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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As Chris Gardner says in *the Pursuit of Happiness* (2007), "if you want something, go and get it. Period." And that is what I have done! The present Master thesis is the result of hours and hours of hard work, persistence and enthusiasm. Nevertheless, behind this personal project, I have been fortunate to have a large number of people who have never stop believing in me, and who deserved a few words.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ø: Null element (in this study, null complementizer)

#: Number

AJT: Acceptability Judgment Task

A: Accepted

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

H: Hypothesis

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

N-A: Non-Accepted

Null Prep: Null Preposition

PPiP: Preposition Pied-Piping

PS: Preposition Stranding

PRC: Preposition Relative Clause

PT: Production Task

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

SpecCP: Specifier Position of the Complementizer Clause

ABSTRACT

Prepositional Relative Clauses are grammatical structures which can be formed through two different processes: Preposition Pied-Piping (PPiP) or Preposition Stranding (PS). English and Spanish are languages which differ with respect to the formation of Prepositional Relative Clauses in the sense that whereas in English both options are allowed, in Spanish there is only one possibility, PPiP. The following dissertation is an empirical study whose main objective is that of investigating the acquisition process of these structures in Spanish speakers who are currently studying English as their L2 and belong to different English proficiency levels. To do so, 24 L1 Spanish students were selected to complete two tasks which tested the comprehension and production of Prepositional Relative Clauses in English. The results show that the participants did not resort to their L1 when they contemplated these structures in their L2 regardless their proficiency level in English, as most of them produced and accepted the option that is not available in Spanish, or in other words, PS. Apart from this, it has been also observed an important number of cases where the preposition was omitted, which decreased as the level of proficiency in English was higher.

Keywords: Prepositional Relative Clauses, Preposition Pied-Piping, Preposition Stranding, Null Preposition, Second Language Acquisition, Spanish, English.

RESUMEN

Las cláusulas relativas preposicionales son un tipo de estructuras que pueden formularse a través de dos procesos cuyos términos en inglés son Preposition Pied-Piping (PPiP) y Preposition Stranding (PS). El inglés y el español difieren con respecto a la formación de cláusulas relativas preposicionales, puesto que mientras que en inglés ambas opciones son perfectamente posibles, en español solo existe una disponible, PPiP. El siguiente trabajo se trata de un estudio empírico que pretende investigar la adquisición de estas

estructuras en hablantes de español que, actualmente, se encuentran estudiando inglés como su L2 y cuyo conocimiento del inglés varía según distintos niveles. Para llevar a cabo este objetivo, se seleccionaron a 24 estudiantes de inglés con español como L1 para completar dos tareas que ponían a prueba tanto la comprensión como la producción de cláusulas relativas preposicionales en inglés. Los resultados muestran que, independientemente de su nivel de inglés, los participantes de este estudio no recurrieron a su L1 a la hora de contemplar estas estructuras en su L2, ya que la opción más producida y aceptada fue la que no está disponible en español, es decir, PS. Además, también se ha observado un número importante de casos de omisión de la preposición en estas estructuras, aunque la proporción de estos casos resultó menor en participantes con una alta competencia en inglés.

Palabras clave: Cláusulas Relativas Preposicionales, Preposition Pied-Piping, Preposition Stranding, Preposición Nula, Adquisición de Segunda Lengua, Español, Inglés.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last 50 years or so, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has gained significant importance both in Linguistic Theory and Second-Language Teaching Research. According to Gass and Selinker (2008, 1), SLA is "the study of how second languages are learned"; that is, the study of how students learn another language which is different from their mother tongue or first language (L1). This area of linguistic research is interested on the investigation of the different factors that conditions the learning process as well as the difficulties and problems that learners may encounter when facing new linguistic information and the different types of errors they may commit.

The present study wants to contribute to the theory of SLA by examining the acquisition of English Prepositional Relative Clauses (PRCs, henceforth) in three different proficiency groups of Spanish learners of English. PRCs constitute the ideal grammatical item for this study, not only because of its complex nature but also because of the differences that present English and Spanish in relation to these structures. Considering this, and basing on previous works on these structures, two different tasks based on the comprehension and production of PRCs in English have been designed.

The present Master thesis consists of 7 sections in addition to the current one: first, section 2 is devoted to presenting a general description of the formulation of Prepositional Relative Clauses in English, and compare them to the Spanish ones. Then, section 3 offers a summary of some of the most relevant empirical studies accounting on how different groups of L2 English learners produce and/or comprehend these structures. In section 4, the research questions and hypotheses that this study aims to answer are exposed; and afterwards, in section 5, the methods and materials, including the participants' profile (5.1) and the two tasks employed (5.2), are outlined. The next two sections, i.e. sections 6 and 7, present an analysis of the results obtained in each task and the answer to the

research questions, respectively. Finally, in section 8 the main conclusions are provided. Besides, at the end of this dissertation, an ANNEX with the sentences included in the two tasks is provided.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE PREPOSITIONAL RELATIVE CLAUSE IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH

PRCs are characterized for being structures in which the element that is relativized is a prepositional phrase, i.e. a phrase that is made up of a preposition and its complement. These type of relative clauses can undergo two different processes in English, ***Preposition Pied Piping (PPiP)*** as in (1a) and ***Preposition Stranding (PS)*** as in (1b).

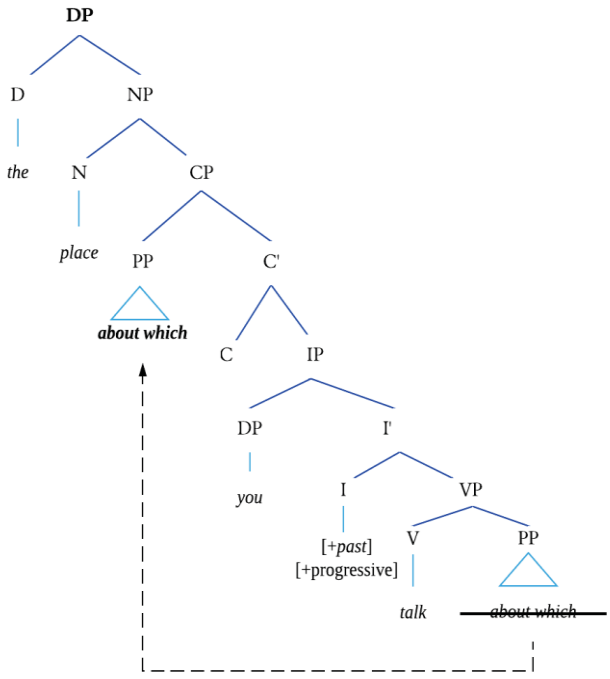
1)

a. [The place *about which* you were taking]$_{PRC}$ is Denver
b. [The place *which* you were talking *about*]$_{PRC}$ is Denver

(Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999, 581)

Broadly speaking, PPiP is the term employed in linguistics to refer to the syntactic phenomenon by which a preposition moves together with its complement to the front of the relative clause, or, to be more precise, to the Specifier position of the Complementizer phrase (SpecCP) as occurs in ***Figure 1***.

Figure 1. *Representation of the PPiP operation in English*



In ***Figure 1***, it is possible to see how the preposition *about* and its complement, the relative pronoun *which*, move as a whole constituent from its initial position (after the verb *talk*) to occupy the one of the SpecCP.

In English, PPiP is conditioned by two principal factors: the level of formality and the type of relative element. In terms of formality, PPiP is a process which, though completely possible in English, is infrequent and normally restricted to very formal registers of the language. In fact, Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 628) recommend not to use it in colloquial speech to avoid "an impression of stuffiness and pedantry". Regarding the type of relative element, PPiP can only occur when the preposition is followed by a wh-pronoun, such as which in the examples above mentioned or *whom* in (2); hence being impossible to "pied-pipe" prepositions with complementizers like *that* or zero relative *(∅*) as in (3a) and (3b), respectively.

2) The boy to *whom* you were talking

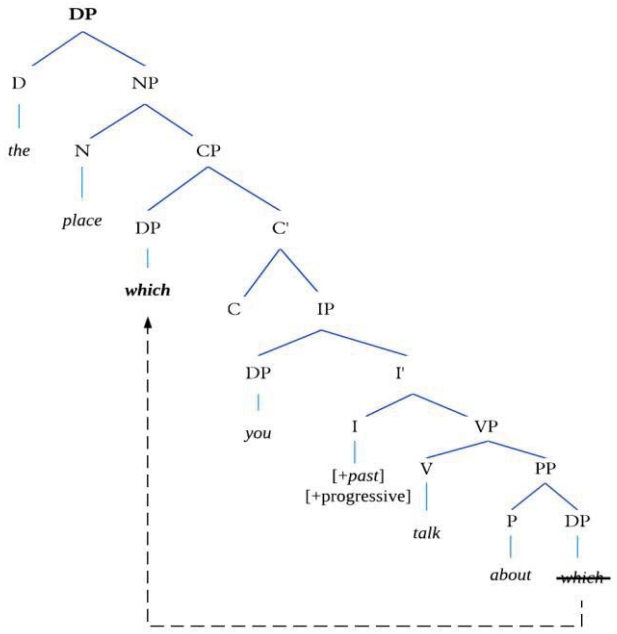
3)

a. *The place/boy about *that* you were talking
b. *The place/boy about *∅* you were talking

(Adapted from Perpiñán-Hinarejos 2008, 40)

Together with PPiP, the other way to form PRCs in English is PS. PS is the process by which the preposition "does not move along with its object" (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 254) but rather stays in its original position as ***Figure 2*** illustrates.

Figure 2. *Representation of the PS operation in English*



In this case, the wh-relative pronoun *which* is the only element that moves to the SpecCP leaving the preposition *about* detached or "dangling" (Klein 1993, Perpiñán-Hinarejos 2008, Perpiñán-Hinarejos 2010) at the end of the sentence without an immediate complement.

Contrary to PPiP, PS is considered to be the most common process for the formulation of PRCs in "standard and oral English" (Perpiñán-Hinarejos 2010, 43-44). Besides, this process is not conditioned by the relative element, as it can occur with both, wh-pronouns as in (4), and complementizers as in (5).

4)

a. The place *which* you were talking *about*
b. The boy *who* you were talking *about*

5)

a. The place/boy *that* you talked *about*
b. The place/boy Ø you talked *about*

(Adapted from Perpiñán-Hinarejos 2008, 40)

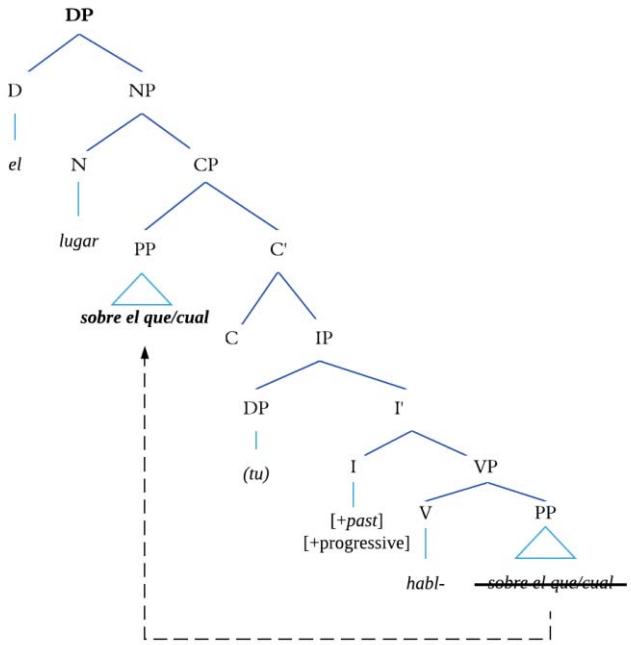
The fact that in English these two processes are allowed does not mean that the rest of the languages also do so. Actually, there are many languages such as Spanish which only permit PPiP for the formulation of PRCs as (6) demonstrates.

6)

a. [El lugar *sobre el que/cual* estabas hablando]$_{PRC}$ era Denver
b. *[El lugar *el que/el cual* estabas hablando *sobre*]$_{PRC}$ era Denver

In (6a) the preposition *sobre* has been pied-pied with the relative pronouns *el que/cual*, and in (6b) it has been left stranded. As can be seen from the examples above, in Spanish it is ungrammatical to have the preposition separated from its complement, and so, the only possible way to construct a PRC in this language would be then, to move *sobre* to the front of the relative clause along with the relative pronoun as ***Figure 3*** shows.

Figure 3. *Representation of the PPiP operation in Spanish*



The similarities and differences that can be found across languages with respect to the availability of these two processes have currently turn PRCs into an interesting area of investigation that has attracted the attention of different SLA studies. Section 3 captures and summarizes some of the most important previous works related to this linguistic property.

3. EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK: PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE ACQUISITION OF PPiP AND PS IN ENGLISH PRCS

Most of the previous literature dealing with PRCs has been especially focused on the exploration of PPiP and PS in English learners whose L1 lacks the PS construction (Mazurkewich (1985); Bardovi-Harlig (1987); Salehi (2009); Sadighi, Parhizgar and Saadat's (2004)). The conclusions reached by these studies display conflicting results which point to two main directions: (i) ***Transfer of the L1 properties***, that is, learners rely on previous linguistic knowledge (i.e. in their L1) and apply it to the L2; and (ii) ***Salience of the PS structure***, by which learners employ the structure which is more productive or more common in the L2, as a consequence of the input received during the learning process.

Bearing these two concepts in mind, the following paragraphs offer a brief review of some of the most influential studies on the acquisition of English PRCs.

Mazurkewich (1985) conducted a study on PPiP and PS in English dative questions to determine which of the two processes is acquired first. In order to do so, she employed two groups of English adult learners: one, whose L1 was French (where only PPiP is possible in dative structures), and other whose L1 was Inuktitut (a language from the North of Canada which does not have prepositions and so neither type of PRC is found). Besides, for the experiment, each group was, in turn, divided according to their level of proficiency into beginner, intermediate and advanced.

The task consisted of a question formation exercise where the participants had to create a series of questions with the prepositions *to* and *for*. The results showed that French learners of English tended to produce more dative questions with PPiP (i.e. ***To whom*** *was the wallet returned*) than with PS (i.e. ***Whom*** *was the wallet returned* ***to****?*) regardless of their proficiency, whereas Inuktitut learners were more likely to employ PS even in the

most elementary levels. The results on the part of French learners could be interpreted as a clear instance of transfer from the L1 as PPiP is the only available option in their mother tongue. Nevertheless, in the case of the Inuktitut speakers whose language does not present PPiP nor PS processes due to the absence of prepositions, the preference for PS seemed to be more in line with the salience of this structure in English.

Later, Bardovi-Harlig (1987) carried out a similar study where she included not only wh-questions with PPiP and PS, but also relative clauses. In this case, a total of 95 learners of English with 15 different L1s (Spanish, German, Chinese, French, Japanese, among others) and 9 proficiency levels (from beginning to advanced) were selected to complete the experiment. Even though the participants in this experiment differed in their country of origin and their proficiency in the L2, all of them shared the fact that in neither of their L1s the PS option was possible. This study included two sentence-combining tasks in which participants had to mix two sentences to obtain a dative question or a PRC.

The results, in this case, showed that, even though PS is not available in their L1 grammars, participants generally produced more PRCs with PS than with PPiP. In the light of this, Bardovi-Harlig (1987) rejected transfer as a possible explanation for the acquisition of these structures, and, supported salience as a more satisfactory account. Together with this, she also observed several cases in which the preposition was omitted as in (7).

7) *The policeman Bill reported the accident __ arrested him

[***Correct expected responses:***

- PPiP: The policeman ***to whom*** Bill reported the accident arrested him
- PS: The policeman Bill reported the accident ***to*** arrested him]

(Bardovi-Harlig 1987, 393)

This phenomenon is often referred to as ***Null Preposition phenomenon (Null Prep)*** and it is generally condemned by the prescriptive grammar. In Bardovi-Harlig's study (1987, 404), Null Prep was especially instantiated in the most elementary levels and gradually disappeared as proficiency in the L2 increased. For this reason, she suggested that the Null Prep phenomenon could be "an initial stage through which L2 learners pass".

In the same line as Mazurkewich (1985) and Bardovi-Harlig (1987), Salehi (2009) examined the order of acquisition of PPIP and PS but, in this case, in 30 Iranian MA students of non-English majors with three different levels of proficiency (high, intermediate and low). The task these participants performed consisted on a series of relative clauses they had to complete with the information given and a wh-relative pronoun (complementizers were not tested because as already pointed out, they cannot be pied-pied with prepositions). An example of this task is provided in (8).

8) The person …….was Louise.
Information for completing the sentence: Allen lent 100 dollars to the person

[*Expected responses*:

- PPiP: The person ***to who(m)*** Allen lent 100 dollars was Louise
- PS: The person ***who*** Allen lent 100 dollars ***to*** was Louise]

(Salehi 2009, 91)

Once analyzed the responses, the author found conflicting results amongst the Iranian speakers that can be summarized as follows: those belonging to the advanced level produced more constructions with PPiP than with PS; those in the intermediate group preferred by far those structures with PS, and those in the low proficiency group opted for Null Prep structures. Taking into account that Persian (the language spoken by Iranians) is a language which, only presents the PPiP configuration as Spanish, these results suggested that learners with high proficiency in the L2 were the ones who relied more on their L1 to construct English PRCs. Consequently, Salehi concluded that these

findings go against most of the previous literature on SLA which suggests that transfer mainly occurs at the beginning and not at the end of the acquisition process. Moreover, the fact that learners in the low level did not show any significant preference for PPiP nor for PS made him impossible to determine which of the two processes is first acquired when learning PRCs in English.

Much more revealing were the results in Sadighi, Parhizgar and Saadat's study (2004), whose main aim was also to investigate the acceptability and production of PPiP, PS and Null Prep in relative and interrogative clauses by Iranian speakers with English as a Foreign Language (EFL). For this study, the researchers selected 80 participants that were divided into three different groups depending on their level of English: low, mid and high. Unlike Salehi (2009), the methodology employed in this case was an Acceptability Judgment Test (AJT) immediately followed by a correction task in which the participants had to correct the sentences they had considered to be ungrammatical. The data elicited from these Iranian EFL speakers pointed to a strong preference towards PS in the low and mid-levels of proficiency, but not in the advanced group where its use drastically decreased and, consequently, there was a substantial increase in the number of constructions with PPiP. The early emergence of the PS option within the lowest group of proficiency was attributed to the salience of the PS option in English, whilst the preference for the PPiP option by the advanced learners obtained was not ascribed to transfer in this case, but rather to the "classroom instruction recommending […] the formal supremacy of preposition pied-piping over preposition stranding" (Sadighi, Parhizgar and Saadat's 2004, 28). As for the question of Null prep constructions, the results showed that all the participants were fairly tolerant to the omission of the preposition both in questions and relative clauses. However, and, coinciding with

Bardovy-Harlig's study (1987), as the level of proficiency in the L2 became higher, the number of ungrammatical Null Prep constructions decreased.

These studies have shown that the acquisition of English PRCs by L2 learners seems to be a controversial area in which there is not a general consensus on whether it is the L1 or the salience of the PS structure in English what eventually conditions its learning. Hence, the present study wants to contribute to this research by conducting an empirical study on this type of structures in Spanish native speakers who are learning English as their L2. In addition, and following the majority of these studies, the level of proficiency of these students will be taken into account as a potentially influential factor. The next section offers the main objective that has guided the present study as well as the hypotheses to be tested.

4. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

This master thesis is an empirical study that aims at exploring the acquisition of English PRCs by Spanish native speakers in order to see to what extent the L1 influences the production and comprehension of these structures, as well as to observe other related issues such as the status of Null Prep in the interlanguage of these participants. To do so, two tasks were designed: an AJT where participants had to provide their perception about a series of sentences, and a production task (PT) which induced them to construct PRCs to answer a question.

So, taking into account the objectives of this study and the results obtained in the previous empirical works, some hypotheses have been formulated in relation to three principal aspects they address, that is, the influence of the participants' L1, the omission of the preposition (Null Prep phenomenon) and the role of proficiency.

- ***Hypothesis #1: Transfer of the L1 will be instantiated***

If influence from the L1 occurs, it is expected that in general, participants would accept and produce more structures with PPiP configuration than those with PS, thus suggesting ***transfer*** of the only available structure as the main explanation for the acquisition of PRCs as occurred in Mazurkewich (1987) and Salehi's (2009) studies. If on the contrary this influence is not evidenced (i.e., PPiP is not accepted and/or produced over PS) other explanation such as the ***Salience of PS in English*** must be accounted (as Bardovi-Harlig (1987) Sadighi, Parhizgar and Saadat's (2004) did).

- ***Hypothesis #2: Preposition omission will occur (Null Prep Phenomenon)***

Taking into account the studies carried out by other authors such as Bardovi-Harlig (1987), Salehi (2009) and Sadighi, Parhizgar and Saadat (2004), it is expected that

all L2 learners of English will certainly accept and produce high percentages of PRCs with no preposition.

- ***Hypothesis #3: Proficiency in L2 will play a role***

If proficiency plays an important role in the acceptability and production of PRC constructions two situations are expected:

a. In the case of PPiP and PS, it is assumed that those groups with higher proficiency in the L2 will provide results that resemble those of the natives and reflect the different factors that condition these structures (i.e. due to formality and frequency of occurrence in English, more PS than PPiP);
b. For Null Prep constructions, it is expected that the percentages decrease as the level of the participant's proficiency increases paralleling the results obtained in the studies conducted by Bardovi-Harlig (1987) and Sadighi, Parhizgar and Saadat (2004).

Once the hypotheses have been determined, the following section contains all the information regarding the experiments that were designed to achieve the main aim of this empirical study.

5. EMPIRICAL STUDY

This section provides a detailed description of the participants' profile that took part in this study (section 5.1) as well as of the methods and materials employed (section 5.2).

5.1. PARTICIPANTS

For the purpose of this study, a total of 29 participants were selected to complete the experimental tasks designed. These participants aged between 16 and 25 and were separated into 2 different groups, experimental and control. The information related to these two types of participants has been gathered in Table 1.

Table 1. *L1 Spanish-L2 English participants' background information*

	GROUP & LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY	**# OF PARTICIPANTS**	**CURRENT ACADEMIC SITUATION**
EXPERIMENTAL	LOW (A2)[1]	8	High School (4th ESO)
	INTERMEDIATE (B2)	8	University
	HIGH (C1)	8	Master and University
CONTROL	CONT (natives)	5	University

The experimental group was made up of 24 L1 Spanish-L2 English speakers who were equally divided into sub-groups of 8 students according to their level of proficiency in English: low, intermediate and high. The low proficiency group includes students who are currently at High School, and so, they receive English input at least 3 hours a week; the intermediate level group are University students who still continue their English formation either in academies and language schools or who have the proficiency in their L2 recognized (i.e. with the FIRST exam by the University of Cambridge); finally, the

[1] English proficiency levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

high level group consists of MA students who have finished a degree in English studies at the Universities of Valladolid and Salamanca and also University students who have obtained this year the C1 level of proficiency.

Still, and as a way of certifying the proficiency of those who did not have their level of English recognized officially (i.e. low, intermediate or high), some days before the tasks took place, they were also asked to complete a Quick Placement Test designed by the Oxford University Press (2001) which tests both vocabulary and grammatical aspects in this language.

As for the control group (CONT), it consisted of 5 American English speakers coming to Spain with the international program API (Academic Programs Internationally) to learn Spanish and complement their University studies in the fields of literature, politics and medical sciences.

5.2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The empirical study consisted of two different tasks: a PT and an AJT. In the case of the low proficiency group, both tasks could be completed on-site in a classroom granted by a local High School; however, in the case of the intermediated, high and native groups, due to the impossibility of assembling the participants, the two tasks were conducted via www.jotforms.com , a free online survey tool[2].

It is worth mentioning that, at the beginning of each experiment warming-up practice with some instructions was provided to ensure that participants understood what they were asked to do. Besides, to avoid comprehension problems, vocabulary was carefully

[2] Before testing the sample of people selected, we make sure that all the participants in the intermediate and high level groups accepted the conditions of the experiment via e-mail, and that the Educational Institution in the case of the low level group, gave us the legal consent to conduct the experiment on these students.

selected taking into account the level of the participants (especially in the case of the low level group). Still, if a word was considered to be troublesome or difficult, its translation into Spanish was facilitated.

The next two subsections explain much more in detail the type of tasks that participants had to fulfill for this study.

5.2.1. Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT)

In the AJT, participants were asked to judge a series of English sentences according to a Linkert scale with 4 different values. Each value also included a description between parentheses just in case they had doubts about its meaning. The 4 values and their corresponding descriptions were the following ones: **1. *Absolutely incorrect*** (this sentence is horrible!), **2**.***Wrong*** (well… the sentence is wrong but not absolutely), **3. *Correct*** (the sentence is not perfect, but still, it sounds good to me), **4. *Perfectly Correct*** (this sentence is absolutely perfect!). The descriptions were also given in Spanish to avoid any type of misunderstanding.

The total amount of sentences for this experiment were 40 (see ANNEX), 22 were fillers and 18 were stimuli sentences which presented the 3 different conditions: 6 PRCs with PPiP configuration, where the preposition was fronted with a wh-pronoun as in (9a); 6 PRCs with PS configuration, where the preposition was left stranded as in (6b); and 6 PRCs with NULL Prep, where the preposition was omitted and so resulting into an ungrammatical sentence as in (9c).

9)

a. PRC with PPiP configuration

This is the picture ***at which*** the tourist is looking attentively

b. PRC with PS configuration

Here comes the bus ***which*** you were desperately waiting ***for***

c. PRC with NULL Prep

This is the book which the teacher is always referring ***(to)***

All the stimuli sentences in this experiment included a prepositional verb, i.e. "verbs which take a PP complement headed by a specified preposition" (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002:54) like *look at, wait for* and *refer to* in (9a), (9b) and (9c) respectively, taken from Biber et al.'s (1999) and Garrudo's (1996) references. Moreover, due to the small size of this dissertation and as a way to avoid problems with the distinction *who/m*, only [-HUMAN] antecedents and the wh-relative pronoun *which* were employed. Complementizers were decided not to be considered in the AJT because, as already argued in section 2, they cannot be pied-pied.

Apart from the experimental sentences, there were 22 object relative clauses with a [-HUMAN] antecedent and without prepositions that function as fillers. From these 22 sentences, 11 were grammatical, as in (10a), and 11 were ungrammatical, as in (10b).

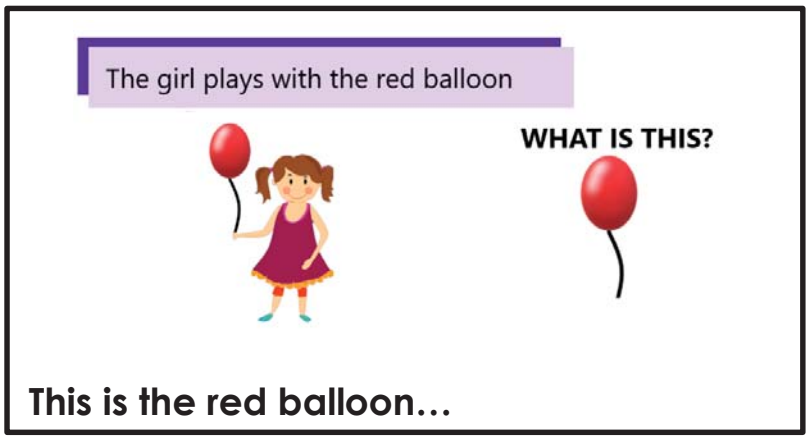
10)

a. That is the e-mail which the math teacher wrote me yesterday
b. *This is the box which the girl are carrying

5.2.2. Production Task (PT)

In this task, participants had to identify a series of objects. In order to do so, they were presented with two images simultaneously as (11) shows.

11)



As (11) illustrates, the image on the left contained a picture and a brief sentence in a purple box describing a particular situation (e.g. the girl plays with the red balloon), whereas the image on the right included a specific object extracted from this previous circumstance and the question "What is this?". Once the images were presented, participants were asked to provide an answer to this question just taking into account the information displayed in the purple box. In order to control the responses of the participants, and as a way of encouraging them to produce a PRC structure in English (e.g. This is the red balloon ***with which*** the girl plays or This is the red balloon ***which/that/Ø*** the girl plays ***with***), the beginning of the answer was given (e.g. This is the red balloon...) both in the answer template for those who took the test on-site (see ANNEX), and in the online survey for those who did it online.

This task included a total of 14 items, out of which only 5 of them were the target of the experiment. Similar to the AJT, all the target items also contained different prepositional verbs taken from Biber's (1999) and Garrudo's (1996) works. Besides, the complement of the preposition in the purple box was always [- HUMAN], as the red balloon in (11), so that participants eventually had to produce PRCs with [-HUMAN] antecedents as (12) shows.

12) The girl plays ***with the red balloon*** → **Answer:** This is ***the red balloon…***

The rest of the sentences, that is the remaining 9, were fillers that prompted the use of an object relative clause, i.e. a sentence in which the relativized constituent is the direct object of a transitive verb. Again, all the direct objects were [-HUMAN] as *a slice of pizza* in (13), so that, in the end, the result was a relative clause with a [-HUMAN] antecedent.

13) The little kid eats ***a slice of pizza*** → **Answer:** This is ***the slice of pizza...***

6. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Once the participants completed both tasks, the results were stored in an Excel sheet (see the file "RESULTS_DATABASE.xls" recorded in the CD attached to this dissertation) and concisely contained in different tables with the purpose of refuting or rejecting the hypotheses previously outlined in section 4. The following section is divided into three parts: first, subsection 6.1 provides a description of the results obtained from the AJT; then, in subsection 6.2 the same will be done, but in this case with the data elicited from the PT; and finally, in subsection 6.3. a comparison between both tasks in terms of the hypotheses made in this study will be offered.

6.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE AJT RESULTS

As already mentioned, this section deals with the data obtained from the AJT. Table 2 represents the global acceptability of the three structures (i.e. PPiP, PS and Null Prep) by the L1 Spanish-L2 English speakers that took part in the task according to whether they accepted the structure (and so, they gave 3 or 4 in the scale) or not (and so, they rated it with 1 or 2).

Table 2. *Overall acceptability of PPiP, PS and Null Prep by the Spanish participants*

STRUCTURE	ACCEPTED	NON-ACCEPTED	TOTAL
PPiP	51.38% (74)	48.61% (70)	100% (144)
PS	63.19% (91)	36.80% (53)	100% (144)
Null Prep	47.22% (68)	52.78% (76)	100% (144)
TOTAL JUDGMENTS	55.60% (233)	44.39% (186)	100% (419)

As Table 2 indicates, the 24 L1 Spanish-L2 English participants provided a total of 419 judgments in this task (144 correspond to structures with PPiP, 144 with PS and 144 with Null Prep) out of which 55.60% were accepted and 44.39% were not.

If these results are broken down according to each structure, it is possible to see that, the accepted responses surpass the non-accepted ones in all cases except for those ones in which the preposition was omitted (Null Prep), where the situation is the slightly the opposite one (Accepted: 47.22 % *vs*. Non-Accepted: 52.78%). Moreover, it must be also pointed out that whereas in the case of PS there was an important difference between the percentages of accepted responses (which reach the highest peak, i.e. 63.19%), and the non-accepted ones (36.80%), in PPiP, this difference is not so relevant (Accepted: 51.38% *vs.* Non-Accepted: 48.61%). This lack of parallelism between both structures seems to indicate that, when accepting, participants generally preferred structures with PS over those with PPiP. This last result is reinforced by the fact that they were less sure about the acceptability of PRCs with PPiP (48.61%) than with PS (36.8%) when labelling the structure as non-accepted.

In the case of the (non-)acceptance of Null Prep, the general results indicate that most of the participants were able to identify these structures as ungrammatical.

Once provided the overall results, Table 3 gathers all the data concerning the acceptability of PPiP, PS and Null Prep according to the level of proficiency of the participants (low, intermediate and high). In the same way as in Table 2, the results in Table 3 have been shown according to whether the participants accepted the structures (A), or they did not (N-A).

Table 3. *Acceptability of PPiP, PS and Null Prep by each proficiency group*

GR.	PPiP		PS		Null Prep		TOTAL
	A	N-A	A	N-A	A	N-A	
LOW	12.50% (18)	20.83% (30)	17.36% (25)	15.97% (23)	23.61% (34)	9.72% (14)	100% (144)
INTER.	16.66% (24)	16.66% (24)	20.83% (30)	12.5% (18)	13.88% (20)	19.44% (28)	100% (144)
HIGH	22.22% (32)	11.11% (16)	25% (36)	8.33% (12)	9.72% (14)	23.61% (34)	100% (144)
CONT	28.88% (26)	4.44% (4)	27.77% (25)	5.55% (5)	1.11% (1)	32.22% (29)	100% (90)

Looking at the results displayed in Table 3, it can be observed important differences between the three proficiency levels. In the case of the participants with the lowest level of proficiency there is a clear preference for the Null Prep structures as the accepted rates rise to 23.61% and the non-accepted ones only to 9.72%. Regarding PPiP and PS, even though this group showed little acceptance for these two processes, still they accepted PS more (12.5% and 17.36%, respectively). Plus, when providing non-accepted responses these seemed to be concentrated on PPiP (20.83%) rather than on PS (15.97%). Following a similar pattern, participants in the intermediate level, preferred structures with an acceptable PS configuration (20.83%) even more than those presenting a PPiP process, which were accepted and rejected equally (16.66% in both cases). Besides, in the intermediate group, when compared with the low group, it is already perceivable a decrease in the accepted responses of Null Prep constructions (13.88%), and consequently a rise in the non-accepted ones (19.44%).

Finally, regarding the group with higher proficiency, the results reveal that the acceptability of ungrammatical cases with Null Prep definitely drops (9.72%) while the

non-accepted cases increase (23.61%) when compared with the other groups. Contrariwise, PPiP and PS structures received similar acceptability (22.22% *vs*. 25%) and non-acceptability rates (11.11% *vs.* 8.33%). This last group, therefore, showed percentages which are close to the native speakers' behavior regarding the three structures: accepted PPiP (28.88%), PS (27.77%) and Null Prep (1%) in contrast with non-accepted PPiP (4.44%), Ps (5.55%) and Null Prep (32.22%).

6.2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PT RESULTS

The tables included in this subsection offer the results obtained in the PT. The classification of data in this task is much more complex than the one in the AJT, as in this case, we have to deal with responses we did not expect. Table 4 presents the proportion of expected and unexpected answers provided by the L1 Spanish-L2 English participants.

Table 4. *Overall expected vs. unexpected answers produced by each proficiency group*

GROUP	EXPECTED	UNEXPECTED	TOTAL
LOW	77.5% (31)	22.50% (9)	100% (40)
INTER.	95% (38)	5% (2)	100% (40)
HIGH	100% (40)	0% (0)	100% (40)
SUBTOTAL	90.83% (109)	9.17% (11)	100% (120)
CONT	100% (25)	0% (0)	100% (25)

Looking at the percentages in Table 4, the majority of responses in this task (90.83%) were completely expected, meaning then that they include PRCs that follow PPiP, PS Null Prep patterns in the way it was originally predicted, whilst only 9.17% of the whole production was unexpected, and so they included any changes in the structure that were not foreseen in advance. Added to this, this table shows that the group who produced more unexpected answers was the less proficient one with percentages that reach 22.5%; in the case of the intermediate proficiency group, the number of unexpected

responses was extremely low (5%) and, in the case of the high level of proficiency group, non-existent (0%), paralleling again the CONT group's results.

In this task, there were **two types of unexpected responses**: those which were not expected but grammatically possible in English, and those which were ungrammatical. Within the first type of unexpected responses, i.e. the grammatical ones, it was observed that there were 3 cases produced by the low group and 1 by the intermediate group where the prepositional verbs that were originally provided in the task were replaced by other verbs which did not require prepositions. As a direct consequence of this change, the final outcome was the production of object relative clauses (as illustrated in (14a) and (14b)) instead of PRCs, that might be due to avoid complex structures like PRCs because they were not sure about how to construct them.

14)

a. This is the new only series that the children ***watch***
b. This is the idea which everybody ***likes***

As for the other type of unexpected responses, i.e., those which were ungrammatical, 4 cases were produced (1 by the intermediate level participants and 3 by the low level ones) in which the preposition was fronted with a ∅ relative pronoun as in (15), and 2 cases (both by the low level group) where a personal pronoun was placed after the preposition (i.e. a resumptive pronoun) as ***it*** in (16).

15) *This is the red balloon ***with ∅*** the girl plays
16) *This is the football club which Messi belongs to ***it***

The production of these errors might be a consequence of the lack of mastering of the structure itself, which, as the results of the participants with the high level of proficiency show (0%), is expected to be reduced in rate as language learning progresses.

Focusing now on the expected responses classified according to the three structures under analysis (that is, PPiP, PS and Null Prep), Table 5 illustrates how each group shows their preference for one of these structures.

Table 5. *Production of expected responses by each proficiency group*

GROUP	EXPECTED RESPONSES			TOTAL
	PPiP	PS	Null Prep	
LOW	9.67% (3)	16.13% (5)	74.19% (23)	100% (31)
INTER.	5.55% (2)	33.33% (12)	61.11% (22)	100% (36)
HIGH	2.5% (1)	92.50 (37)	5% (2)	100% (40)
SUBTOTAL	5.50% (6)	49.54% (54)	43.11% (47)	100% (109)
CONT	20% (5)	80% (20)	0% (0)	100% (25)

As a whole, in this table it can be seen that among the 109 expected responses in the experimental groups, 5.50% were produced with PPiP, 49.54% with PS and 43.11% with Null Prep. So, these rates suggest that most of the participants seem to opt for the stranded option when constructing PRCs, but followed very closely by the one in which the preposition is omitted

If the results are considered by proficiency groups, one of the first aspects that may call the attention in Table 5 is the high production of Null Prep especially in the first two levels, that is, in the low and intermediate group. In the case of the low proficiency group, out of the 31 expected sentences they produced, only 9.67% and 16.13% present PPiP or PS forms, respectively, whilst the remaining 74.19% did not contain the required preposition. As for the results in the intermediate group, these are quite similar to the ones already seen in the low proficiency group, but, in this case, with slightly lower percentages of PPiP (5.55%) and Null Prep (61.11%), and a much higher preference for

the PS option (33.33%). Focusing now on the results of the group with the highest level of proficiency in English, the numbers show a sharp decrease of the structures with Null Prep (5%) together with a very low production of PPiP structures (2.5%) –lower than the CONT group whose rates reach 20%–. Consequently, in this group, PS is undoubtedly the most employed process (92.5%), even overcoming the control group's production (80%).

6.3. SUMMARY AND COMPARISON ACROSS TASKS

Having analyzed and discussed the results derived from the AJT and the PT in the previous sections, in this last part it is established a comparison between the two tasks in terms of the three forms of PRCs under study (PPiP, PS and Null Prep) and the different proficiency levels.

Table 6 gathers the general acceptability and production of PPiP, PS and Null Prep structures provided by these participants.

Table 6. *Overall acceptability and production of PPiP, PS and Null Prep*

STRUCTURE	AJT	PT
PPiP	31.33% (74)	5.50% (6)
PS	39.05% (91)	49.54% (54)
NULL PREP	29.18% (68)	43.11% (47)
TOTAL	100% (233)	100% (109)

The table above only contains the accepted responses of all the participants in the AJT (i.e. 233), and the expected responses in the PT (i.e.109). From the data presented in table 7, it is clear that L1 Spanish participants in both tasks seem to accept and produce more instances of PRCs with PS as they always represent the highest rates (39.05% in acceptability; 47.50% in production). Thus, in this sense, it seems that the AJT and the PT follow the same tendency. However, if we turn to the results related to PPiP and Null Prep, it is possible to see some differences between one task and the other: in the case of

the AJT, PPiP was accepted slightly more than Null Prep (31.33% *vs*. 29.18 %, respectively), whilst in the PT the situation is completely reversed, being PPiP the process less employed by these participants (5% *vs.* 43.11%, respectively).

Finally, Table 7 reflects all the results provided by group of participants both in the AJT (left side of the table) which, again, only gathers the accepted cases of the AJT as in Table 7**,** and in the PT (right side of the table).

Table 7. *Acceptability and production of PPiP, PS and NULL Prep by each proficiency group*

	AJT				PT			
GR.	**PPiP**	**PS**	**NULL**	**TOTAL**	**PPiP**	**PS**	**NULL**	**TOTAL**
LOW	12.50% (18)	17.36% (25)	23.61% (34)	100% (144)	9.67% (3)	16.13% (5)	74.19% (23)	100% (31)
INTER	16.66% (24)	20.83% (12)	13.88% (22)	100% (144)	5.55% (2)	33.33% (12)	61.11% (22)	100% (36)
HIGH	22.22% (32)	25% (36)	9.72% (2)	100% (144)	2.50% (1)	92.50% (37)	5% (2)	100% (40)
CONT	28.88% (26)	27.77% (25)	1.11% (1)	100% (90)	20% (5)	80% (20)	0% (0)	100% (25)

As seen in this table, from the three groups tested in study, the low proficiency group is the one which seems to have a similar behavior in both acceptability and production patterns, that is, the Null Prep structures represent the highest rates in both tasks (AJT: 23.61%; PT: 74.19%), followed by those with PS, in similar proportions (AJT: 17.36%; PT: 16.13%) and, finally, the ones with PPiP, that seem to be more accepted than produced (AJT: 12.50%; PT.: 9.67%). As for the intermediate-level learners of English, like the low proficiency ones, were more prone to Null Prep production (61.11%) than to Null Prep acceptability (13.88%); PPiP was also less produced (5.55%) than accepted (16.66%) while PS showed an opposite pattern to that in

the low proficiency group, with lower percentages of acceptability than those of production (20.83% and 33.33%, respectively).

Moving into the results of the high proficiency group, the main differences between tasks are mainly found in the rates of PPiP and PS (Null Prep represents the lowest proportions in both tasks). Regarding PPiP, the numbers indicate that this group was more likely to accept sentences with this process (22.22%) rather than to produce them (2.50%), following the same pattern as the low and intermediate participants. In contrast, PS was more produced than accepted (25% and 92.50%, respectively), following in this case the same pattern as the intermediate proficiency group but being this difference of rates higher. As a way of concluding with the results group, it is necessary to mention that the results in the high level of proficiency group are quite similar to the ones of the natives, which seems to indicate that PS production is more common than PPiP (as suggested in section 2).

So, in summary, there are two main tendencies in terms of proficiency groups that can be grasped from this comparison:

1. All the experimental groups showed similar behavior with respect to PPiP and Null Prep. On the one hand, the results reflect that all the participants were more likely to accept PPiP constructions rather than to produce them (tendency which is also observed in the CONT group); and, on the other hand, that they prefer to produce Null Prep constructions rather than accepting them.

2. As for the PS, in the intermediate, high and CONT groups the percentages were higher in the PT than in AJT; in other words, PS was more produced than tolerated. However, this pattern varies in the case of the low level group, as these participants show similar proportions in both tasks.

7. DISCUSSION: HYPOTHESES RESOLUTION

Having described the results in section 6, the following section has been created to discuss the results obtained in the AJT and the PT in connection to the hypotheses previously established in section 4.

7.1. HYPOTHESIS 1: THE TRANSFER OF THE L1 IS INSTANTIATED

Considering the results exposed in section 6, it can be said that there is no evidence in the AJT nor in the PT pointing to a possible influence of the L1 with respect to PPiP and PS, as in none of these tasks PPiP was accepted nor produced more than the PS option. In fact, as it has been observed before, PPiP has proven to be the process less employed in the case of the PT and the one which caused more problems in the AJT as participants were not to be completely sure about the grammaticality of these structure.

So, taking this overall analysis into account, it can be concluded that the results of this dissertation seem to follow the line of the studies carried out by Bardovi-Harlig (1987) and Sadighi, Parhizgar and Saadat's (2004) in favor of the salience of the marked structure, i.e. of PS. This means that if the general results (i.e. regardless the role of proficiency that will be discussed later) are considered ***the hypothesis #1,*** which predicted higher percentages of PPiP due to the influence of the L1, has been clearly **rejected**, being the PS process Spanish speakers accepted and produced the most.

7.2. HYPOTHESIS 2: PREPOSITION OMISSION WILL GENERALLY OCCUR (NULL PREP PHENOMENON)

Regarding Null Prep overall results, the participants, in general, accepted and produced large amounts of sentences where the preposition was null; indeed in the case of the PT, the proportions were similar to those obtained in the case of PS and surpassing

by far those of PPiP. Based on this, it is possible to **confirm *hypothesis #2*** which already predicted a high level of Null Prep in both tasks.

7.3. HYPOTHESIS 3: PROFICIENCY IN L2 WILL PLAY A ROLE

The last hypothesis included in this study was related to the role that proficiency may have in the acquisition of PPiP, PS and Null Prep structures in English.

The results obtained from the two tasks showed that PPiP was more accepted than produced, regardless of the participants' level of proficiency in English. In fact, the percentages of PPiP in the AJT rose linearly as the proficiency of the group was higher, reaching eventually similar rates to those of the natives. However, in the case of PS, some differences between proficiency groups were found: whilst the low proficiency group obtained similar percentages of PS structures in both tasks, the intermediate and high groups were more prone to produce them rather than to accepted them, showing again a similar tendency to that of the native group, and, particularly, being the high level participants' patterns in the two tasks closer to those of the natives.

The fact that the high and intermediate groups of proficiency showed a similar behavior to that of native speakers in terms of PPiP and PS in English (i.e. PPiP was quite accepted but not produced, and PS was generally more produced than accepted) **confirms** the ***hypothesis #3(a)*** which stated that a higher proficiency would also reflect native-like rates. These results, hence, suggest that the high levels of proficiency, likewise native speakers, consider PPiP a possible process in English, but still, they seem to prefer to employ PS which is the most common pattern in this language and the one which implies a lesser cost on the L2 (and L1) processing of PRCs (i.e. in PS only one item the

preposition, is moved, whereas in PPiP two, the relative and the preposition, as described in section 2).

Regarding Null Prep, it has been observed a common pattern in the 3 experimental groups as all of them produced PRCs without the preposition rather than to accept them. However, it is important to emphasize that in both types of tasks there was a dramatic decrease of Null Prep structures as proficiency in the L2 groups increased, being the high level group the closest to the rates of the native group. Consequently, this result seem to indicate that even though Spanish speakers considerably produced and accepted this type of errors, the number of ungrammatical structures where the preposition did not appear decreased as the level of proficiency raised, **as already predicted** in ***hypothesis #3(b)*** and coinciding with the majority of the studies previously conducted (Bardovi-Harlig (1987); Salehi (2009); and Sadighi, Parhizgar and Saadat (2004)).

8. CONCLUSION

The present dissertation is an empirical study which aims at investigating the acquisition of PRCs, a structure which behaves differently in English and Spanish. The experiments included within this study consisted on two different tasks, a AJT and a PT, which were conducted on 24 Spanish learners of English who were divided into three different groups (low, intermediate and high) depending on their level of proficiency in English. 5 native English speakers from the United States were also incorporated as control participants.

The general results obtained from these two tasks have shown that these learners do not draw upon their L1 to produce and judge PRCs as none of them preferred the structure which is available in their L1, i.e. PPiP, over the one which is actually more productive in English, i.e. PS. Consequently, this suggests that ***salience of the stranded option*** in English is an important factor in the acquisition of these constructions. In addition to this, it has been also observed that generally, and as it was expected, the L1 Spanish speakers displayed high rates of ungrammatical structures where the preposition was absent (i.e, of Null Prep constructions), which in even surpassed the acceptability rates of PPiP.

Apart from this, and supporting the conclusions from other previous studies, ***proficiency*** in English has proven to be an important variable when studying PRCs. This study has shown that only the most proficient participants (i.e. those in the intermediate and the high levels), were the ones who always displayed similar patterns to that of the native speakers in terms of PPiP and PS. Moreover, it was also observed that the acceptability and production of ungrammatical Null Prep constructions diminished as the proficiency in the L2 increased.

Even though these findings have achieved to shed some new light on the study of this complex study, the conclusions reached are far from being conclusive. Hence, further

research including a larger number of participants, or even, other languages which, similar to Spanish, only present PPiP for PRCs, would be needed. Besides, it will be also interesting to test PRCs were the antecedent is [+HUMAN] and see the extent to which this factor also affects the acceptability and production of these structures.

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ANNEX

SENTENCES IN THE AJT

- **STIMULI SENTENCES**

Sentences with PPiP pattern

1. This is the picture ***at which*** the tourist is looking attentively
2. That is the jail ***from which*** the prisoner escaped
3. This is the laptop ***with which*** I normally work
4. That is the car accident ***from which*** Paul is recovering from
5. This is the University ***from which*** my best friend graduated last year
6. This is the religion ***in which*** many people believe

Sentences with PS pattern

1. This is the job ***which*** my father applied ***for*** last year
2. That is the company ***which*** my aunt Mary is working ***for***
3. That is one of the worst illnesses ***which*** a person can suffer ***from***
4. This is the information ***which*** Laura was asking ***for***
5. Here comes the bus ***which*** you were desperately waiting ***for***
6. This is the new computer system ***which*** everybody is talking ***about***

Sentences with Null Prep pattern

1. This is the book ***which*** the teacher is always referring ***(to)***
2. This is the chapter ***which*** the story begins (***with***)
3. This is the comic strip ***which*** John was laughing (***at***)
4. That is the math problem ***which*** the student is concentrating (***on***)
5. That is the basketball team ***which*** Marc Gasol plays (***for***)
6. This is the money ***which*** my family depends (***on***)

- **FILLER SENTENCES**

Grammatical sentences

1. This is the building which you were building last summer
2. That is the wall which Peter was painting this morning
3. Here is the television which my friend Louis bought
4. That is the country which your mother wanted to visit many years ago
5. That is the dress which you were wearing in Susan's party
6. This is the house which we are designing
7. That is the e-mail which the math teacher wrote me yesterday
8. That is the t-shirt which John bought me last week
9. This is the birthday gift which you did not like
10. This the film which our teacher recommend us
11. That is the type of books which my friend Angela reads

Ungrammatical sentences

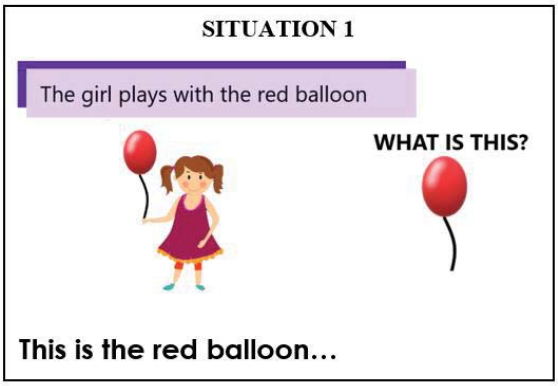
1. This is the chocolate that which my mum eats
2. This is the last CD which am including the greatest songs ever heard
3. This is the dictionary which I are reading
4. That is the camera my father are using to take new photos
5. This is the box which the girls is carrying
6. That is the sculpture that which you can find in the museum
7. Here the red apple are which Snow White eats
8. This are one flower which I think is beautiful
9. This is the pencil that which I need to complete the test
10. This is the new fridge that which Paul broke

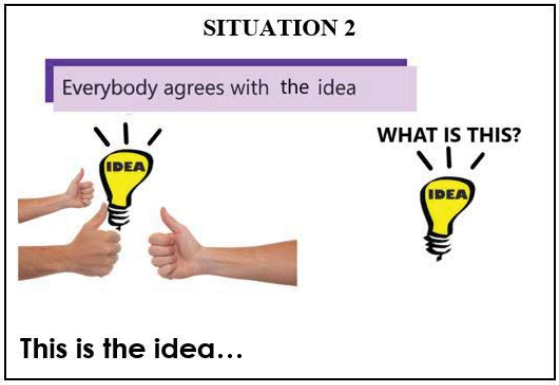
11. This is the water that the dog am drinking

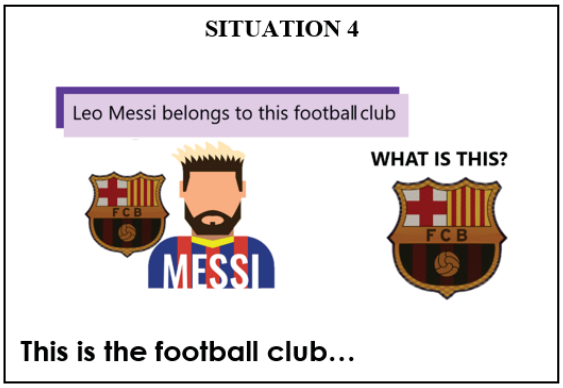
SENTENCES IN THE PRODUCTION TASK

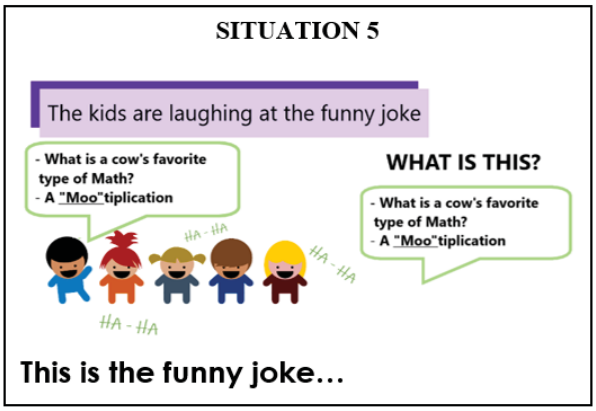
All the images employed in this task where downloaded from NeedPix (https://www.needpix.com/), Pixabay (https://pixabay.com) or Google images (https://images.google.com/ with the license filter tool activated), and adapted to represent the specific circumstance. These three platforms offer a large collection of photos and pictures which are allowed to be used and modified for free for any type of purpose. This way, problems with copyright have been avoided.

- **STIMULI SITUATIONS**

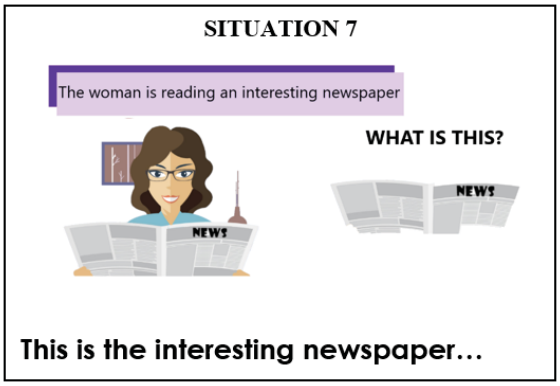


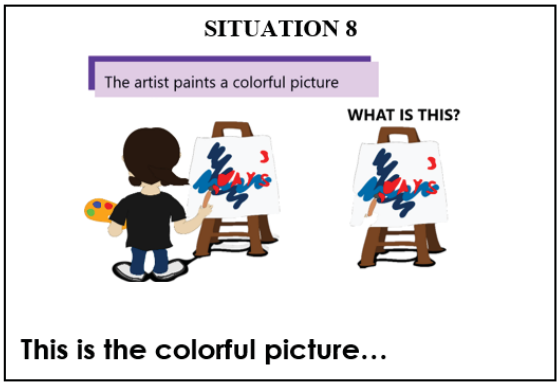


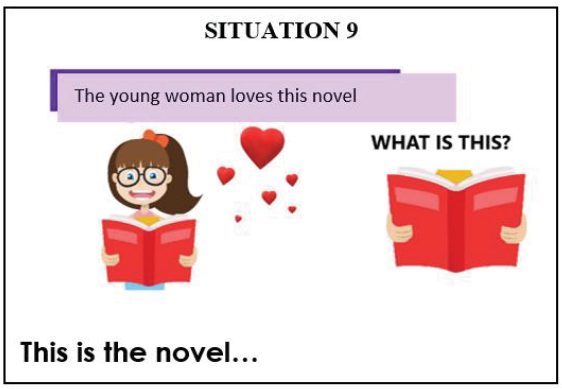


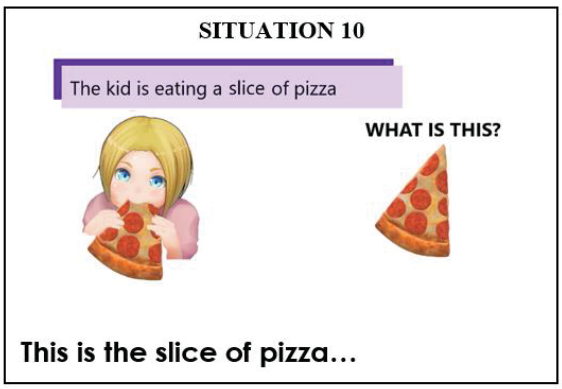


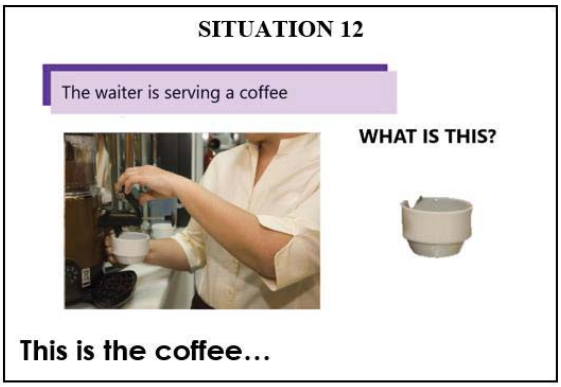
- **FILLER SITUATIONS**

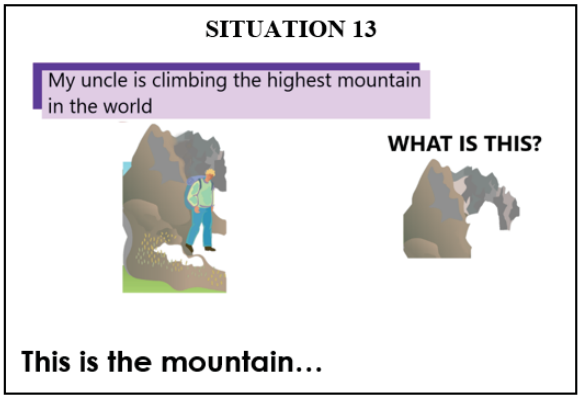


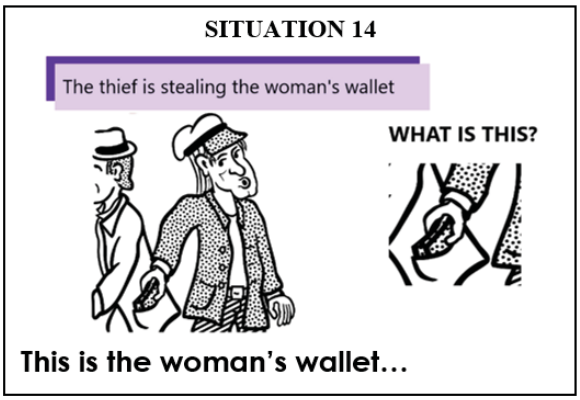












ACCEPTABILITY AND PRODUCTION ANSWER SHEETS

- **ACCEPTABILITY ANSWER SHEET**

	1.Absolutely incorrect	2.Wrong	3.Correct	4.Perfectly correct
That is the camera which my father are using to take new photos				
Here comes the bus which you were desperately waiting for				
Here is the television which my friend Louis bought				
Here the red apple are which Snow White eats				
That is the basketball team which Marc Gasol plays				
That is one of the worst illnesses which a person can suffer from				
That is the car accident from which Paul is recovering from				
That is the type of books which my friend Angela reads				
That is the country which your mother wanted to visit many years ago				
That is the dress which you were wearing in Susan's party				
That is the e-mail which the math teacher wrote me yesterday				
That is the jail from which the prisoner escaped				
That is the math problem which the student is concentrating				
That is the sculpture that which you can find in the museum				
That is the t-shirt which John bought me last week				
That is the company which my aunt Mary is working for				
That is the wall which Peter was painting this morning				
This are one flower which I think is beautiful				
This is the birthday gift which you did not like				
This is the book which the teacher is always referring				
This is the box which the girls is carrying				
This is the building which you were building last summer				
This is the chapter which the story begins				
This is the chocolate that which my mum eats				
This is the comic strip which John was laughing				
This is the dictionary which I are reading				
This is the house which we are designing				
This is the information which Laura was asking for				
This is the job which my father applied for last year				
This is the laptop with which I normally work				
This is the last CD which am including the greatest songs ever heard				
This is the money which my family depends				
This is the new computer system which everybody is talking about				
This is the new fridge that which Paul broke				
This is the pencil that which I need to complete the test				
This is the picture at which the tourist is looking attentively				
This is the religion in which many people believe				
This is the University from which my best friend graduated last year				
This is the water that the dog am drinking				
This the film which our teacher recommend us				

- **PRODUCTION ANSWER SHEET**

1. This is the new Italian restaurant…
2. This is the red balloon…
3. This is the interesting newspaper…
4. This is the colorful picture
5. This is the idea…
6. This is the mountain…
7. This is the new online series…
8. This is the slice of pizza…
9. This is the novel…
10. This is the football club…
11. This is the wallet…
12. This is orange jacket…
13. This is the coffee…
14. This is the funny joke…