

# TRANSFER AND LINGUISTIC CONTEXT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS OF ENGLISH NEGATIVE STRUCTURES

**MARÍA CRISTINA ALONSO VÁZQUEZ**

University of Castilla-La Mancha

---

25

## I. Introduction

Transfer is a theme that has centred the attention of many second language learning researchers. According to Odlin (1989: 27) “transfer is the influence of the first language (L1) on the second one (L2), resulting from the similarities and differences between them”. More specifically, “learners may retain something from their L1 [...] to aid in coping with new challenges” (Jarvis and Odlin 2000: 573).

Some of the research into transfer has involved studies of the acquisition of negative forms in English. One common feature of second language research studies on Spanish speakers in negation is that they have been carried out where acquisition takes place in naturalistic settings without formal instruction. In those contexts, learners are motivated to interact with native English speakers (Schumann 1986), which in turn increases the amount of input that L2 learners receive (Krashen 1982). This study focussed on the L2 learning process in an FL context i.e. in the subjects’ own country, so the article deals with the tutored English as a Foreign Language (EFL) of nine native Spanish speaking subjects.

The study centred on negation in English, and the reason was an intuition that the negation system in English was considerably more difficult to grasp for FL students than traditional English Second Language pedagogic procedures would suggest. The English negation system is complex for most Spanish speakers, not only in

terms of word order but also because there are different negative markers (preverbal *no* in Spanish, and either *no* or *not* in English). But the most significant difficulty lies in the difference in the use of auxiliary verbs in English (*do, does, did*), which have no equivalent in Spanish.

The present study is an attempt to bring some data to bear on the question of whether the L2 and FL learning process of negation might be different for Spanish speakers as the processes take place in different language contexts. Two further aims are also discussed in this article. First, we will attempt to detect the presence of transfer in the learning process of English negation through the Marked Differential Hypothesis, (MDH) (Eckman 1985). Secondly, following Selinker (1992) a range of phenomena included in transfer are considered, amongst them *avoidance* (Dusková 1984). *Avoidance* is said to take place when specific target-language features are not represented in the learner's language, so learners do not use those structures they find difficult as a result of the absence of equivalents in their native language. Although *avoidance* has not so far been considered as a learning strategy, in this study we take it to be one.

In order to provide evidence for the previous claims, this study was designed to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there evidence that transfer is greater in an EFL context than in an L2 context for Spanish speakers studying or acquiring the English negative?
2. Should studies in Second Language Acquisition take '*avoidance*' into account? How far would not taking it into account affect the results of the research?
3. Do Spanish speaking subjects studying English as a Foreign Language go through the same learning stages as those in an L2 context?

To attempt to answer these questions this article will proceed as follows. Firstly, the results obtained by Cancino, Rosansky and Schumann (1978) in their classic study on the acquisitional stages of Spanish speaking subjects learning in an L2 context are presented. Secondly what seems to be an error in their statistical method is discussed and an alternative is offered. Thirdly, the findings of this current study carried out with Spanish speaking subjects in an EFL setting are shown. Finally, I compare the results of both studies.

Following Cancino et al. (1978), Schumann (1979) and Larsen-Freeman (1991), in our negation study each device used to mark negation is catalogued in the following way:

- *No V* construction: 'I *no* understand', 'I *no* can see'. 'They *no* have water'.
- *Don't V* forms: 'We *don't* like it', 'I *don't* can explain', 'I *don't* have a woman'.
- *Auxiliary-Negative* forms: '*It's* not dangerous', 'He *can't* see', 'I *haven't* seen all of it'.

- *Analysed forms of Don't*: (*do not, doesn't, does not, didn't, did not*):

'I *didn't* even know', 'One night I *didn't* have the light'.

As mentioned before, the study also considers a fifth variable – *avoidance*.

(Q: Did you go to swim yesterday?. R: It is winter).

## II. The Data

The data used in this study are from the corpus collected by Neff, Licerias and Díaz (1997), of nine native Spanish speakers. They were interviewed and recorded in monthly sessions over a period of eight months. The participants were monolingual Spanish speaking residents of the Madrid region.

The main consideration when selecting the subjects was their level of English proficiency. This was determined by a comprehensive-productive placement test made for the purpose. The subjects were all volunteers attending EFL classes at beginner level, and they were interviewed during their first year of English studies. All participants attended state schools.

Eight different tests were specially made, one for each month. They included instructions and training exercises at the beginning of each task. The aim of the interviews was to elicit negative structures from the subjects at particular points in time. The interviews consisted of a number of tasks with at least ten different questions in each. The interview materials were based on three different types of task (Table 1): free production tasks, guided production tasks, and controlled ones, so that subject's use of negative structures in various situations could be tested. All the pictures used to elicit data were easy to describe and kept in front of the subjects during the interview.

Free production tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Personal questions.</li> <li>* Tell your own story.</li> <li>* Description of pictures.</li> <li>* Spot the difference.</li> </ul>
Guided production tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Questions based on stories.</li> <li>* Questions based on pictures.</li> </ul>
Controlled production tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Drill: repetitions.</li> <li>* Drill: transformations (positive to negative).</li> <li>* Complete the following sentences.</li> </ul>

TABLE 1. Types of tasks in the interviews

To meet the aims of the study, longitudinal data were required from the earliest stages of learning. Data elicitation began three months after the subjects' first exposure to the target language structures. There were two reasons for this three month period; firstly, following Butterworth and Hatch (1978), it seemed a long enough period of time for subjects to make themselves familiar with the learning of English negative devices. Secondly, following Gibbons (1985) and Saviile-Troike (1988), L2 learners —both children and adults— go through a period of silence to prepare for the time they begin speaking the L2. This period is thought to take place during the initial three months.

Speech samples needed to be frequent enough to detect fairly small changes in the participants' rule system as manifested by their speech production. Therefore, subjects were interviewed once a month for eight months. All participants followed the same interview procedure in the same week, so their negation development could be compared. Each subject had a record sheet with the recorded date on it. To avoid strain on the participants, interviews lasted no longer than fifteen minutes. For each interview the subjects sat individually at desks, facing the interviewer either at their school or at the interviewer's home. The interviews were later transcribed in traditional orthography. After this, the recorded sessions were collected in one record for each subject. These records were used as the main source of data.

28

### **III. Transfer and the Markedness Differential Hypothesis**

To measure the levels of language transfer, we start from Eckman's MDH. This model reflects an increasing desire on the part of many researchers (Rutherford 1983; Zobl 1983) to draw on research findings in the area of theoretical linguistics to explain various facts about second language acquisition. In particular, it represents Eckman's attempt to explain the process of second language in terms of language transfer (Babear 1988: 80), as "language transfer affects all linguistic subsystems including pragmatics and rhetoric, semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, phonetics and orthography" (Odlin 2003: 437). Being a strategy of the greatest interest in SLA, transfer is also (Weinreich 1953) a significant factor in linguistic theory.

Eckman's MDH is based on the notion of "typological markedness", which the author defines as follows: "A phenomenon or structure X in some language is relatively more marked than some other phenomenon or structure Y if cross-linguistically the presence of X in a language implies the presence of Y, but the presence of Y does not imply the presence of X". (Eckman 1985: 3).

Given this definition, the MDH states that "the areas of difficulty that a second language learner will have can be predicted on the basis of a comparison of the native language (NL) and the target language (TL) such that:

- a. those areas of TL that are different from the NL and are relatively more marked than in the NL will be difficult.
- b. the degree of difficulty associated with those aspects of the TL that are different and more marked than in the NL corresponds to the relative degree of markedness associated with those aspects.
- c. those areas of the TL that are different to the NL but not relatively more marked than in the NL will not be difficult” (Eckman 1985: 3-4).

An additional, less complex definition for the terms marked and unmarked, which are particularly important in linguistics, may be offered by using Zobl’s (1986: 180) approach to this concept: he considered a structure in L1 to be marked when there is no direct equivalent in L2, and unmarked when there is a similar one in L2.

In a linear interpretation, it seems clear that unmarked L1 structures tend to be transferred to L2, whilst this does not occur with marked structures (Eckman 1985; Kellerman 1977; Gass and Selinker 1992; Gundel and Tarone 1983; Zobl 1983, 1986; Rutherford 1984; Hyltenstam 1987). The concept of markedness has been defined in different ways but the idea of complexity, of relative frequency of use or of deviation from the norm is implicit in all of them. Therefore, we consider that *avoidance* and the negative structures *No +V* are unmarked but the forms *Aux-Neg*, *Don’t V* and *Analysed of Don’t* are marked forms. Following Eckman’s MDH, the former have a lower degree of markedness than the latter ones.

Based on MDH we assign indices to the degrees of markedness of each of the negative forms, and of *avoidance*, from low to high.

- a. *Avoidance* is the nearest form to the mother tongue and that which offers subjects the least difficulty and therefore its degree of markedness is zero. Avoidance has a low degree of markedness because it consists of the subjects’ use of expressions which are very close to their native language (e.g. affirming rather than using complex negation structures, using expressions in their own language or simple expressions such as yes and no). The subjects frequently resorted to *avoidance* strategies (Alonso Vázquez 2005). Some examples follow: (Q stands for question and A for the answer of the subjects).

Adult 3. Q: Did you go to swim yesterday?

A: It is winter.

Child 1. (Exercise to transform into the negative).

Q: There are two helicopters.

A: There are one helicopter.

Adult 1. Q: Was your mother sleeping when you arrived?

A: She was at work.

Adult 1. Q: Does Mr. Brown wear a hat?

A: No, tiene un paraguas. (He doesn't have an umbrella).

The closeness of some *avoidance* strategies to L1 is noteworthy. In fact on some occasions the replies are in Spanish.

- b. The transitional form *No+V* is the second nearest form for Spanish speakers, so we assign a markedness grade of 1: in fact this form is no more than the literal translation of verb negation in Spanish (e.g. I no understand = Yo no entiendo).
- c. The *aux-neg*, widely used in Spanish, has the grade of 2. This value relates to the syntactic closeness between the constructions in English and Spanish (e.g. I am not reading = Yo no estoy leyendo).
- d. The *don't V* form, which seems to be particularly difficult and distant for Spanish native speakers due to the non-existence of any similar form in Spanish, was given the grade of 3. (e.g. I don't go to school).
- e. The *analysed don't* form was the most difficult for our subjects and was marked as a 4 on the scale. (They didn't go to church).

There appears to be a similarity between these markedness grades and Ellis' (1994: 302-304) concept of positive and negative transfer. "In traditional accounts of language transfer, the research focus was placed on the errors [which] occurred as a result of the negative transfer of mother tongue patterns into the learner's L2". The *Don't V* and *Analysed Don't* forms are included in this category. On the other hand there is Facilitation, or positive transfer, as "the learner's L1 can also facilitate L2 learning [and] evidence of such a facilitative effect [...] can be best obtained through the longitudinal studies of individuals learners". This category leads us to the *No+V* form. But transfer also leads to *avoidance* as "learners also avoid using linguistic structures which they find difficult because of differences between their native language and their target language" (Ellis 1994: 304). Finally, transfer can lead to an "over-use or over indulgence of certain grammatical forms in L2 acquisition [...] as a result of intralingual overgeneralization", a category in which the *Aux-Neg* form is to be found.

Based on these markedness degrees, we have constructed the first row of Table 2.

	<b>Avoidance</b>	<b>No+V</b>	<b>Aux-Neg</b>	<b>Don't V</b>	<b>Anal. Don't</b>
Markedness Degree	0	1	2	3	4
Transfer Level	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low

TABLE 2. Markedness Degree and Transfer Level of negative and Avoidance for Spanish speakers

The figures in the second row were obtained in this way: *avoidance*, with the lowest degree of markedness was the easiest strategy, and as close as possible to the mother tongue, therefore representing the highest level of transfer possible, which we term *very high*. The second closest form to Spanish is *No+V*, to which we give a degree of markedness 1, and a level of transfer *high*. In third place closest to Spanish was the *Aux-Neg*, with a value of 2 and a *medium* level of transfer. The absence of an equivalent in Spanish for the auxiliary *Don't* lead to its being given a value of 3, and consequently a *low* transfer level. The highest markedness value, 4, corresponded to the *Analysed Don't* form, which is considered to have a transfer level of *very low*.

#### IV. Transfer in Spanish speakers learning English as Second Language (L2)

Cancino et al. (1978) is still considered to be one of the most relevant studies on the acquisition of the English negative in L2, and the four acquisitional stages (Stage I: *No+V*; Stage II: *Don't V*; Stage III: *Aux-Neg*. Stage IV: *Analysed Don't*) that these authors defined are still used as a basic reference in SLA. Applying the Markedness Degrees from Table 2 to Cancino's subjects' learning processes, gives the following table.

Stages	Markedness Degree	Transfer Level
STAGE I: No+V	1	HIGH
STAGE II: Don't V	3	LOW
STAGE III: Aux-Neg	2	MEDIUM
STAGE IV: Anal. of Don't	4	VERY LOW

TABLE 3. MARKNESS DEGREE AND TRANSFER LEVEL IN CANCINO

Cancino's subjects showed a high level of transfer in Stage I, but by Stage II, the acquisition of the form *Don't V*, it was far less in evidence. However, in Stage III, the frequent use of the *Aux-Neg* form showed a return to transfer. Finally, in *Stage IV*, the most advanced acquisitional stage, subjects had completely abandoned that strategy.

We concluded that transfer in the learning stages of Cancino's subjects is, on average, quite high, but it progresses in a cyclical manner in a dynamic process of

peaks and troughs with upward and downward tendencies. It is high in Stages I and III and low in Stages II and IV. This cyclical pattern is equally difficult to explain in terms of theories of Contrastive Analysis (Fries 1945; Lado 1957; Dipietro 1971) and in terms of theories of Interlanguage (Selinker 1972). Those theories predicted an increasing development of markedness degree from troughs to peaks, suggesting that transfer decreased as learning progressed, or in any case a nearly constant markedness degree, showing a stable presence of transfer. But neither of these studies explains the oscillations in the use of transfer which may be deduced from Cancino's results.

In other words, although the theories suggest a decreasing development, or at most a constant presence, of transfer as learning takes place, Cancino's results appear to point to a high degree of transfer in acquisition which develops in a cyclical path. The order of Stages 2 (*Don't V*) and 3 (*Aux-Neg*) breaking the chain of expected development in the sequence of markedness degree and transfer, is responsible for that result.

## V. An algorithm to determine the sequences

32

The unexpected development of transfer in Cancino et al's subjects has led us to carry out an exhaustive analysis of their methodology. It would seem that these authors determined the stages in an approximate way without using rigorous statistical methods. Their calculations lead them into certain errors which seem to require revision, although this does not detract from the importance of their findings. With this purpose in mind a statistical method was developed which enables us to delimit the development stages of our subjects' learning process.

In this study, a stage is defined as a stable period in the subjects' learning process in which there is a predominant use of one specific negative form and a less frequent use of the others. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 90) add the requirement of it being an obligatory path.

We consider that a form is *dominant* in the tests when it is the one most widely used, and we say that it is a *dominated* second, third, when it occupies this place in the level of use. We also consider that a form is *strongly dominant* when its use is notably more frequent than the following form, 10% or over, and that it is *weakly dominant* when the difference is lower than 10%. We also define the *intensity of use* of a form over a number of tests as the arithmetic mean of its frequency in those tests.

On the basis of these concepts, a stage is determined by the following criteria:

1. The *dominant* form.
2. The degree of dominance (*strong* or *weak*) over the second or third form.
3. The *intensity in the use* of every form.



## VI. Transfer in Cancino's (reformulated) Acquisitional Stages

Table 4 shows the acquisitional sequences which Cancino's subjects passed through when the stages are determined by applying the algorithm designed for this corrected study.

	<b>STAGE I: No+V</b>	<b>STAGE 2: Don't V</b>	<b>STAGE 3: Aux-Neg</b>
Subject 1	Tests 3-5 No+V: 37% Don't V: 5%	Tests 6-10 Don't V: 40% Aux-Neg: 16%	Tests 11-15 Aux-Neg: 48% Don't V: 23% An.Don't: 12%
Subject 2	Tests 3-7 Don't V: 31% No+V: 20% Aux-Neg: 12%	Tests 8-10 Don't V: 35% Aux-Neg: 32% An. Don't: 10%	NONE
Subject 3	Tests 1-8 Don't V: 38% Aux-Neg: 26% An. Don't: 15%	Tests 9-12 Aux-Neg: 31% Don't V: 21% An. Don't: 16%	Tests 12-18 Don't V: 32% An. Don't: 25% Aux-Neg: 20%
Subject 4	Tests 1-4 No+V: 54% Don't V: 14%	Tests 5-20 Don't V: 36% Aux-Neg: 21% An. Don't: 10%	NONE
Subject 5	Tests 1-20 No+V : 55% Don't V: 21%	NONE	NONE
Subject 6	Tests 1-3 An. Don't: 28% Don't V : 22% Aux-Neg: 16%	Tests 4-9 Don't V: 41% Aux-Neg: 22% An. Don't: 16%	NONE

TABLE 4. SEQUENCE OF LEARNING IN CANCINO (REFORMULATED) IN L2.

In this Table we show the number of tests corresponding to each stage for each subject, and the percentage of frequency of use of each verb form. Subject 1 stayed in Stage I for tests 3 to 5, with *No+V* being the most used form (37% of the negations were produced with this form), followed by *Don't V* with 5%. The other forms were not used as a significant percentage.

Table 4 shows the following results:

- a. In Stage I, three subjects (1, 4 and 5) used the construction *No+V* as the dominant form while the other two (2 and 3) used *Don't V*. Subject 6 used the

*Analysed Don't* as the dominant form.

- b. *Don't V* is the dominant form most frequently used in Stage 2, in which there is also a high frequency of *Aux-Neg* and a still significant use of *No+V*.
- c. In Stage 3 the dominant forms are also *Don't V* (subject 1) and *Aux-Neg* (subject 3), although in different proportions to those shown in Stage II.
- d. Contrary to Cancino's findings we did not note a Stage IV corresponding to the *Analysed Don't* in any of the subjects.

This new ordering of the sequences followed by Cancino's subjects means that the previous version of Table 3 needs to be modified. As previously noted, that table had been constructed on the basis of the general conclusions of Cancino et al, which briefly stated that the stages were the same for all subjects. However, the subjects did not use the same form in each Stage, thus subject 1 used *No+V* as the dominant form in the first Stage, whilst subject 2 used *Don't V*.

Now we consider each one of the dominant forms used by each of the subjects. With these data we have completed Table 5, showing the new markedness degrees and levels of transfer in our reformulation of Cancino's data.

34

<b>STAGES</b>	<b>Markedness Degree</b>	<b>Transfer Level</b>
STAGE I: No+V	2.2	MEDIUM
STAGE II: Don't V	2.5	MEDIUM/LOW
STAGE III: Aux-Neg	2.25	MEDIUM
STAGE IV:	Doesn't exist	Doesn't exist

TABLE 5. MARKEDNESS DEGREE AND TRANSFER LEVEL IN CANCINO (CORRECTED)

This more detailed analysis leads to the conclusion that the degree of transfer during the three Stages remains around a *medium level* with a stable markedness degree without any significant swings, contrary to Cancino's original calculations. Once this correction has been made, Cancino et al's results are in agreement with Contrastive Analysis and Interlanguage theory. Subjects in the L2 contexts used transfer during the whole acquisitional process at stable medium levels.

## VII. Sequences in the acquisition of the negative in English as a Foreign Language

In this section we present the sequences of our nine subjects in the context of EFL. Table 6 shows the results of applying the algorithm to this study's corpus data. The following points are drawn from this table:

- a. Most subjects went through two stages, *No+V* and *Aux-Neg*.
- b. In Stage 1, six subjects (2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9) used the *No+V* as the dominant form. Subjects 1 and 8 resorted to *Avoidance*, and 6 to *Aux-Neg*.
- c. In Stage 2, two subjects (3 and 8) used the *Aux-Neg* as the dominant structure, one used the *No+V* and two (2 and 4) used *Avoidance*.
- d. A subtle transition was noted in the dominant structures used by the subjects in each of the Stages.
- e. Use of the marked forms, *Don't V* and *Analysed Don't* is rare.

Table 7 shows transfer level and markedness degree data in the stages followed by our subjects when *Avoidance* is taken into account.

We conclude, firstly, that our subjects in the EFL context showed a high level of transfer evidenced by a frequent use of the least marked forms (*Avoidance*, *No+V* and *Aux-Neg*) and an almost non-existent use of the most marked forms (*Don't V* and *Analysed Don't*). We note that four subjects used '*Avoidance*' as the dominant strategy in at least one Stage.

The second significant conclusion from our subjects' learning strategies was that the level of transfer decreased, although slowly, as the subjects progressed. Thus, from a markedness degree of 0.89 in the first Stage they changed to 1 in the second. This result is in agreement with theories of linguistic transfer, which predict that transfer will decrease as learning progresses.

## VIII. Transfer and learning linguistic context

In order to compare our results with those of Cancino et al, it is necessary to homogenise the data by eliminating *Avoidance* from our study. The markedness degree and the level of transfer used by our subjects when *Avoidance* was eliminated are shown in Table 8.

	<b>STAGE I</b>	<b>STAGE II</b>	<b>STAGE III</b>
Subject 1	Tests 1-3 Avoidance: 31% Neg-Aux: 24% No+V: 23%	Tests 4-7 No+V: 53% Avoidance: 20% Neg-Aux: 20%	Test 8 Neg-Aux: 73% Avoidance: 23%
Subject 2	Tests 1-6 No+V: 41% Avoidance: 24% Neg-Aux: 18%	Tests 6-8 Avoidance: 48% Neg-Aux: 30% No+V: 13%	NONE
Subject 3	Tests 1-5 No+V: 38% Avoidance: 28% Neg-Aux: 25%	Tests 6-8 Neg-Aux: 51% Avoidance: 24% No+V: 13%	NONE
Subject 4	Tests 1-5 No+V: 39% Avoidance: 23% Don't V: 17%	Tests 6-8 Avoidance: 31% No+V: 30% Neg-Aux: 30%	NONE
Subject 5	Tests 1-8 No+V: 42% Avoidance: 29% Neg-Aux: 20%	NONE	NONE
Subject 6	Tests 1-8 Neg-Aux: 44%. No+V: 28% Avoidance: 16%.	NONE	NONE
Subject 7	Tests 1-8 No+V: 62%. Avoidance: 33%	NONE	NONE
Subject 8	Tests 1-5 Avoidance: 28% Neg-Aux: 26% Don't V: 20%	Tests 6-8 Neg-Aux: 70%. Avoidance: 18%	NONE
Subject 9	Tests 1-8 No+V: 57% Avoidance: 24%	NONE	NONE

TABLE 6. Learning sequences of our subjects in our sample of FL.

<b>STAGES</b>	<b>Markedness Degree</b>	<b>Transfer Level</b>
STAGE I: No+V	0.89	HIGH
STAGE II: Aux-Neg	1	HIGH

TABLE 7. Markedness Degree and Transfer Level in our sample in FL

## Transfer and linguistic context in the learning process of ...

STAGES	Markedness Degree	Transfer Level
STAGE I: No+V	1.3	HIGH
STAGE II: Aux-Neg	1.6	MEDIUM/HIGH

TABLE 8. Markedness Degree and Transfer Level in our sample in FL without *Avoidance*

From a comparison of the results with and without including *Avoidance*, we immediately notice that excluding it from SLA studies tends to diminish the importance of the presence of transfer. In fact, whilst the markedness degree in the first stage is 0.89, by excluding *Avoidance* it increases to 1.3. In the second stage it is 1 but increases to 1.6 by excluding *Avoidance*.

Table 9 shows a comparison of levels of transfer and markedness degree between our reformulation of Cancino's L2 study and our EFL study.

CANCINO (L2)		OUR STUDY (FL)	
Markedness Degree in Cancino (L2).	Transfer Level	Markedness Degree in our study (FL)	Transfer Level
Stage I: No+V: 2.2	Medium	Stage I: No+V: 1.3	High
Stage II: Don't V: 2.5	Medium	Stage II: Aux-Neg: 1.6	High/Medium
Stage III: Aux-Neg: 2.25	Medium	—	—

TABLE 9. Transfer in L2 and in FL

The difference in the markedness degree is highly significant. The figures for Cancino's L2 subjects (in Stage I) are almost double those of our subjects, and in Stage II, the markedness degree in Cancino's subjects is almost one point above ours. So, analysing Stages I and II together, we find that the markedness degree in Cancino's subjects is nearly double ours. Consequently, transfer in their subjects stayed at a medium level, while in ours it was situated at a medium-high one. Transfer is much higher in the EFL subjects than in the L2 ones.

Given that the subjects' cultural levels and initial levels of English in both studies were very similar and that there were different degrees of motivation, the most relevant difference between the two studies was the linguistic context in which acquisition took place. From this it may be deduced that the context had a strong influence on the presence of Linguistic Transfer in the acquisition of the English negative by Spanish L1 speakers.

Motivation is without doubt a factor of major importance, and the motivation of Cancino's subjects was presumably higher than ours, as a consequence of the context. Subjects in contexts of L2 are generally more motivated than in FL, as they need the second language for daily communication, Spolsky (1969) and Lukmani (1972). While integrative motivation is without doubt of great importance, Alptekin (1981) considers that instrumental motivation is equally effective. Theories of motivation in the L2 research reached a turning point in the 1990's with a variety of models and approaches put forward in the literature, resulting in what Gardner and Tremblay (1994) had called a "motivational renaissance" (Dörnyei and Skehan 2003: 621). This 'renaissance' initiated by Gardner's (1985) Canadian Social Psychological approach, which goes beyond the traditional integrative/instrumental orientation categories, centred on the relevance of the integrative motive. Within this complex concept are the following notions:

- i) integrativeness, subsuming interest to foreign languages and attitudes toward the learning process;
- ii) attitudes toward the learning situation, i.e. the attitude toward the teacher and the course;
- iii) motivation, representing the desire to learn the language; and
- iv) linguistic self-confidence, a concept introduced by Clement, Dörnyei and Noels (1994).

38

Gardner et al. (1997) systematised the factors of the socio-psychological approach, establishing: (1) that language attitudes were seen to cause motivation, (2) that motivation gave rise to self confidence and language learning strategies and (3) that field independence coincided with language aptitude. However, Robinson (2003) does not mention integration as one of the stimuli of attention, and puts emphasis on questions such as ability.

Based on the previous results we can state that the markedness degree in the sense used by Eckman is substantially higher in L2 contexts than in EFL ones, and consequently the degree of transfer is higher in EFL contexts than in L2 ones.

Most SLA studies (e.g. Ellis 1997) carried out on Spanish speakers have been in immersion contexts (L2), and for that reason little attention has been paid to how context influences acquisition. The immersion context was taken as the norm and so the relevance of context to learning was not taken into account. However, we suggest that context is not neutral, so that the degree of linguistic transfer is considerably higher in EFL contexts than in L2 ones.

## IX. Context and the learning stages

The results set out above can be interpreted in the light of the acquisitional stages. In the SLA literature of the 70s and 80s, special attention was paid to the study of acquisitional stages. In fact, as we have stated, Cancino et al's work was directed towards characterising these stages in the use of the English negative system by Spanish speakers, concluding that they were *No+V*, *Don't V*, *Aux-Neg* and *Analysed Don't*.

While respecting the findings of those studies, we have shown that when analysing Cancino's data with our algorithm, the fourth stage (*Analysed Don't*) does not appear. Furthermore, from our study in an EFL context, we conclude that the context fundamentally alters the order of the learning stages which the learners go through, in such a way that *Aux-Neg* is the dominant form in the second stage instead of *Don't V* as in Cancino et al's. These results are shown in Table 10, where we show Cancino's Stages and our reformulation (both in an L2 context), and our study in an EFL context.

Stages in Cancino (L2)	Cancino corrected (L2)	Stages in our study (FL)
I. No+V	I. No+V	I. No+V
II. Don't V	II. Don't V	II. Aux-Neg
III Aux-Neg	III. Aux-Neg	III. (Undetermined)
IV. Analysed Don't	IV. (Doesn't appear)	IV. (Undetermined)

TABLE 10. Stages in context of L2 and of FL

In the above table we see that the stages which the subjects go through in the L2 contexts are different from those in our EFL one, and that the main difference is in Stage II, in which Cancino's subjects use the form *Don't V*, whilst ours use the *Aux-Neg*.

The above findings would seem to indicate that the order of acquisitional stages of the English negative for Spanish speakers varies according to the context in which learning takes place.

## X. Conclusions

Eckman's MDH together with Zobl's DCR and the findings of Selinker have led to a revival of language transfer theory. Since its appearance, many researchers have

directed their efforts towards demonstrating the importance of transfer as a learning strategy. However, two areas remain to be studied, firstly the quantitative importance of transfer, and secondly, the relevance of linguistic context to acquisition.

In this article, through Eckman's MDH, we have made an index that has enabled us to measure transfer in the acquisition of the English negative system. We applied this index to Cancino et al's Spanish speaking subjects acquiring English in an L2 context, and to our subjects in an EFL context. We found that linguistic transfer was far less frequent in the L2 context subjects than in our own, suggesting that context appears not to be neutral when it comes to using learning strategies.

We also saw that the stages followed by the subjects are different in the two contexts; subjects in both contexts coincide in Stage 1, *No+V*, but differ in Stage 2: L2 subjects in Stage 2 have a preference for *Don't V*, whilst EFL subjects prefer *Aux-Neg*.

An additional result is that the order of the acquisitional stages seems to be nothing more than evidence of transfer. So, when Spanish speakers learning English in EFL contexts show a high level of transfer, they are following an order of stages using forms from a lower to higher markedness degree: firstly *No+V* and then *Aux-Neg*. However, subjects in L2 contexts, i.e. integrated into the linguistic environment, use *No+V* as well in the first stage but in the second resort less to transfer, using *Don't V* instead of *Aux-Neg*, although both may be used interchangeably.

40

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup>. Rather than an analysed form it seems more of a verb prefix+verb.

<sup>2</sup>. The calculation was carried out in the following way: in Stage 1, subject 1 used *No+V* as the dominant form, which gives a value of 1; subject 2 used *don't V* as the dominant structure, giving a value of 3; subject

3 also used *don't V*; subjects 4 and 5 used *No+V*, giving 1; subject 6 used the *analysed don't*, with a value of 4. The markedness degree in this stage will be given by  $(1+3+3+1+1+4)/6= 2.2$ .



## Works cited

---

- ALONSO VÁZQUEZ, María Cristina. 2005. "Avoidance as a learning strategy". *Estudios Ingleses de la Universidad Complutense*, 13: 67-84.
- ALPTEKIN, Cem. 1981. "Sociopsychological and pedagogic considerations in L2 acquisition". *TESOL Quarterly*, 15: 275-284.
- BABEAR, Saleh I. 1988. *An Investigation of the Avoidance Behaviour in Adult Second Language Learners*. Ph. D. Thesis. Indiana University.
- BUTTERWORTH, Guy A. and Evelyn M. HATCH. 1978. "A Spanish-speaking adolescent's acquisition of English syntax". In Hatch, E. M. (ed.): 231-245.
- CANCINO, Herlinda, Ellen J. ROSANSKY and John H. SCHUMANN. 1978. "The acquisition of English negatives and interrogatives by native Spanish speakers". In Hatch, E. M. (ed.): 207-230.
- CLEMENT, Richard, Zoltán DÖRNYEI, and K. A. NOELS. 1994. "Motivation, self-confidence and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom". *Language Learning*, 44: 417-448.
- DIPIETRO, Robert. 1971. *Language structures in contrast*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- DÖRNYEI, Zoltán and Peter SKEHAN. 2003. "Individual Differences in L2 Learning". In Doughty, C. J. and M. H. Long. (eds.): 589-630.
- DOUGHTY, Catherine J. and Michael H. LONG. (eds.). 2003. *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- DUSKOVÁ, Libuse. 1969. "On sources of errors in foreign language learning". *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 7: 11-36.
- ECKMAN, Fred. 1985. "The Markedness Differential Hypothesis: Theory and Application". In Wheatley, Barbara. (ed.). *Current Approaches to Second Language Acquisition. Proceedings of the 1984 University of Wisconsin-Madison Linguistics Symposium*. Bloomington, Id.: Indiana University Linguistics Club: 3-21.
- ELLIS, Rod. 1994. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford U. P.
- 1997. *SLA Research and Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford U. P.
- FRIES, Charles C. 1945. *Teaching and learning English as a foreign language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- GARDNER, Robert C. 1985. *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- GARDNER, Robert C. and Paul F. TREMBLAY. 1994. "On motivation, research agendas, and theoretical frameworks". *Modern Language Journal*, 78: 359-368.
- GARDNER, Robert C., Paul F. TREMBLAY and Anne-Marie MASGORET. 1997. "Towards a full model of second language learning: an empirical investigation". *Modern Language Journal*, 81:344-362.
- GASS, Susan M. and Larry SELINKER. (eds.). 1983. *Language Transfer in Language Learning*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- 1992. *Language Transfer in Language Learning*. Revised edition. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- GIBBONS, John. 1985. "The silent period: an examination". *Language Learning*, 35: 255-67.
- GUNDEL, Jeanette K. and Elaine E. TARONE. 1983. "Language transfer and the acquisition of pronominal anaphora". In Gass, S. M. and L. Selinker. (eds.): 281-296.

- JARVIS, Scott and Terence ODLIN. 2000. "Morphological type, Spatial Reference and Language Transfer". *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 22: 535-556.
- HATCH, Evelyn M. (ed.). *Second Language Acquisition: A Book of Readings*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House.
- HYLTENSTAM, Kenneth. 1987. "Markedness, language universals, language typology, and second language acquisition". In Pfaff, Carol. (ed.). *First and second language acquisition process*. Cambridge, Mass.: Newbury House: 55-78.
- KELLERMAN, Eric. 1977. "Towards a characterisation of the strategy of transfer in second language learning". *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin*, 2: 58-145.
- KRASHEN, Stephen D. 1982. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- LADO, Robert. 1957. *Linguistics across cultures*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- LARSEN-FREEMAN, Diane and Michael H. LONG. 1991. *An Introduction to Second Language Research*. London: Longman.
- LUKMANI, Y. 1972. "Motivation to learn and language proficiency". *Language Learning*, 22: 261-273.
- NEFF, JoAnne, Juana M. LICERAS and Lourdes DÍAZ. 1997. *A Parametric Perspective of EFL Acquisition in Institutional Contexts*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- ODLIN, Terence. 1989. *Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning*. New York: Cambridge U. P.
- ODLIN, Terence. 2003. "Cross-Linguistic Influence". In Doughty, C. J. and M. H. Long. (eds.): 436-486.
- ROBINSON, Peter. 2003. "Attention and Memory during SLA". In Doughty, C. J. and M. H. Long. (eds.): 631-678.
- RUTHERFORD, William E. 1983. "Language Typology and language transfer". In Gass, S. M. and L. Selinker. (eds.): 358-370.
- RUTHERFORD, William E. (ed.). 1984. *Language universals and second language acquisition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- SAVILLE-TROIKE, Muriel. 1988. "Private speech: evidence for second language learning strategies during the silent period". *Journal of Child Language*, 15: 567-90.
- SCHUMANN, John H. 1979. "The Acquisition of English negation by speakers of Spanish: a review of the literature". In Andersen, R. (ed.). *The Acquisition and Use of Spanish and English as First and Second Languages*. Washington DC: TESOL: 3-32.
- 1986. "Research on the acculturation model for second language acquisition". *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 7: 379:392.
- SELINKER, Larry. 1972. "Interlanguage". *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 10: 209-231.
- SELINKER, Larry. 1992. *Rediscovering Interlanguage*. London: Longman.
- SPOLSKY, Bernard. 1969. "Attitudinal aspects of second language learning". *Language Learning*, 19: 271-285.
- WEINREICH, Uriel. 1953. *Languages in Contact*. The Hague: Mouton.
- ZOBL, Helmut. 1983. "Markedness and the projection problem". *Language Learning*, 33: 293-313.
- ZOBL, H. 1986. "Word order typology, lexical government and the prediction of multiple, graded effects in L2 word order". *Language Learning*, 36: 159-183.