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Expletive presentational constructions in L3 acquisition by Norwegian L1, English L2 learners

Background

Expletive presentational construction (EPC)

- Any expression used to introduce previously unmentioned entities into the discourse and featuring a (potentially silent) expletive in the subject position

English: **There are** some books on the table.

Norwegian: **Det er** noen bøker på bordet.

Spanish: **Hay** algunos libros sobre la mesa.

French: **Il y a** quelques livres sur la table.

German: **Es gibt** einige Bücher auf dem Tisch.

Cross-linguistic influence (CLI)

- Any plausible interaction between the target languages (L3/Ln) and any previously acquired languages (L1, L2), facilitative or detrimental (Jarvis, 2017)
- Includes word-for-word translation produced based on perceived similarities between L1/L2 and L3/Ln (Odlin & Yu, 2016)
- Learner intuitions based on L1 or L2 may speed up or block target-like production
- L1 Norwegian learners of L2 English often struggle with EPCs in English (Dypedahl & Hasselgård, 2018; examples from TRAWL):
 - It is someone in Norway that still is racist...* (P01002_Y09_TALC_V0_ORIG)
 - Sometimes there is impossible to make an agreement...* (P01002_Y10_WAPE_V1_ORIG)

Research questions

RQ1: To what extent do Norwegian learners of L3 Spanish, French, and German use EPCs correctly in their texts?

RQ2: Is there a pattern of transfer from either L1 Norwegian or L2 English in the L3/Ln data?

RQ3: Are there any differences between the L3 languages?

Data and method

Texts from TRAWL (Dirdal et al. 2023)

- Year 11-12 (16-18-year-olds)
- Written at school and at home
- Spanish, German, French as L3/Ln, level 2
- 11 pupils with L1 other than Norwegian

Coding:

- All texts screened manually
- Sentences with expletive constructions coded as correct, incorrect (use of BE), or inappropriate (use of a different verb or omission)

Quantitative analysis:

- Proportions of errors per text
- Proportions of errors per construction/language
- Development across languages and years

Qualitative analysis:

- Types of errors
- Inappropriate use

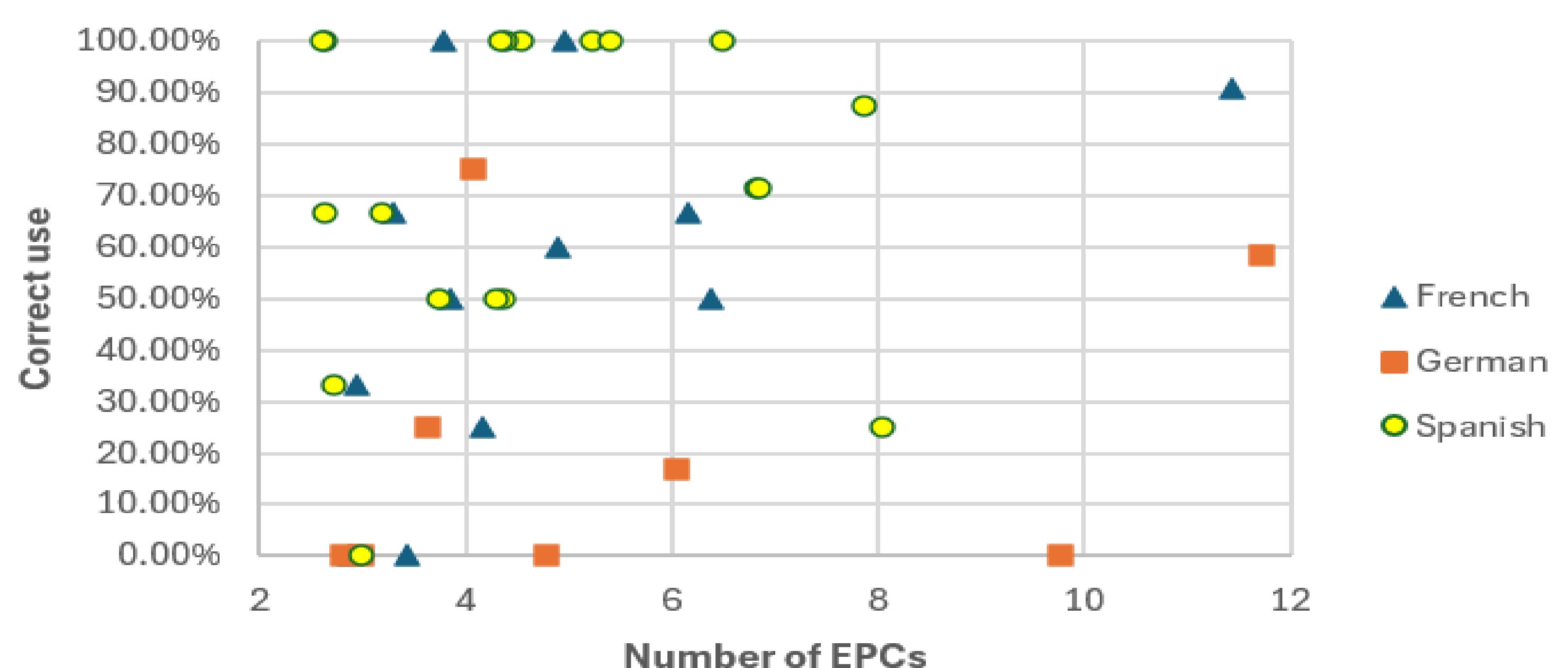
Main findings

- Most students have not fully mastered EPCs by 2nd year of high school
- Correct and incorrect use overlap in texts
- Many learners seem to avoid EPCs and opt for alternative constructions
- There are noticeable differences between the successful use in Spanish (75.6%), French (61.5%), and German (23.6%)
- No clear connection between the use of EPCs and language proficiency

Results

Language	Students	Texts	Tokens	Extracted EPCs	Correct EPCs	Success rate
Spanish	53	125	33951	125	92	73.6 %
French	31	90	31009	78	48	61.5 %
German	13	130	27442	55	13	23.6 %

Distribution for pupils with > 3 EPCs



Type of error	Learner sentence	Literal translation	Correct expression	Source
Incorrect	<i>Aqui fue muchas coches antiguos.</i>	Here was many cars antiques.	<i>Aquí había muchos coches...</i>	P60003_Y12_VI AC_V0_ORIG
Incorrect	<i>Il est très beaucoup peuple dans la photo.</i>	It is very much people in the photo.	<i>Il y a beaucoup de gens...</i>	P00191_Y12_M AIN_V0_ORIG
Incorrect	<i>Es ist viel Sonne und nicht Regen.</i>	It is much sun and not rain.	<i>Es gibt viel Sonne...</i>	P60664_Y12_S CHU_V0_ORIG
Inappropriate	<i>Luego yo hay ingles y finalmente ciencias naturales.</i>	Later I there is English and finally sciences natural.	<i>Luego tengo inglés...</i>	P60002_Y11_C UBA_V0_ORIG
Inappropriate	<i>Tienen mucho chocolate en Baracoa.</i>	They have much chocolate in Baracoa.	<i>Hay mucho chocolate...</i>	P60017_Y12_H ABA_V0_ORIG
Inappropriate	<i>En France a beaucoup une bonne nourriture.</i>	In France has much a good food.	<i>En France il y a beaucoup...</i>	P00215_Y12_LY CE_V0_ORIG
Inappropriate	<i>Il y a incroyable je vais sur film de d'horreur.</i>	There is a unbelievable I go on horror movie	<i>C'est incroyable, je vais voir...</i>	P00182_Y12_CI NE_V0_ORIG

Possible interpretations

- Higher success rates in Spanish could indicate higher salience of *hay* which is likely taught only in an EPC construction (*a* in French and *gibt* in German occur as main verbs as well).
- Spanish is the only pro-drop language, which could influence the willingness to transfer directly from L1 Norwegian or L2 English, which are not pro-drop.
- Tener* and *haber* both mean “to have” but *haber* can only be used as an auxiliary. Learners sometimes used *haber* as a main verb or use *tener* as an alternative EPC.
- German invites for word-for-word translation from Norwegian due to typological similarities.

Further research

- More data is needed for longitudinal conclusions, but problems with EPCs persist over time.
- Numerous learners use EPCs more and make more mistakes in Y12 than in Y11, which could indicate more advanced language use in areas with lower proficiency (experimenting).
- Elicited production or acceptability judgments could help understand the source of the errors.