denial, etc.); (3) to direct the sub-
jects' attention to the content of their utter-
ances.

The task consisted of a series of 44 draw-
ings, each containing two 'contextualizers:'
a short caption, and two glossed people or
objects, which Figure 1 illustrates. After
hearing questions relating to a given draw-
ing (and to its contextualizers), the subjects
provided spoken answers.

The primary function of the drawings
was to give the subjects a way to determine
the context of questions quickly; this tends
to lead learners to focus their attention on
content rather than on form.[7] The drawings'
contextualizers served as controls on the
type of information that responses were to
include; these controls ultimately con-
strained the morphosyntactic characteris-
tics of the participants' output.

The subjects were instructed that any
response must relate to the drawing and to
its captions. They were also told that their
answers must make explicit reference to
the glossed people or objects accompany-
ing a given drawing. For instance, for Fig-
ure 1, an appropriate response to a question
such as *¿Qué están haciendo los dos
empleados?* might be a simple, single-clause
utterance: *María está hablando con Carlos.*
An appropriate response to a question such
as *¿Qué quiere María?* would be a NPS:
María quiere que Carlos trabaje más.

Based on the forty-four drawings, fifty
questions were posed, of which twenty were
for diversionary purposes. Thirty questions
specifically elicited NPSs: three questions
tested the subjects' abilities to appropriately
select mood for each of the ten modalities
described above (i.e., five requiring the in-
dicative, and five the subjunctive). The par-
ticipants had ten seconds to provide each
utterance; all responses were tape recorded
and transcribed for analysis.

To verify the task's reliability for eliciting
NPSs, as well as its reliability for inducing
the indicative and subjunctive, it was pre-
sented to native/advanced speakers of
Spanish (N=10). All were instructors of
Spanish as a FL. The native/advanced
group provided NPSs in every targeted in-
stance, and they selected NP-clause mood
with 100% accuracy, paralleling the pre-
scripts outlined above.

Results: Task 1

The syntactic structure of the partici-
pants' utterances was decidedly simple. A
total of 64% (517/804) of all utterances con-
sisted of a single clause (e.g., *Yo trabajo,
Juan come*). These sentences were, never-
theless, frequently juxtaposed in a paratac-
tic fashion, giving the effect of complex ut-
terances (e.g., **Juan quiere ... yo voy* for *Si
Juan quiere, yo voy también*).[8] The following
exemplifies these two behaviors.

(7) In a discussion on the rights of the press

to invade the privacy of public officials: (// signifies *pause)*

Subject: No pienso es justo // pero al mismo tiempo la gente tiene // necesita saber // pero es muy difícil // no es negro o blanco // es gris.

Later in the same interview:

Interviewer: ¿Por qué estudias español? Subject: Porque estudiaba en el colegio // muchas personas hablan español en los EEUU // es muy // 'common.'

The remaining 36% (287/804) of the utterances were biclausal, summarized in Table 2. A significant majority of these utterances involved coordinate structures ($\chi^2(2)$=202.4; p<.0001), while only a small percentage had NP clauses (i.e., they were NPSs). The only other type of subordinate structures were adverbial clauses, of which there were few instances.

Most clauses contained more nouns than verbs, suggesting that, within clauses, instead of producing pidgin-like utterances with one verb and one noun (e.g., *Carlos come, Yo estudio)*, the subjects could describe individual events/states in detail (e.g., *Carlos come una ensalada, Yo estudio en la biblioteca)*. Of the combined nouns and verbs, 54% (N=1898) were nouns, and 46% (N=1601) were verbs, yielding a ratio of 1.2:1 ($\chi^2(1)$ =25.2; p<.0001). If one includes in the tally of nouns all pronouns and subject omissions, the difference between the percentages increases to 62% (N=2584) nouns and 38% (N=1601) verbs, yielding a ratio of 1.6:1 ($\chi^2(1)$=39.7; p<.0001).

Concerning morphology, whereas the subjects provided the indicative in all obligatory contexts, they supplied the subjunctive in only 13% of contexts where it was needed. That is, the subjects seem to know when to provide the indicative (e.g., *Creo que es importante)*, but not the subjunctive (e.g., *Dudo que *es importante)*.

Task 1, then, paints three different pictures. First of all, an analysis of the syntactic structure of the subjects' utterances im-

plies presyntactic-stage operations. Givón would argue that the prevalence of single-clause utterances and parataxis implies a dependency on presyntactic-stage operations. "Short turns—thus shifting, choppy coherence—is indeed the early childhood norm" (Givón 1990: 951). The participants' dependence on coordinate structures to relate clauses also implies presyntactic-stage operations.

Secondly, the participants' use of verbal morphology, which was neither pidgin nor native-like, suggests that intermediate-level learners have the ability to operate somewhere between the presyntactic and the syntactic stages. Thirdly, one aspect of the subjects' performance implies that intermediate-level learners can use syntactic-stage operations: the participants clearly showed that they could spontaneously produce clauses with a larger ratio of nouns-over-verbs.

Results: Task 2

Table 3 describes the types of responses that the participants provided in the second task, which specifically aimed at eliciting utterances with NP clauses.

Concerning syntax, 64% of all responses were NPSs. However, viewing the data from the point of view of 'a cup half empty' reveals that a substantial portion of the responses —about one third (36%)—involved what appeared to be simplifications (e.g., missing *que* subordinators, coordinate structures, and single-clause sentences). To questions eliciting the indicative, 26% of the subjects' responses were simplifications; however, to questions eliciting the subjunctive, 47% were simplifications. This difference was significant (t (74)=3.83; p=.0023). There seem to be at least two possible explanations for the greater inclination to simplify in subjunctive contexts.

On the one hand, the learners may have preferred syntactic simplification to avoid the production of subjunctive forms. When the subjects needed to produce reports of a command, which require subjunctive forms, most of their responses (71%; 81/

114) involved parataxis (e.g., *Carla dice: ven aquí*); however, to questions eliciting reports of statements, which require indicative forms, a vast majority (89%; 102/114) of the responses contained subordinate clauses (e.g., *Carla dice que Juan es simpático*). Additionally, a significant majority of the coordinate structures were responses to questions eliciting the subjunctive. To questions such as *¿De qué se enoja Juan?*, the participants were more likely to respond with *Juan se enoja porque María no lo escucha*, than with *Juan se enoja de que María no lo escuche*.

On the other hand, the tendency to simplify may reflect that these learners depended on principles of English syntax to help them produce complex utterances, signifying that, for this sort of task, their Spanish syntactic development was inadequate. English primarily uses three phrase structures to relate sentential NP complements: clausal complements, e.g., *We doubt that they understand*; gerundive complements, e.g., *We insisted on their arriving early*; and infinitival complements, e.g., *We need for you to do more*. According to Terrell and Salgués (1979), doubt/denial is related with clausal complements almost to the exclusion of infinitival and gerundive complements. English relates modalities such as reports of commands, volition, evaluations, and reactions with all three sentential complement types, however.[9] These principles of English complementation seem to be predictors of learners' simplification in Spanish. Clausal complements appeared in 88% (100/114) of the subjects' responses to questions eliciting sentences of doubt/denial. In contrast, clausal complements surfaced in only 41% (188/456) of responses to questions eliciting the subjunctive under other modalities. Thus, it is conceivable that, when the participants were configuring the syntactic structure of utterances involving reports of commands, volition, evaluations, and reactions, they wasted valuable processing energy by even considering infinitival or gerundive complements as viable syntactic options; in which case, they may have found it necessary to use syntax requiring less processing effort (e.g., coordinate structures, parataxis).

Which of these interpretations is more plausible? If the principal difficulty that the learners experienced was with the production of the subjunctive morphology, then simplification should emerge in the corpus of data regardless of the modality type requiring this inflection. This was not the case, however. Table 4 shows that, under modalities such as reports of commands and reactions, the participants simplified regularly; yet, they rarely simplified under modalities such as doubt/denial and volition. The differences among the five categories were significant ($\chi^2(4) = 45.64$; p<.0001). Is there independent evidence that the subjects used their L1 knowledge to produce complement clauses? Most erroneous subordinators (63%; 12/19) involved the use of *para* in contexts of volition, suggesting that some participants attempted to use infinitival complements (e.g., **Quiero para Juan sale* for *I want for John to leave*). It seems, therefore, that the best predictor of simplification for intermediate-level learners is not the morphological complexity that utterances could have, but rather the degree to which they can rely on English in the subordination of clauses.

Regarding morphology, Table 5 shows that, although mood-selection accuracy was high when the indicative (90%) was needed, it was significantly lower when the subjunctive (34%) was needed ($\chi^2(1)=241.29$; p<.0001).[10] Furthermore, the extent to which the subjects appropriately provided the subjunctive depended on the modality (e.g., doubt/denial, volition) governing its employment ($\chi^2(4)=11.00$; p=.0262). A regrouping of the data in Table 6 according to the 'subjunctive contexts' to which textbooks commonly refer (i.e., influence, doubt/denial, and emotion) elucidates this relationship. The subjects produced subjunctive forms most reliably in contexts of influence, secondly in contexts of doubt/denial, and least reliably in contexts of emotion; the difference between the accuracy scores was significant ($\chi^2(3)=7.9$; p=.0188).

In summary, Task 2 suggests that learn-

ers completing the intermediate level are approaching, but have not entirely reached, the syntactic stage. To produce syntactic complexity, the subjects appeared to rely on principles of English syntax, suggesting that their Spanish syntactic abilities required further development. In addition, the participants seemed to favor the indicative as a default verb form, or regardless of the mood that a context required; this implies that the morphological abilities of these learners also needed to develop further before being able to emulate syntactic-stage operations.

Summary

Upon the completion of the intermediate level of study, do learners operate at the presyntactic or the syntactic stage? The data from this study suggest that such learners operate at a point on the developmental continuum that is *between* the presyntactic and the syntactic stages. The conversational task (Task 1) suggests that intermediate-level learners can spontaneously generate a greater number of nouns-over-verbs, which is indeed characteristic of syntactic-stage operations. The rest of the data, however, implies that intermediate-level learners are at a point that is well before the syntactic stage.

Concerning syntax, the results imply that intermediate-level learners are not comfortable using their IL knowledge to generate complex phrase structure. The participants in the conversational task favored rudimentary phrase structure (i.e., parataxis, single-clause utterances, and coordinate structures). Moreover, although the subjects in the controlled task (Task 2) produced a large number of utterances with a subordinate structure, to do so they seemingly relied on principles of English syntax, which would indicate that their *Spanish* syntactic abilities were somehow inadequate for the generation of complex syntax. Thus, it would be premature to conclude that the syntactic development of learners at the end of the intermediate level parallels the syntactic stage.

Intermediate-level learners may only be able to attend to some aspects of grammatical morphology. Both sets of subjects participating in this study were able to use Spanish's verbal suffixes in a systematic fashion: when a conjugated verb form was necessary, they regularly utilized the (present) indicative. This alone is an indication that they were not limited to presyntactic-stage operations. Yet, the controlled task suggested that intermediate-level learners will rarely produce the subjunctive where it is required, even with considerable time for planning utterances. Thus, as in the case of syntax, intermediate-level learners seem not to be able to generate the verbal morphology that would imply syntactic-stage operations.

Conclusions and Considerations for Future Research

This study has attempted to help elementary and intermediate-level instructors, as well as their students, to understand the source of their frustrations relating to the subjunctive. Givón (1979, 1990) claims that learners exhibit two general stages of acquisition: a presyntactic and a syntactic stage. Learners are not ready to produce complex syntax spontaneously and to make subtle morphological distinctions, such as between the indicative and the subjunctive, until they reach the syntactic stage. This study indicates that learners of Spanish completing the intermediate level probably operate at a stage that is beyond the presyntactic stage, yet prior to the syntactic stage.

To be more specific, although at a glance the 'subjunctive problem' would seem to have its origins in morphology, the most important barrier to learners' benefiting from mood-selection instruction relates to their abilities to generate complex syntax. If, in speech, the production of subordinate structures is too burdensome for intermediate-level learners, it should not be surprising that they show few signs of 'selecting' mood at all (i.e., they use the indicative as a default verb form)—they may put so

much energy into processing syntax that they have little left for processing morphology. Still, Terrell et al. (1987) have shown that even elementary-level learners can select mood with a high degree of accuracy in *writing* tasks (e.g., those that are common to Spanish exams). Hence, the combined task of producing complex syntax and selecting mood is probably too difficult for intermediate-level learners in most *speaking* tasks.

Be that as it may, to my knowledge, no mechanism exists in any Spanish curriculum or textbook—which tend to focus on verbal morphology—intending to foment syntactic abilities. Would the development of mood-selection abilities be enhanced and/or hastened with materials for fostering learners' syntactic abilities (i.e., to produce subordinate structures)? And, if the addition of a syntactic component to the curriculum benefited mood-selection abilities, would it have other desirable effects? Perhaps syntactic intervention (either through some deductive approach to instruction, or through an input approach) would enhance learners' abilities to manipulate word order within clauses (e.g., object pronoun placement); learners might also learn to parse complex utterances earlier than they normally do.

Of course, once an element is added to the lower-level curriculum, something—or things—may need to be postponed (e.g., pluperfect subjunctive). Nevertheless, by doing so, we might finally abandon exhaustive approaches to mood-selection instruction for a curriculum whose expectations reflect a greater awareness of the limitations, the potential, and the needs of students in a typical two-year Spanish program.[11]

■ NOTES

[1]Terrell et al. (1987) estimate that Spanish courses devote about 40% of class time to the indicative/subjunctive distinction. It is, nevertheless, possible to claim that such assertions do not apply to today's classroom since the communicative agenda has significantly diminished the role of grammar study. Although this "revolution" (Whitley 1993: 137) appears

to have brought substantive modifications to the elementary level, Whitley claims that more advanced levels of the FL curriculum—such as the intermediate level—still largely operate under the assumptions of past approaches (e.g., the cognitive method). Thus, as concerns the intermediate level, there is no reason to suspect that the situation described by both VanPatten et al. and Terrell et al. in 1987 is significantly different from that of today.

[2]A full review of this topic goes beyond the scope of this inquiry. Palmer (1986) provides a comprehensive introduction to the difference between mood and modality.

[3]With one exception, the ten modality categories referred to herein fall under one of two macro modalities described by Palmer. Palmer classifies seven of the modalities—belief, doubt/denial, evidence, inference, knowledge, as well as reports of a statement and reports of a command—as "epistemic" (1986: 18); they are indications of the degree to which one is committed to the truth value of a proposition (e.g., *Dudo que Juan se vaya* suggests that 'I' am not very committed to the truth value of the proposition 'Juan is leaving'). Palmer classifies two of the modalities—evaluations and volition—as "deontic" (1986: 18); these are indications of the effects of an event/state on the world (e.g., *Es bueno que Juan se vaya* means that the prospect that 'Juan is leaving' has resulted in 'my approval'). Concerning the exception, Palmer appears to conflate an important distinction recognized by Terrell and Salgués (1979). Palmer refers to sentences such as *Es bueno que Juan se vaya* and *Me sorprende que Juan se vaya* as evaluations. Although both are clearly deontic (e.g., in the latter sentence, 'Juan's leaving' has caused a 'sensation of surprise in me'), Terrell and Salgués would recognize that the first sentence is an evaluation, but they would classify the second sentence as a (subjective) reaction.

[4]Sato (1988) gives a detailed description of this medial stage of development, referred to as the onset of syntacticization.

[5]*Parataxis*, in this instance, is the placement of one single-clause utterance after another to give the effect of a complex utterance. With parataxis, subordinate conjunctions (e.g., *que, si*) and coordinate conjunctions (e.g., *y, o*) are omitted, and so the interpretation of the relationship between two clauses is highly context dependent.

[6]The instructor took a proficiency approach to the management of classroom activities (e.g., in the types and use of supplemental materials, group-work activities). Thus, throughout the semester every effort was made to promote the development of the students' *communicative* competence (Canale and Swain 1980).

[7]According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), when learners can readily determine the context of a statement or question, they tend to use cognitive strategies known as top-down processes, which oppose another type of strategy known as bottom-up processes. Top-down processes involve attending to concepts (or in this case, content), rather than attending to linguis-

tic structure (or in this case, form).

[8]In terms of clause structure, Sato (1988) argues that the paratactic concatenation of single-clause utterances is the initial—and so the most rudimentary—means by which learners produce complex syntax.

[9]To my knowledge, no statement exists on the preferred English syntax for the indicative-causing modalities of belief, evidence, knowledge, inference, and report of a statement. They seem, however, to require clausal complements: *I think/see/know/suppose/say that they live here*. They appear to be rather incompatible with either infinitival, **I think/see/know/suppose/say them to live here*, or gerundive complements, **I think/see/know/suppose/say their living here*.

[10]This chi-square test measured the difference between the proportion of correct to incorrect uses of the indicative—365 to 40, respectively—and the proportion of correct to incorrect uses of the subjunctive—97 to 191, respectively .

[11]I would like to thank Karina Collentine, Dale Knickerbocker, Barbara Lafford, Peter Standish, and Fran Sweeney for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

■ WORKS CITED

Canale, Michael, and Merrill Swain. 1980. "Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing." *Applied Linguistics* 1: 1–47.

Ellis, Rod. 1985. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Flynn, Suzanne. 1986. "Production vs. Comprehension: Differences in Underlying Competencies." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 8: 135–64.

Givón, Talmy. 1979. *On Understanding Grammar.* New York: Academic.

_____. 1990. *Syntax: A Functional-Typological Introduction: Volume 2.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Krashen, Steve. 1982. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Lee, James F. 1987. "Comprehending the Spanish Subjunctive: An Information Processing Perspective." *Modern Language Journal* 71: 50–57.

McLaughlin, Barry. 1978. "The Monitor Model: Some Methodological Considerations." *Language Learning* 28: 309–32.

O'Malley, Michael J., and Anna Uhl Chamot. 1990. *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Palmer, F. R. 1986. *Mood and Modality.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Rivers, Wilga M. 1990. "Mental Representations and Language in Action." *Linguistics, Language Teaching, and Language Acquisition: The Interdependency of Theory, Practice, and Research.* Georgetown University Roundtable on Language and Linguistics, 1990. Ed. James E. Alatis. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP. 49–64.

Sato, Charlene. 1988. "The Origins of Complex Syntax in Interlanguage Development." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 10: 371–95.

Selinker, Larry. 1972. "Interlanguage." *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 10: 209–30.

Takagaki, Toshihiro. 1984. "Subjunctive as a Marker of Subordination." *Hispania* 67: 248–56.

Tarone, Elaine. 1988. *Variation in Interlanguage.* London: Edward Arnold.

Terrell, Tracy, Bernard Baycroft, and Charles Perrone. 1987. "The Subjunctive in Spanish Interlanguage: Accuracy and Comprehensibility." *Foreign Language Learning: A Research Perspective.* Eds. Bill VanPatten, Trisha R. Dvorak, and James F. Lee. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 19–32.

Terrell, Tracy, and Joan Hooper. 1974. "A Semantically Based Analysis of Mood in Spanish." *Hispania* 57: 484–94.

Terrell, Tracy, and Maruxa Salgués de Cargill. 1979. *Lingüística aplicada a la enseñanza del español a anglohablantes.* New York: John Wiley.

VanPatten, Bill. 1987. "Classroom Learners' Acquisition of *ser* and *estar*: Accounting for Developmental Patterns." *Foreign Language Learning: A Research Perspective.* Eds. Bill VanPatten, Trisha R. Dvorak, and James F. Lee. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 61–75.

VanPatten, Bill, Trisha R. Dvorak, and James F. Lee. 1987. Introduction. *Foreign Language Learning: A Research Perspective.* Eds. Bill VanPatten, Trisha R. Dvorak, and James F. Lee. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 1–16.

Whitley, Stanley M. 1993. "Communicative Language Teaching: An Incomplete Revolution." *Foreign Language Annals* 26: 137–54.
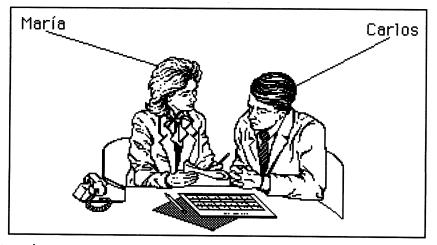
Table 1. IL Developmental Stages (Givón 1979: 223)

Presyntactic	Syntactic
a. Topic-comment structure.	Subject-predicate structure.
b. Loose conjunction.	Tight subordination.
c. Slow rate of delivery.	Fast rate of delivery.
d. Word order is governed mostly by one pragmatic principle; old information goes first, new information follows.	Word order is used to signal semantic case functions.
e. Roughly one-to-one ratio of nouns-to-verbs in discourse, with verbs being semantically simple.	A larger ratio of nouns-over-verbs in verbs in discourse, with verbs being semantically complex.*
f. No use of grammatical morphology.	Elaborate use of grammatical morphology.
g. Prominent intonation-stress marks the focus of new information; topic intonation is less prominent.	Very much the same, but perhaps not exhibiting as high a functional load, and at least in some languages totally absent.

*Givón uses the noun-to-verb ratio as a measurement of *propositional* complexity. A proposition's complexity generally increases with more *arguments* or individual NPs per clause.

Figure 1. Sample Drawing from Task 2 Materials.

María: "Carlos, no vendiste casi nada el mes pasado."
Carlos: "Entiendo, trabajaré más horas este mes."

Table 2. Types of Biclausal Utterances Produced in Conversation.

SENTENCE TYPE	EXAMPLE	N	%
Coordinate Structures	Ella tiene trabajo y me gusta eso.	202	72
NPSs	Creo que es interesante.	77	27
Others	Como mucho si tengo hambre.	3	1
		287	

Table 3. Syntactic Properties of Responses in the Controlled-Production Task.

SENTENCE TYPE	EXAMPLE	TARGETED MOOD OF RESPONSE'S SUBORDINATE CLAUSE**					
		INDICATIVE		SUBJUNCTIVE		TOTALS	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
-NPS	Creo que es bueno.	405	74	288	53	693	64
-NPS, less *que*	*Creo es bueno.	39	7	29	5	68	6
-NPS, wrong subordinator	*Quiero para Juan sale.	5	1	19	3	24	2
-Coordinate structure	Tiene trabajo y me gusta eso.	15	3	81	15	96	9
-Single Clause	Juan sale.	83	15	126	23	209	19
SUBTOTALS		547		543		1090	
-No Answer		23		27		50	
TOTALS		570		570		1140	

**These totals represent the questions that specifically elicited NPSs. The responses are categorized according to the mood that the question aimed to induce in a response's NP clause (e.g., Indicative: *Creo que es bueno*, Subjunctive: *No creo que sea bueno*).

Table 4. Simplifications according to Modality Context in the Controlled-Production Task.

MODALITY CONTEXT	FREQUENCY OF SIMPLIFICATIONS	QUESTIONS ELICITING MODALITY CONTEXT	PERCENTAGE OF SIMPLIFICATIONS
Report of a Command	76	114	67
Reaction	67	114	59
Evaluation	52	114	46
Volition	45	114	39
Doubt/Denial	10	114	9
	250	570	44

Table 5. Mood Selection Accuracy according to Main Clause Modality and NP Clause Mood in the Controlled-Production Task.

MODALITY CONTEXT	FREQUENCY OF CORRECT MOOD SELECTION	FREQUENCY OF MODALITY CONTEXT	MOOD ELECTION ACCURACY
INDICATIVE CONTEXTS:			
Knowledge	72	77	94
Report of a Statement	93	102	91
Belief	79	87	91
Inference	72	82	88
Evidence	49	57	86
	365	405	90
SUBJUNCTIVE CONTEXTS:			
Report of a Command	16	33	48
Volition	25	66	38
Doubt/Denial	36	100	36
Evaluation	15	53	28
Reaction	5	36	14
	97	288	34

Table 6. Subjunctive Accuracy according to the Traditionally Studied Categories in the Controlled-Production Task.

MODALITY CONTEXT	MOOD SELECTION ACCURACY %
Influence*	41
Doubt/Denial	36
Emotion**	23

* This category comprises the mood-selection accuracy figures of *Reports of Commands* and *Volition*, presented in Table 5.

** This category comprises the mood-selection accuracy figures of *Evaluations* and *Reactions*, presented in Table 5.