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Especialidad: Inglés**

**Expletive constructions in L2 English: A study of  
bilingual and non-bilingual programs**

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**Curso: 2021-2022**

## **Abstract**

The present dissertation aims at giving an account of acceptability and production of expletive subjects *it* and *there* by L1 Spanish L2 English learners attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (i.e., Spanish secondary education). Through the analysis of experimental data, elicited through an acceptability judgment task (AJT) and production task, the comprehension and production of different expletive constructions has been analyzed. The main focus is set on the typological differences between Spanish and English and the possibility of transfer. The study compares students with low (A1/A2) and lower-intermediate (B1) levels of proficiency in L2 English, and from CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and non-CLIL programs. A didactic proposal is provided to introduce these constructions in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. The results show that existential *there* is the most accepted construction, while presentational *there* is the least accepted one; that L1 (Spanish) null expletive is often transferred; and that CLIL participants normally outperform non-CLIL participants in both experiments conducted.

*Keywords:* expletive subjects, L1 Spanish L2 English, level of proficiency, CLIL, EFL

## **Resumen**

El presente trabajo pretende dar cuenta de la aceptabilidad y producción de sujetos expletivos (*it* y *there*) por parte de aprendientes de L1 español L2 inglés que cursan 2º de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria. A través del análisis de datos experimentales, obtenidos con una tarea de aceptabilidad y otra de producción, se ha analizado la comprensión y producción de distintas construcciones. El enfoque principal se basa en las diferencias tipológicas entre español e inglés y en la posibilidad de transferencia. El estudio compara estudiantes con un nivel de competencia bajo (A1/A2) e intermedio bajo (B1) en inglés, así como de un programa AICLE (Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras) y no AICLE. Se presenta una propuesta didáctica para introducir estas construcciones en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE). Los resultados muestran que las construcciones existenciales con *there* son las más aceptadas, y las presentacionales con *there* son las menos aceptadas; que la transferencia del expletivo nulo de la L1 (español) es frecuente; y que los participantes AICLE superan normalmente a los no AICLE en ambos experimentos.

*Palabras clave:* sujetos expletivos, L1 español L2 inglés, nivel de competencia, CLIL, ILE

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## 1. Introduction

This dissertation examines the extent to which L1 Spanish students from a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) program and students from the non-CLIL program, all attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO at the same high school in Castile and Leon, are already proficient in the comprehension and use of expletive subjects *–it* and *there*— in their second language (i.e., English).

The present study provides an insight into the acceptability and production of expletive subjects in L2 English. It deals with the comparison of L1 Spanish L2 English students with different levels of proficiency (A1, A2, and B1), but it also compares students from a CLIL program of the British Council and a non-CLIL program. Taking this into consideration, four different groups have been distinguished: A1 (non-CLIL), A2 (non-CLIL), A2 (CLIL), and B1 (CLIL).

Subjects differ in English and Spanish, and so do expletive subjects in both languages, due to the typological differences between both languages. To differentiate subjects in general and expletive subjects in particular, the Principles and Parameters (P&P) approach describes the Null Subject Parameter (NSP), which distinguishes [+/- null subject] languages. Thus, this distinction establishes that Spanish is a [+ null-subject] language and English is a [- null-subject] language, and this difference has consequences in how expletive constructions are used in both languages.

For L1 Spanish L2 English students, correctly using expletive constructions has been proven to be a considerable obstacle regarding the use of subjects in L2 English. Extensive research has demonstrated that L1 Spanish L2 English students tend to face problems with respect to the use of expletive subjects in English (Lozano & Mendikoetxea, 2010; Ferrandis & Mendikoetxea, 2013; Judy & Rothman, 2010, among others), while the use of referential subjects, both null and overt, is mastered much earlier in the learning process (Ferrandis & Medikoetxea, 2013). Indeed, it has been suggested that learners never master the use of expletive subjects entirely (Judy & Rothman, 2010).

These studies suggest that instruction regarding expletive subjects can be useful in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), because even students of higher levels find it difficult or even impossible to master these constructions, regardless of the students' level of proficiency. Nevertheless, proficiency level also has some impact in the use of expletive

subjects, and this is something that is also analyzed in the present study.

This study explores whether students from different levels of proficiency, particularly the lower (A1-A2) and lower intermediate (B1) levels, are already able to interpret expletive subjects *it* and *there* as acceptable constructions, and whether they are capable of producing them or not. This has been done by conducting two experiments: an acceptability judgment task (AJT) and a production task. The AJT deals with the competence of the students—i.e., the knowledge they have about the constructions under study—, while the production task investigates their performance, i.e., their actual use of these expletive constructions. Additionally, the participants are compared according to whether they follow the CLIL program or not.

The results show that the participants find some expletive constructions more acceptable than others. In particular, existential *there* sentences are the most accepted, but presentational *there* sentences are the least accepted. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that there is a negative transfer from the L1 in the production of expletive subjects in L2 English, consisting in the use of a null expletive, and also in using expletive *it* instead of *there*. Finally, the rest of the results show that, in general, CLIL participants are more proficient than non-CLIL participants in both experiments, but these differences seem to be also related to a higher proficiency level.

In this dissertation, it is hypothesized that explicit instruction can be the key to a better understanding and usage of expletive constructions. In this sense, this study also focuses on the application of these findings in the EFL classroom. Notwithstanding, the learning of expletive subjects is much more complex than the learning of referential subjects. For this reason, implementing the teaching of these constructions more explicitly and in a simultaneous way in the classroom could contribute to better learning because students will be aware of the different uses of expletive subjects *it* and *there*.

This dissertation has the following structure. The first two sections examine the previous literature on the topic of expletive subjects, providing an insight into the nature of subjects, and particularly expletive subjects in relation to the Principles and Parameters (P&P) approach. Additionally, the characteristics of both English and Spanish expletive subjects are introduced, as well as the different constructions that have been distinguished in the literature. Finally, an overview of previous studies on L1 Spanish L2 English learning of expletive constructions is provided. The characteristics and errors regarding the learning of this grammatical aspect are also described.

The third section deals with the method used to carry out the analysis of this study. The types of expletive structures analyzed are presented, and the research questions and hypotheses of the study are described, followed by the classification of the participants. Finally, the two experiments that have been conducted —the AJT and the production task— are introduced.

The results and discussion are described in the fourth section, which presents the findings of both experiments, and the main conclusions that can be drawn from them. And finally, the didactic proposal is included in the last section which is followed by the conclusions, in which the main points of the dissertation are summarized.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Expletive subjects and the Null Subject Parameter (NSP)

In this dissertation, the grammatical elements that are dealt with are expletive subjects, particularly English *it* and *there*, and Spanish null expletive or expletive *pro*. Expletives are “elements that do not compositionally contribute to the meaning of the clause” and “are semantically empty” (Hartmann, 2008, p. 3). This means that they are non-argumental and non-referential entities, since they do not have any semantic value because they are a functional category (Fernández Fuertes, 2001, p. 11). Expletives have been called placeholders of the subject position (Moro, 2006, p. 212) because their function consists in filling the position of the subject when it is not present, in order to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), which states that all verbs require a subject, regardless of the language typology (Sabel, 2000, p. 412; Haegeman, 1994, p. 68).

Spanish and English are different in terms of language typology. Although these languages satisfy the EPP, their subjects, including expletive subjects, behave differently. That is, English always requires its subjects to be overt, whereas in Spanish subjects can be either null or overt. The Principles and Parameters (P&P) approach proposes a series of principles that govern all languages (Haegeman, 1994). Following the EPP principle, all verbs require a subject being it overt or null. However, languages differ from each other, so the P&P approach, apart from describing the properties that all languages have in common (i.e., the Principles), also describes languages typologically depending on the option of the parameter that is being checked. In other words, parameters are groups of properties that distinguish different types of languages. In the case of subjects, the Null Subject Parameter (NSP) specifies that some languages allow null subjects, that is, subjects that are not phonetically realized; and some languages require overt subjects. This distinction thus classifies the languages into [+null subject] and [-null subject] languages. This classification is further detailed below.

Expletives are non-referential Determiner Phrases (DPs), that is, phrases whose head is a determiner. What is more, expletives are not theta-marked. A theta role is a role that the verb assigns to its arguments, and it has to do with the semantic relationships (i.e., semantic value) between the verb of a clause and its different arguments (Haegeman, 1994, p. 49). These roles include AGENT, PATIENT, and THEME, among others. For example, the verb *eat* takes two arguments: the person or being that is eating (i.e., the doer of the action), which

is the AGENT; and the thing that it eaten, which is the THEME (i.e., the inanimate element that is included in the action). Thus, the subject of the verb *eat* is assigned the role of AGENT, and the object is assigned the role of THEME, but this does not have to be always the case. Subjects and objects can also take different thematic roles such as EXPERIENCER and PATIENT, among others. In the case of expletives, they act as the subject of the clause but are not assigned any theta role because they have no semantic value. The fact that expletives are purely grammatical elements “makes them an excellent probe into the boundary between syntax and semantics” (Svenonius, 2001, p. 3). This is so because they are only present to satisfy syntactic needs.

The NSP divides languages into two groups; the ones that follow a cluster of properties, and the ones that do not comply with those properties. This Parameter thus distinguishes between [+null subject] languages such as Spanish that requires its subjects to be either overt or null and [-null subject] languages such as English that always requires an overt subject. There are various properties that a language has to comply with in order to be a [+null subject] language (Chomsky, 1981; Rizzi, 1982), apart from allowing null subjects or not. These properties include as well the possibility of post-verbal subjects, or subject inversion; the possibility of a complementizer when the subjects of embedded clauses are moved; and additionally, the possibility of *pro* as a non-referential subject in expletive constructions. The last property, that of allowing null non-referential subjects, is the focus of the study, as it deals with expletive subjects. Because Spanish checks all of these properties, it is classified as a [+null-subject] language. Conversely, a language that does not check some of these properties —and English does not check any of them— is considered a [-null-subject] language.

The NSP can also be linked to the Agreement Parameter (AP), which divides languages into [+pronominal agreement] and [-pronominal agreement] languages. There is a relationship between the NSP and the AP, because languages with a rich agreement morphology have been found to be commonly null subject languages, while languages with a poor agreement system are normally [-null-subject] languages (Gilligan, 1987).<sup>1</sup> This is the

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<sup>1</sup> However, Neeleman and Szendroi (2007) indicate that Asian languages like Japanese and Chinese allow for null subjects although they completely lack verb-subject agreement (p. 2). Similarly, Huang (1984, p. 537) maintains that these Asian languages allow null subjects “even more freely than those with rich agreement systems.” Huang (1984) argues that the reason behind this is the existence of two different parameters, one that distinguishes [+/-null subject] languages, and one that distinguishes “zero-topic” and “non-zero topic”



case of Spanish and English, which have rich and poor verbal inflection, respectively. Asian languages do not follow this pattern, but since these languages are not the focus of this study, this topic will not be dealt with.

According to Kato (1999), Spanish has strong pronouns, which are usually marked and are related to emphasis, while English has weak pronouns, which are unmarked because they are always required to be overt. This is because Spanish subjects can be inferred from verbal agreement, while English subjects cannot be recovered from verbal agreement. Taking this into account, English is a [-pronominal agreement] language, while Spanish is a [+pronominal agreement] language. In this way, it seems that the nature of subjects in a language is very much related to verbal inflection. Parting from these ideas, a study of expletive subjects in L1 Spanish L2 English speakers needs to take into account the fact that Spanish and English are parametrically different in respect of subjects and verbal agreement. However, this theory distinguishing strong and weak pronouns is challenged by Holmberg (2005) and Sheehan (2006), who argue that there is no such distinction between strong or weak pronouns, and that the only difference between subject pronouns is whether they are null or overt; that is, whether they are phonologically realized or not.

## **2.2 Expletive subjects in English and Spanish**

### **2.2.1 English *it* and *there***

Expletives *it* and *there* are the English overt non-referential subjects. Both referential and expletive subjects in English are phonologically realized; consequently, the main difference between these two types of subjects in English is that referential pronouns relate to an entity, while expletives are non-referential and, thus, do not relate to any entity. In Spanish, referential subjects can be either overt or null, whereas expletive subjects are always null. As it has been seen, one of the reasons why English expletives are always overt has to do with agreement morphology and the EPP approach. As English has poor verbal agreement, the use

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languages, that is, languages that allow or do not allow a null topic (p. 564). In this way, the European languages mentioned could be called “sentence-oriented” languages (as they check agreement in the clause), while the Asian ones are “discourse-oriented” (in that the subject can be identified outside the clause) (Huang, 1984, p. 557). In other words, while the European languages owe the possibility of omitting a subject to a rich verb-subject agreement that allows its recoverability, and are thus related to the NSP, languages like Chinese and Japanese allow subject omission when the null subject is identified by a noun phrase (NP) in a superordinate clause (Huang, 1984, p. 557).

of null subjects is not licensed. In order to identify the subject of the clause, it has to be necessarily overt.

Another argument in favor of the overtness of English expletives is related to the fact that English is a fixed-word-order language. In expletive constructions, where there is no referential subject, the subject position must be filled with another element, which in the case of English is always overt due to the lack of rich agreement morphology. In the case of sentences with *there*, a sentence that uses *there* (as in 1.a) is similar to the sentence that does not use it (as in 1.b):

1. a) [TP *There* [T' is [*t* a man] in the garden]]

b) [TP *A man* [T' is *t* in the garden]]

(Sabel, 2000, p. 414)

But these sentences do not necessarily have the same semantic value: according to Sabel (2000), 1.a is not ambiguous, while 1.b is ambiguous because *a man* could be interpreted as either specific or non-specific (p. 413).

In 1.a, *there* is used because the logical subject *a man* is not filling the Tense Phrase (TP) head position, so the head of the TP has to be filled by an expletive in order to preserve the S-V order (i.e., subject-verb order). English is an SVO language with a rather fixed word order, and this means that the verb must be in the second position in the clause (as in 2.a and 2.b). In 2.a, an expletive is not required because the DP subject is already in the first position and therefore the verb occupies the second position.

2. a) A woman *lived* in that building.

b) In that building, *there lived* a woman.

Three main types of expletive subjects are generally distinguished: extraposition *it* (as in 3.a), weather *it* (as in 3.b), and impersonal *there* (as in 3.c) (Svenonius, 2001, p. 3):

3. a) *It* is obvious where you got that hickey. (extraposition *it*)

b) *It* gets dark in November. (weather *it*)

c) *There's* a fly in your soup, isn't there? (impersonal *there*)

(Svenonius, 2001, pp. 3-4)

Extraposition *it* consists in placing a clause to the right of the sentence due to its heaviness, and filling the original position of that clause with *it*. The original sentence for 3.a would be the one that places the extraposed clause in the subject position: *Where you got that hickey is obvious*.

However, the types of expletives present in Germanic languages have been classified into two main categories: “one *it*-type, which is linked to a third person personal pronoun, and one *there*-type that is linked to a locative pronoun” (Hartmann, 2008, p. 244). The difference between *it* and *there* is that *it* checks Case and phi-features, whilst *there* checks Case and lacks phi-features (Fernández-Fuertes, 2001, p. 231). *It* checks phi-features because it has default person and number (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular) features (Sabel, 2000, p. 415), while *there*, on the contrary, does not have these phi-features.

In addition to these differences, *it* and *there* differ in the constructions in which they can be used: *there* is used for presentational (as in 4.a) and existential constructions (as in 4.b); *it* is the subject of weather (as in 4.c) and extraposition constructions (as in 4.d), as well as “one-argument (and passive) verbs with clausal objects” (Lozano and Mendikoetxea, 2010, p. 477) (as in 4.e).

4. a) There arrived three girls.
- b) There is a problem in this analysis.
- c) It is snowing!
- d) It is a pity that he hates dogs.
- e) It seems that everybody agrees on this.

(Lozano and Mendikoetxea, 2010, p. 477)

Hartmann (2008) distinguishes five types of expletive constructions that are present in different Germanic languages. These include “transitive expletive constructions (TECs),” (*\*there has someone eaten an apple*) (Hartmann, 2008, p. 237) and “impersonal passives” (*\*There has been danced*) (p. 241). These two types are ungrammatical in English. English only incorporates the following three types:

5. a) *Yesterday, it rained* (weather-verb expletives)
- b) *It was stupid [that you came home late].* (expletive as a correlate)

c) *There came a man*

(expletive with unaccusative verb)

(Hartmann, 2008, pp. 240-242)

The constructions in 5.b and 5.c are equivalent to extraposition *it* and presentational *there* constructions described in Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010) above. The weather expletive does not only refer to the weather as such, since it can also refer to temperature (as in 6.a) or time (as in 6.b):

6. a) *It* is hot in this room.

b) *It* is very late.

5.c refers to expletives occurring with unaccusative verbs. Unaccusative verbs are a type of intransitive verbs whose subject, which is the only argument, is the THEME, for instance, *begin* in English or *empezar* in Spanish (Escutia, 2012, p. 4). That is, unaccusatives do not have an argument that bears the AGENT role. We can distinguish between unaccusative verbs that express a change of state or position (Escutia, 2012, pp. 4-5), like *break* (as in 7.a), and inherent unaccusative verbs, like *happen* and *exist* (and their Spanish translations, *ocurrir* and *existir*) and *be* (Escutia, 2012, p. 5) (as in 7.b). In both examples 7.a and 7.b, the subjects (i.e., *the chair* and *an accident*) bear the THEME role.

7. a) The chair *broke*.

b) An accident *happened*.

In English, the THEME of an unaccusative verb, that is, its subject, needs to be in a pre-verbal position (as in 8.a). The subject could only move to a post-verbal position if an expletive fills the pre-verbal position (as in 8.b), satisfying in this way the EPP.

8. a) *Three girls* came.

b) *There* came *three girls*.

To sum up, there are five English expletive constructions described in the literature. First of all, extraposition *it*, which has the structure: *It* + be + adjective + clause. Secondly, weather *it*, which expresses weather, time or temperature. In the third place, one-argument verbs with clausal arguments are a type of construction with the structure: *It* + one-argument verb + clause. One-argument verbs include *seem*, *happen*, *appear*, among others. As for expletive *there* constructions, these include presentational *there*, which is used to introduce a

new entity and employs unaccusative verbs like *arrive* or *begin*. The structure of presentational *there* is: *there* + unaccusative verb + object. Finally, existential *there* is a construction used to express the existence or presence of an entity, normally including the copula verb *be*, but also other verbs like *exist*. Existential *there* sentences have the structure: *There* + existential verb + object.

### 2.2.2 Spanish null expletive: Expletive *pro*

Expletives in Spanish are non-referential and null. It is claimed that expletive *pro* is the “non-overt counterpart” of expletive *there* in [+null subject] languages like Italian and Spanish (Lozano and Mendikoetxea, 2008, p. 88). While expletives in English have a phonological realization, it is more difficult to account for the existence of null expletives in *pro*-drop languages, as they lack both semantic and phonological content. However, Oshita (2004) gives some evidence that proves the psychological existence of expletive *pro* in speakers of null-subject languages through the analysis of their L2 English. This is based on the different behavior of unaccusatives in English and Spanish. In Spanish, expletive constructions with unaccusative verbs are also possible, but the THEME of the unaccusative verb does not need to move to a pre-verbal position (unlike in English, as in 8.b above) because an expletive *pro* fulfils the EPP (Escutia, 2012, p. 7) (as in 9.a).

9. a) [IP *pro*EXPL [VP llegaron **tres chicas**]]

(Lozano & Mendikoetxea, 2010, p. 477)

The results of Oshita (2004)’s study show that speakers of null-subject languages only use V-S order, that is, post-verbal subjects, with unaccusative verbs (as in 10.a), while they maintain S-V order with unergative verbs (in which the subject is the AGENT) (as in for example 10.c). Unaccusatives allow expletives (as in 10.a), while unergatives do not allow them (as in 10.b). It was proved that expletives are a psychological reality for native speakers of null-subject languages, because they apply this same pattern to their L2 English: they allow expletives with unaccusative verbs but do not allow them with unergatives.

10. a) There *fell* some leaves.

b) \*There *shouted* some people.

c) Some people *shouted*.

The existence of a null expletive subject (i.e., expletive *pro*) licenses post-verbal subjects in *pro*-drop languages. This is due to the fact that the expletive and the post-verbal subject “share agreement and Case features” (Lozano & Mendikoetxea, 2008, p. 88). In Spanish, although a sentence like 9.a (with a post-verbal subject, *tres chicas*) can be transformed into a sentence with a pre-verbal subject (as in 11.a), this would only be justified if the sentence is marking a focus on *tres chicas* (Escutia, 2012, p. 7).

11. a) *Tres chicas* llegaron.

To sum up, Spanish has one expletive subject, called null expletive or expletive *pro* because it is always non-overt. The Spanish expletive subject also occurs in initial position in the clause, and it is used to fill the head position of the Inflectional Phrase (IP) when the subject moves to a post-verbal position.

### **2.3 Expletive subjects in L1 Spanish L2 English learners: Transfer**

Expletive subjects in the L2 English of L1 Spanish L2 English speakers were studied by Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013), who explored the transfer regarding the acquisition of overt expletive subjects. The aim of their study was to determine to what extent the [+null-subject] nature of Spanish influences the acquisition of overt expletives in English –a [-null-subject] language. Their study shows that the acquisition of expletive *it* is difficult to acquire in all proficiency levels, while *there* seems to be less complex; that learners tend to use a null expletive because they transfer from their L1; and that L1 Spanish L2 English speakers never fully master the use of expletive subjects even if they are very proficient in the L2 (Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea, 2013, p. 183).

In a study on transfer, Escutia (2012) shows that in L2 acquisition both Universal Grammar (UG) and L2 grammar play a role when producing expletive subjects. Universal Grammar is a system that is innate to all human beings, and includes the linguistic principles that are common to all human languages (Haegeman, 1994). In his study, Escutia studies the production of expletives by L1 Spanish L2 English speakers, focusing on its relation to unaccusativity. The influence of the UG is seen in the fact that learners are aware of the unaccusative thematic structure of the clause; the transfer of their L1 grammar is seen in the tendency not to raise the subject to a pre-verbal position; finally, L2 grammar also plays a role in the fact that learners do provide overt expletives (not present in their L1) in order to fill the pre-verbal subject position (Escutia, 2012, pp. 8-10). He also points out that, despite

providing expletives, learners tend to use *it* instead of *there* (Escutia, 2012, p. 8), something which is corroborated by Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010), who claim that “L2 learners often use *it* in contexts where *there* is required” (p. 477).

Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010) studied the types of English V-S structures produced by L1 Spanish L2 English learners. These are expletive constructions because post-verbal subjects in English require an expletive to occupy their initial position (as in 8.b and 10.a). Their results indicate important differences between L1 English and L2 English regarding not only the preferred structures but also the production of ungrammatical sentences by L1 Spanish L2 English speakers. Their results show that L2 English speakers often produce *it*-insertion (ungrammatical); that they produce constructions which should include *there* without providing the expletive; and that they also provide null expletives (ungrammatical in English) (Lozano and Mendikoetxea, 2010, p. 486).

Judy and Rothman (2010) studied the L2 English referential and expletive subjects of L1 Spanish learners. The participants performed a Grammaticality Judgment/Correction Task (GJCT) including expletive subject judgments. The results showed that advanced L2 English learners perform similarly to native English speakers, except for ungrammatical expletives in main clauses, with a higher acceptability from L2 learners (Judy and Rothman, 2010, p. 10). This means that even advanced L2 English learners do not completely master the use of expletive subjects.

Some conclusions that can be drawn from the literature reviewed are stated below. L2 English speakers apparently have less problems with the acquisition of *there* than with the acquisition of *it*. However, in production, it has also been observed that they tend to use *it* in cases where they should use *there*. Among the errors that can be observed regarding the use of these constructions, it is common to find ungrammatical *it*-insertion, that is, including an expletive *it* in a construction that does not require it. Another error is the omission of *there* in sentences which should include it. Finally, another case of transfer which is also attested is the use of null-expletives, a transfer that tends to gradually disappear as the level of proficiency increases.

### 3. Methodology

The grammatical property that is studied in the experiment is the expletive subject, particularly the types of expletive constructions that have been described in the literature review. These constructions are the following:

IT:

- Extraposition *it* (e.g., *It is a pity that he does not like football.*)
- Weather *it* (e.g., *It is freezing.*)
- One-argument verb with clausal arguments (e.g., *It seems that nobody agrees on this.*)

THERE:

- Presentational *there* with unaccusative verbs (e.g., *There arrived a girl.*)
- Existential *there* (e.g., *There is a problem with the analysis.*)

#### 3.1 Research questions

Research question 1. Do L1 Spanish L2 English students find some of the studied expletive constructions (extraposition *it*; weather *it*; one-argument verb with clausal argument; presentational *there*; and existential *there*) more acceptable than others? If so, which ones do they find more acceptable?

Research question 2. Is there a negative transfer in the production of expletives in L1 Spanish L2 English students? If so, at which levels of proficiency?

Research question 3. Will the students who follow an English-Spanish Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) program outperform the students who follow the normal Spanish curriculum for the foreign language learning in terms of acceptability judgment and production of expletive subjects?

#### 3.2 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1. According to Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013), expletive *it* is more problematic than *there* at all proficiency levels. If this is so, then negative transfer is expected to occur in both CLIL and non-CLIL participants. Particularly, it is expected that students consider constructions with expletive *there* to be more acceptable than those with expletive *it*.

Hypothesis 2. According to Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013) and Lozano and



Mendikoetxea (2010), negative transfer of L1 null expletive is to be found at all proficiency levels, but it gradually decreases as the proficiency level increases. Based on both Escutia (2012) and Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010)'s observations, negative transfer also occurs in the use of *it* in contexts where *there* is required. If this is so, then negative transfer is to be found in the production of L1 null expletive especially in lower levels, and in the production of *it* instead of *there*.

Hypothesis 3. As observed by Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010), students tend not to produce constructions with *there* (*there*-omission). According to Judy and Rothman (2010), problems with expletives in main clauses occur even at advanced levels in L1 Spanish L2 English. Taking this into consideration, it is expected that CLIL students will be generally more proficient in acceptability and production of expletive subjects (due to their higher level), but they will tend not to produce constructions with *there*, as observed by Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010) (*there*-omission). In other words, *there*-omission will occur in both the CLIL and non-CLIL participants, and in all levels.

### 3.3 Participants

In this study participated 24 L1 Spanish L2 English learners of 13-14 years of age, who were attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Spanish compulsory secondary education (ESO). They were divided into two groups:

- 10 students who follow the normal curriculum for the foreign language learning. They receive 3 hours of English lessons a week.
- 14 students who follow the Spanish-British integrated curriculum (British Council Programme). Each week, they receive 5 hours of English language lessons and, in content subjects taught in English: 3 hours of Geography and History, and 3 hours of Physics and Chemistry. These amount to 11 lessons with English input per week.

Table 1 shows the total input in English received by students in the two first years of ESO in the high school of the participants. These data take into consideration both the duration of the ESO school year in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, which amounts to 37 weeks (ORDEN EDU/482/2020, de 12 de junio, pp. 17661-17663; ORDEN EDU/501/2021, de 16 de abril, pp. 23071-23073), and the curriculum of the bilingual program in the participants' high school (Proyecto curricular, 2021, p. 10).

**Table 1.***Total instruction hours in English at the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO and at the time of testing*

	English	Biology and Geology	Geography and History	Physics and Chemistry	Total	At the time of testing
CLIL	407	111 (1 <sup>st</sup> ESO)	222	111 (2 <sup>nd</sup> ESO)	851	752
Non-CLIL	259	--	--	--	259	232

We have to take into consideration that the experiments were carried out at the beginning of April 2022, so the participants had not yet finished the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO. Hence, the actual instruction given to them at the moment of the experiment, which is less than the total instruction hours, is also presented here.

The participants have been divided both according to curriculum type and to proficiency level using the quick Oxford Placement Test. Below (table 2) are the students from both groups who completed both the placement test and the two tasks: the acceptability judgment task (AJT) and the production task (dealing with translation).

**Table 2.***Classification of participants according to placement test results*

	Number of participants	Proficiency level		
		A1	A2	B1
CLIL	14	--	3	11
Non-CLIL	10	4	6	--
Total	24	4	9	11

One participant in the CLIL group obtained a B2 result, and another one, a C1; additionally, one participant from the non-CLIL group obtained a B1. Given that these are isolated cases, these participants were excluded from the analysis. The studied participants have been subdivided into four groups:

1. Non-CLIL: A1 (with 4 participants)
2. Non-CLIL: A2 (with 6 participants)
3. CLIL: A2 (3 participants)
4. CLIL: B1 (11 participants)

### 3.4 The experiments

In the present study, the experimental data elicited through two online questionnaires in Google Forms have been analyzed. Two tasks have been conducted: an acceptability judgment task (AJT), and a production task.

Task 1 is an AJT, consisting of 30 experimental sentences and 30 distractors and fillers. The students are given a scale with four options for each sentence in the task (1-4): 1 is “totally unacceptable” and 4 is “totally acceptable,” as can be observed in the following example:

#### Figure 1

##### *Item 2 in the AJT*

It does not matter whether you go or not. \*

	1	2	3	4	
Totally unacceptable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally acceptable

In each set, there are 6 experimental sentences: three of them are grammatical, while three of them are ungrammatical. 30 fillers and distractors have also been included, so that the results are not biased.

Task 2 is a production task, which consists in the translation of sentences. It includes 25 experimental sentences and 25 distractors and fillers. Each set is made up of 5 experimental sentences, but all of them are grammatical. The fillers and distractors are also grammatical.

## 4. Results and discussion

This section deals with the results obtained in the AJT and production task. The purpose of the AJT has been to assess how students perceive certain expletive constructions in English. To explore the actual use of expletive constructions, the production task has been conducted. The first research question deals with the results of the AJT. To provide an answer to the second research question, the results in the production task have been analyzed. The third research question will be answered by combining both the AJT and production results.

### 4.1 Research question 1

The first research question deals with the acceptability of the expletive constructions studied. The results in table 3 show that the first hypothesis, namely, that participants find constructions with *there* more acceptable, is not confirmed. Considering the mean value of all *it* and all *there* constructions, participants find constructions with *there* slightly less acceptable than the ones with *it*, being this difference very low (2.729 for *there* and 2.782 for *it*). Therefore, it can be concluded that these participants accept both structures equally. Nevertheless, participants are more sensible to the difference between grammatical and ungrammatical structures in the case of *there* than in the case of *it*, because participants gave a higher value to ungrammatical *it* constructions than ungrammatical *there* constructions.

If each construction is taken into consideration separately, existential *there* constructions are actually the most accepted ones by these participants, and presentational *there* constructions are the least accepted. The fact that presentational *there* shows the lowest acceptability value for the participants is inconsistent with the first hypothesis, but the results of existential *there* constructions partially confirm it. This also suggests that presentational *there* constructions are the most complex for students to learn, while existential *there* is generally accepted by all participants. Therefore, existential *there* constructions are probably less complex, because they seem to be the easiest ones to learn by participants.

The highest acceptability value for ungrammatical sentences is in one-argument verb with clausal argument structures, and the acceptability of the grammatical ones is very similar, so this might suggest that these structures are too complex for the low and lower-intermediate level of the students, and for this reason participants are more uncertain of their acceptability.

**Table 3.***Mean acceptability values of expletive constructions*

	IT			THERE	
	Extraposition <i>it</i>	Weather <i>it</i>	One-arg. v.	Presentational <i>there</i>	Existential <i>there</i>
Grammatical sentences	2.681	2.819	2.847	2.278	3.181
	Mean: 2.782			Mean: 2.729	
Ungrammatical sentences	2.417	2.556	2.708	2.069	2.583
	Mean: 2.560			Mean: 2.326	

Note: The following abbreviations are used in this table: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument

The first hypothesis also stated that both CLIL and non-CLIL participants would consider *there* constructions more acceptable than *it* constructions. If CLIL participants are compared with non-CLIL participants (see table 4), we can see that in all types of constructions both groups consider grammatical sentences more acceptable than the ungrammatical ones. The only exception is extraposition *it*, in which ungrammatical sentences are given a higher mean value (2.733) than grammatical ones by non-CLIL participants (2.533). This could be due to the complexity of the construction together with the lack of exposure to this structure by participants in the lower levels. Therefore, this part of the hypothesis is confirmed, and the first hypothesis is, in the same vein, only partially confirmed.

**Table 4.***Mean acceptability values of expletive constructions by CLIL and non-CLIL participants*

		IT			THERE	
		Extraposition <i>it</i>	Weather <i>it</i>	One-arg. v.	Presentational <i>there</i>	Existential <i>there</i>
Non-CLIL	Gram	2.533	2.867	2.967	2.400	3.000
	Ungram	2.733	2.700	2.767	2.200	2.767
CLIL	Gram	2.786	2.786	2.762	2.190	3.310
	Ungram	2.190	2.452	2.667	1.976	2.452

Note: The following abbreviations are used in this table: Gram: grammatical; Ungram: ungrammatical; One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument

## 4.2 Research question 2

The second research question was whether there is a negative transfer from the participants' L1 in the production of expletive subjects, and at which levels. It was hypothesized that there would be a frequent production of null expletives, especially in the lower levels; and also, occurrences of *it* in contexts where *there* should be used.

Regarding null expletives, table 5 shows the percentage of null expletives with respect to the total number of answers in each group and each type of construction. It can be seen that there are instances of null expletives in almost all groups and structures, and these findings are in accordance with Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013) and Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010). Particularly, the production of null expletives is much more frequent in the case of *it* (26.11%) than *there* (12.08%). It can also be seen that the construction with the highest rate of null expletives is weather *it* (32.5%), and the one with the least instances is existential *there* (6.67%). The results of weather *it* can be explained by the fact that participants often expressed these constructions without the expletive subject in cases like, *Tomorrow will rain*. In the case of existential *there*, the fewer omissions could be expected because it is also the construction with the highest production of expletive subjects, and also due to the reasons mentioned in the first research question (it is basic for communication and therefore more frequent, and it has a more concrete meaning dealing with situation in space).

Nevertheless, the omission of expletive subjects actually increases with the level of proficiency, in contrast to the observations of the above-mentioned authors. The group with the highest proportion of null expletives is A2 (CLIL) (extraposition *it* 40%, weather *it* 60%, constructions with one-argument verbs 33.33%, presentational *there* 33.33%, existential *there* 26.67%), and the B1 group is in the second place. One reason for this might be the fact that A2 (CLIL) participants have a lower level than their B1 classmates. On the contrary, in the non-CLIL groups, the A2 participants' production contains many more null expletives (extraposition *it* 10%, weather *it* 10%, constructions with one-argument verbs 30%, presentational *there* 13.33%, existential *there* 3.33%) than their A1 classmates (extraposition *it* 15%, weather *it* 20%, constructions with one-argument verbs 0%, presentational *there* 15%, existential *there* 0%). This can be due to the fact that A1 participants had a too low level to be able to produce these constructions even with a null expletive. A2 (non-CLIL) participants omit much more often than the A1 group, possibly because the A2 participants are still learning these structures but have not mastered them yet.

**Table 5.***Production of null expletive constructions*

	IT			THERE	
	Extraposition <i>it</i>	Weather <i>it</i>	One-arg. V.	Presentational <i>there</i>	Existential <i>there</i>
A1 (non-CLIL)	15%	20%	0%	15%	0%
A2 (non-CLIL)	10%	30%	30%	13.33%	3.33%
A2 (CLIL)	40%	60%	33.33%	33.33%	26.67%
B1 (CLIL)	24.46%	30.91%	27.27%	16.36%	5.46%
By construction	21.67%	32.50%	24.17%	17.50%	6.67%
By exp. Type	Mean: 26.11%			Mean: 12.08%	

Note: The following abbreviations are used in this table: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument; Exp.: expletive

Therefore, the first part of the hypothesis is partially confirmed. The use of null expletive subjects in all levels of proficiency is in accordance with Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013) and Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010)'s results. Nevertheless, the increase in the use of null expletive subjects with the level of proficiency is unexpected taking their findings into consideration. This could be explained by the fact that A1 students are still often incapable of producing these constructions, so there cannot be as many cases of omitted expletives as in the A2 participants. This could also be supported by the fact that, in the case of the CLIL group, it is indeed the participants of the lower level who have the highest rate of omission of expletive subjects. What these findings suggest is that, although expletive subjects start to be learned early, students start to use them productively at the A2 level, and start to use them more correctly in B1.

The second part of the hypothesis is confirmed. The results in table 6 show the percentage of answers using a different expletive subject (*it* instead of *there*; or *there* instead of *it*) out of the total number of answers. In nearly 15% of the answers requiring expletive *there*, participants used *it* instead. This percentage is higher in presentational *there* (17.5%) than in existential *there* (11.7%). The opposite trend, namely, using expletive *there* in cases where *it* should be used, is almost inexistent (one instance out of 360 answers). These findings are consistent with the observations of Escutia (2012) and Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010). Particularly, the type of construction with the most frequent occurrence of a wrong expletive is presentational *there*. This is probably due to the fact that it is a more complex structure, and that participants are used to placing the subject at the beginning in English. When facing structures like *Vinieron muchas personas* (item 17), many students tend to translate it using sentences similar to *Many people arrived* instead of, *There arrived a lot of people*. As the

structure using the expletive is only produced by two participants (one of them producing *they* instead of *there*), it seems that the sentence with the pre-verbal subject is considered more natural by most students.

The data in this part of the analysis additionally show that both non-CLIL and CLIL participants behave in a similar trend with expletive *it* and expletive *there* constructions regarding the two types of errors that have been considered. Both groups omit expletive *it* (CLIL: 36%; non-CLIL: 17.50%) more than expletive *there* (CLIL: 20.45%; non-CLIL: 7.91%), and both groups contain a significant number of instances in which *it* is used in contexts requiring the production of *there* (CLIL: 12.88%; non-CLIL: 10.41%), but not the other way round (CLIL: 0%; non-CLIL: 0.83%). Therefore, in this case the second hypothesis is partially confirmed: null expletives extensively occur, in line with Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010) and Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013), but they actually tend to be used more often in higher levels, with A2 CLIL using it more than B1 CLIL; secondly, participants have been found to use *it* instead of *there* in many cases, confirming the results of Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010) and Escutia (2012).

**Table 6.**

*Ungrammatical use of expletives in the production task*

	IT			THERE	
	Extraposition <i>it</i>	Weather <i>it</i>	One-arg. v.	Presentational <i>there</i>	Existential <i>there</i>
A1 (non-CLIL)	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%
A2 (non-CLIL)	0%	0%	0%	23.33%	13.33%
A2 (CLIL)	0%	0%	0%	6.67%	6.67%
B1 (CLIL)	0%	0%	0%	21.82%	16.36%
By construction	0%	0.83%	0%	17.50%	11.67%
By exp. type	Mean: 0.28%			Mean: 14.58%	

Note: The following abbreviations are used in this table: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument; Exp.: expletive



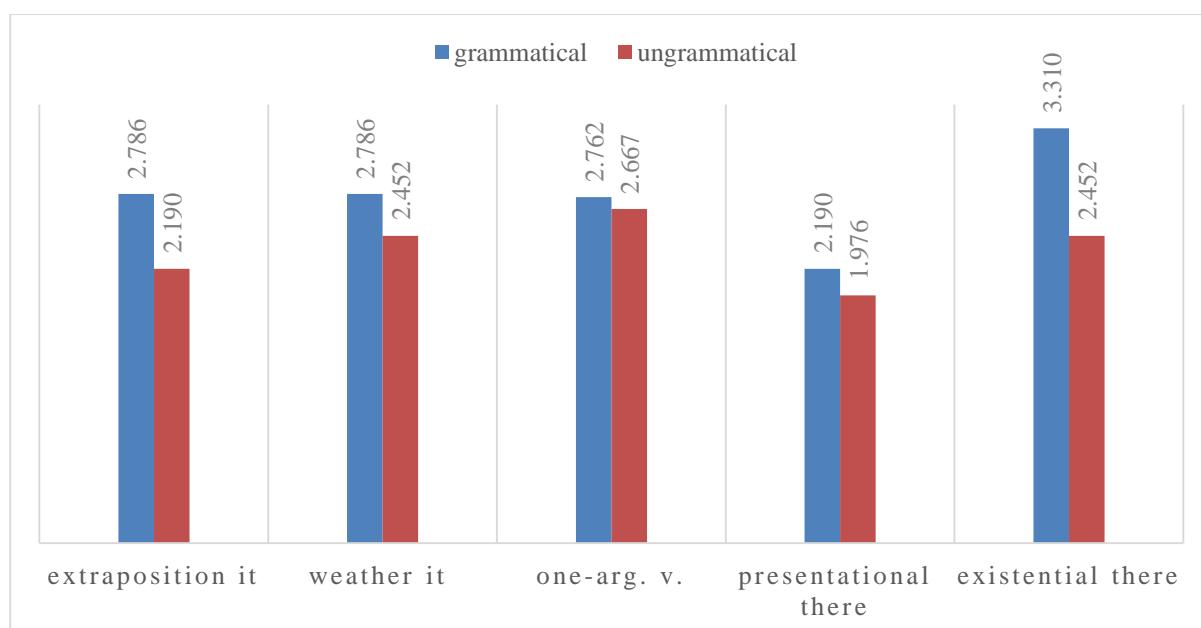
### 4.3 Research question 3

The last research question asks whether CLIL participants are more proficient in the acceptability and production of expletive subjects than non-CLIL participants. It is hypothesized that this is true, but *there*-omission occurs in both groups and all levels of proficiency. Both the results of the CLIL and the non-CLIL group are considered and compared in each of the four groups distinguished.

With respect to acceptability, a higher difference can be observed between the value given to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences in the case of CLIL participants (see figures 2 and 3). The only exception is in structures with one-argument verbs with a clausal argument, in which the difference between the value given to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences was higher in the case of non-CLIL participants. This might be due to the higher complexity of the structure, as it is the construction in which CLIL participants have made a less clear distinction regarding grammaticality. Taking these results into account, CLIL participants are, overall, more proficient in the acceptability of expletive constructions than non-CLIL participants. This is probably due to the higher level of CLIL participants, and in turn to their longer time of exposure to the English language.

**Figure 2.**

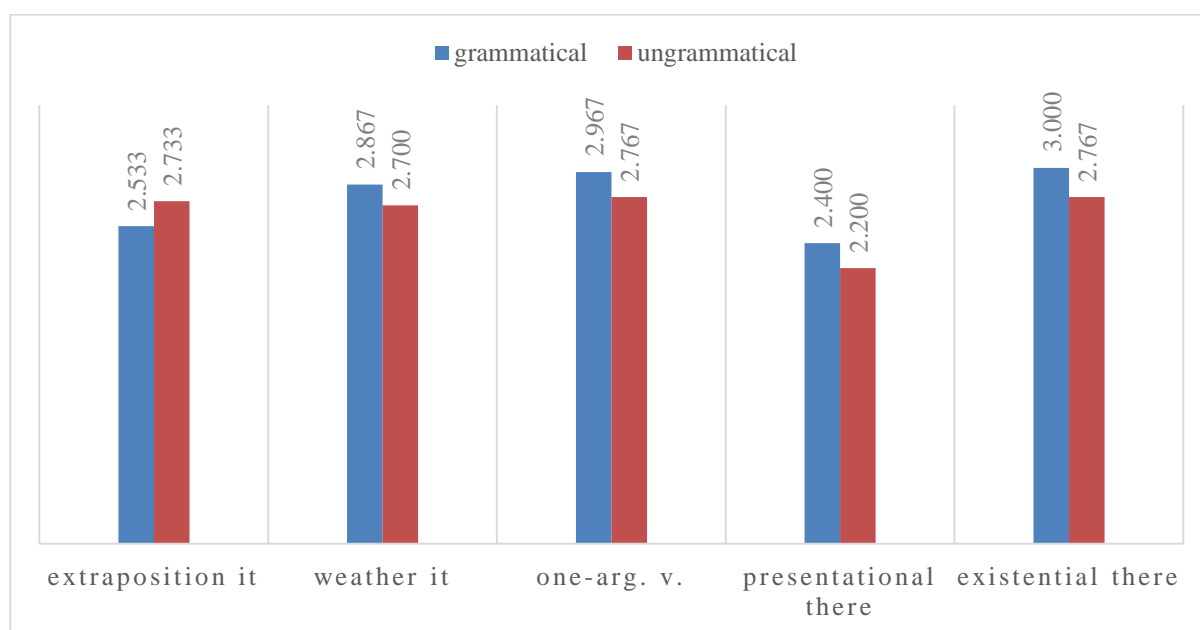
*Mean acceptability values of expletive constructions by CLIL participants*



Note: The following abbreviations are used in this figure: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument

**Figure 3.**

*Mean acceptability values of expletive constructions by non-CLIL participants*



Note: The following abbreviations are used in this figure: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument

If the total values given to *it* and *there* constructions are considered as a whole (table 5), similar results can be observed. Table 7 shows that CLIL and non-CLIL participants have given very similar values to grammatical structures, but CLIL participants gave lower values to ungrammatical structures. This might suggest that non-CLIL participants find it more difficult to distinguish between the grammatical and ungrammatical structures, while CLIL participants show a higher awareness of the difference between the grammatical and ungrammatical structures. These results suggest that both the non-CLIL and CLIL groups have similar tendencies in terms of acceptability of expletive constructions, but CLIL participants are more able to recognize ungrammaticality.

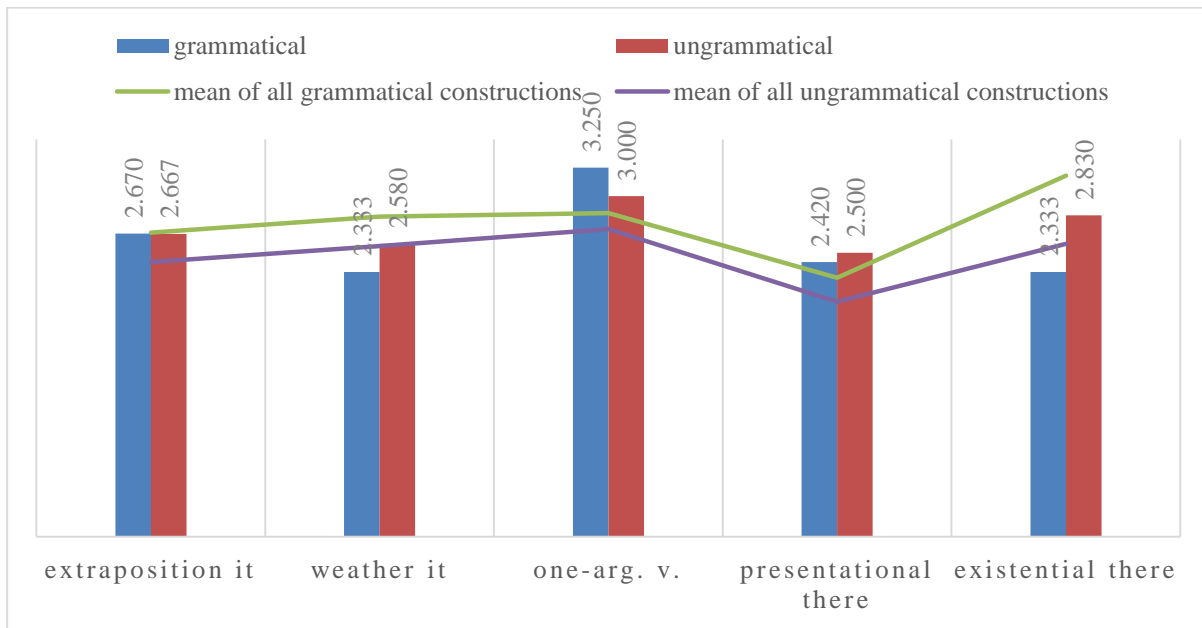
**Table 7.**

*Mean acceptability values of expletives it and there by CLIL and non-CLIL participants*

		IT	THERE
CLIL	Grammatical	2.778	2.75
	Ungrammatical	2.437	2.214
Non-CLIL	Grammatical	2.789	2.700
	Ungrammatical	2.733	2.483

**Figure 4.**

*Acceptability of expletive constructions by A1 (non-CLIL) participants*



Note: The following abbreviations are used in this figure: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument

If we now turn to the results obtained for each of the four groups distinguished, A1 participants (figure 4) have given higher values to ungrammatical sentences (2.716) than to grammatical ones (2.601) except in one-argument verb constructions (grammatical 3.250; ungrammatical 3.000), and extraposition *it* constructions, where they gave the same value to grammatical than to ungrammatical ones. This might suggest that comprehension of these structures is still deficient at this level of proficiency, as participants have presumably not been exposed to them often. In weather *it*, presentational *there*, and existential *there*, the better results can be attributed to the frequency of these structures in everyday English.

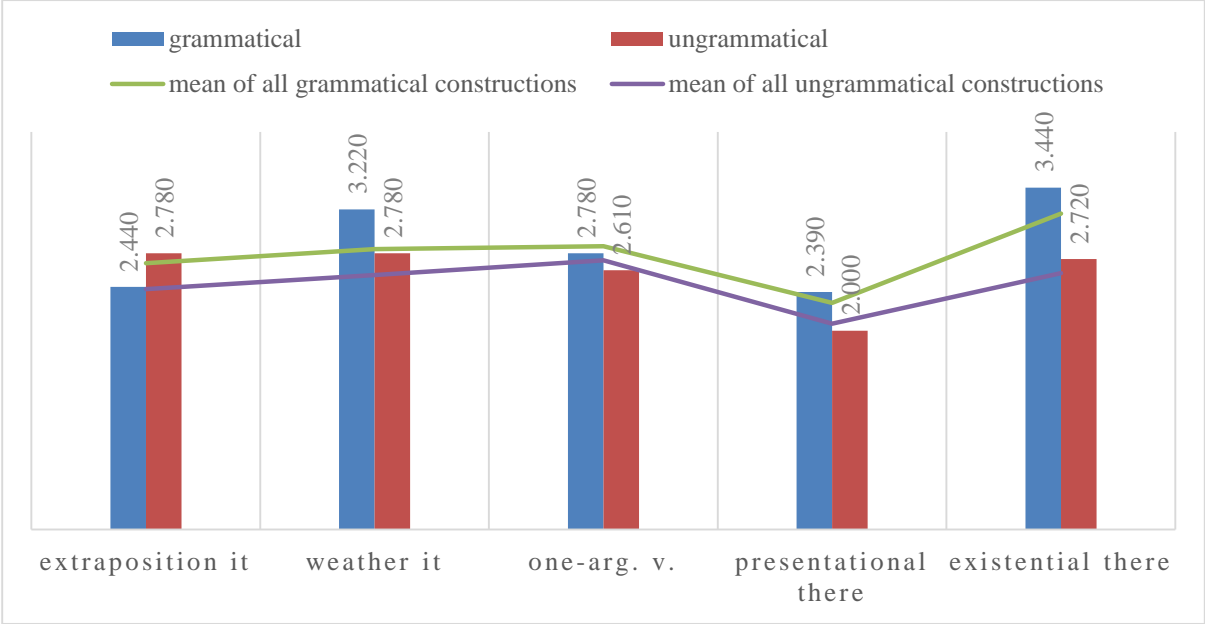
If we now consider the results in figure 5 of the A2 (non-CLIL) group, it can be seen that they have given higher values to grammatical sentences (2.854) than to ungrammatical ones (2.578), except in extraposition *it* constructions (grammatical 2.440; ungrammatical 2.780). For this reason, it can be suggested that participants improve considerably in acceptability judgment from the A1 to the A2 (non-CLIL) level of proficiency.

Thirdly, in figure 6, the results of the A2 (CLIL) group have been analyzed. This group has given higher values to ungrammatical sentences than grammatical ones in weather *it* (grammatical 2.560; ungrammatical 3.110) and presentational *there* (grammatical 2.220;

ungrammatical 2.440). Besides, they have given the same value to ungrammatical existential *there* sentences than to the grammatical ones (3.000). The reason for these results is unclear, so in order to obtain more conclusive results further research needs to be carried out.

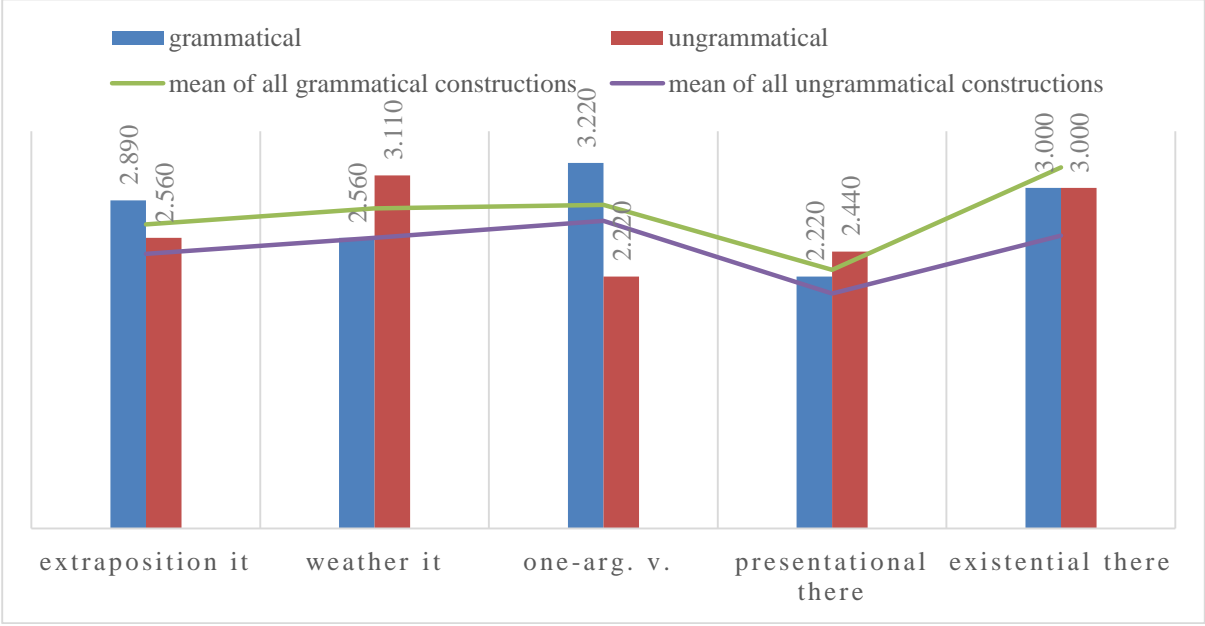
**Figure 5.**

*Acceptability of expletive constructions by A2 (non-CLIL) participants*



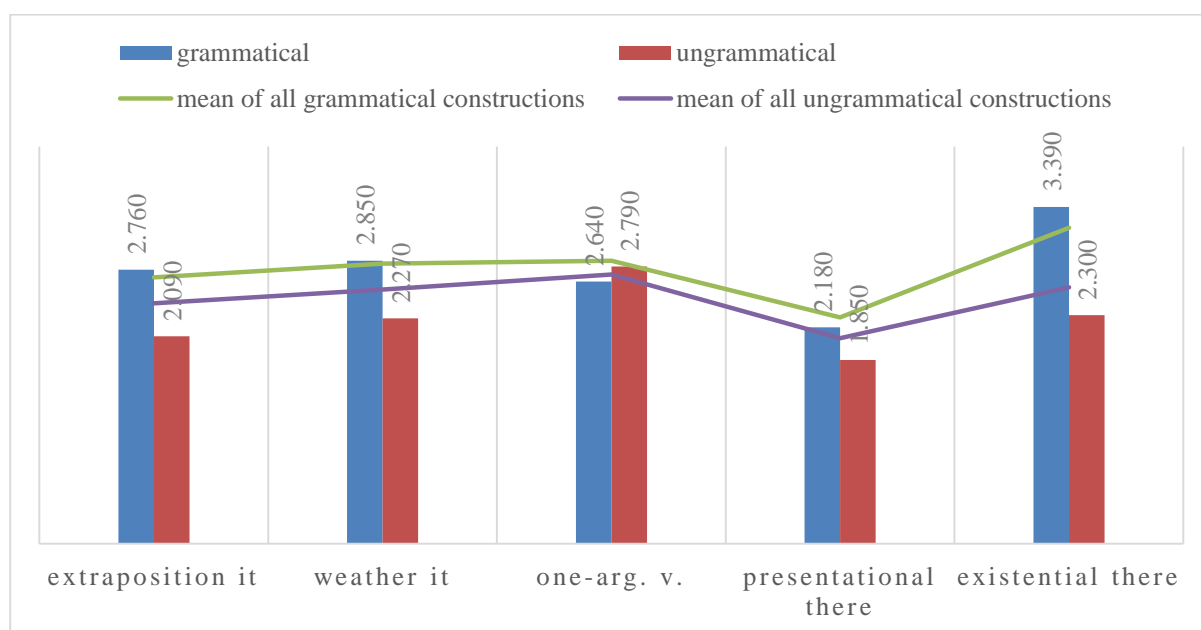
**Figure 6.**

*Acceptability of expletive constructions by A2 (CLIL) participants*



**Figure 7.**

*Acceptability of expletive constructions by B1 (CLIL) participants*



Note: The following abbreviations are used in this figure: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument

Finally, the results of the B1 participants in figure 7 show that the participants have given higher values to grammatical than ungrammatical sentences except in the case of one-argument verb constructions (grammatical 2.640; ungrammatical 2.790). This difference, nevertheless, is quite low in comparison with the other constructions: in most of the other structures, the difference between the value given to grammatical sentences and the one given to ungrammatical ones is higher than in the rest of the groups. This means that there is a considerable improvement in the acceptability of expletive subjects as the level of proficiency increases, and this thus confirms the first part of the hypothesis. Particularly, there is a high improvement from the A1 to the A2 group.

To investigate the part of the hypothesis dealing with the production, the performance of the participants has been analyzed by considering the proportion of grammatical expletive subjects produced out of the total number of expletive subjects produced. There are some instances (5 in total) in which the participants have used the referential pronoun *they* instead of the required expletive *there*. For example, one participant has produced the sentence, \**They will come foreign classmates*, in order to translate the sentence, *Vendrán alumnos extranjeros* (item 19). In these cases, it has been considered that the participants were using an

expletive subject because they were producing the referential pronoun with an expletive value.

First, if the total number of expected answers in *it* and *there* (table 8) is considered, *it* (43.61%) presents a higher percentage of expected answers than *there* (32.92%), inconsistent with Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013)'s claim that expletive *it* is more problematic for L1 Spanish L2 English learners than expletive *there*. Nevertheless, if we take each type of construction into consideration separately, the one that shows the highest rate of correct answers is existential *there* (57.5%); while the construction with the lowest rate is presentational *there* (8.33%). These results are in line with the ones obtained in the AJT, which have shown that existential *there* is the most accepted type of expletive subject and presentational *there* was the least acceptable one for all participants. These results deal with the production of all participants in general. In order to assess whether the CLIL groups actually outperform the non-CLIL ones, the four different groups distinguished in this study have also been compared.

**Table 8.**

*Total expected answers in the production task*

	IT			THERE	
	Extraposition <i>it</i>	Weather <i>it</i>	One-arg. v.	Presentational <i>there</i>	Existential <i>there</i>
A1	5%	0%	0%	0%	20%
A2 (non-CLIL)	53.33%	40%	16.66%	3.33%	53.33%
A2 (CLIL)	46.66%	40%	53.33%	6.66%	60%
B1	65.45%	61.82%	58.18%	14.55%	72.73%
By construction	50%	43.33%	37.5%	8.33%	57.5%
By exp. type	Mean: 43.61%			Mean: 32.92%	

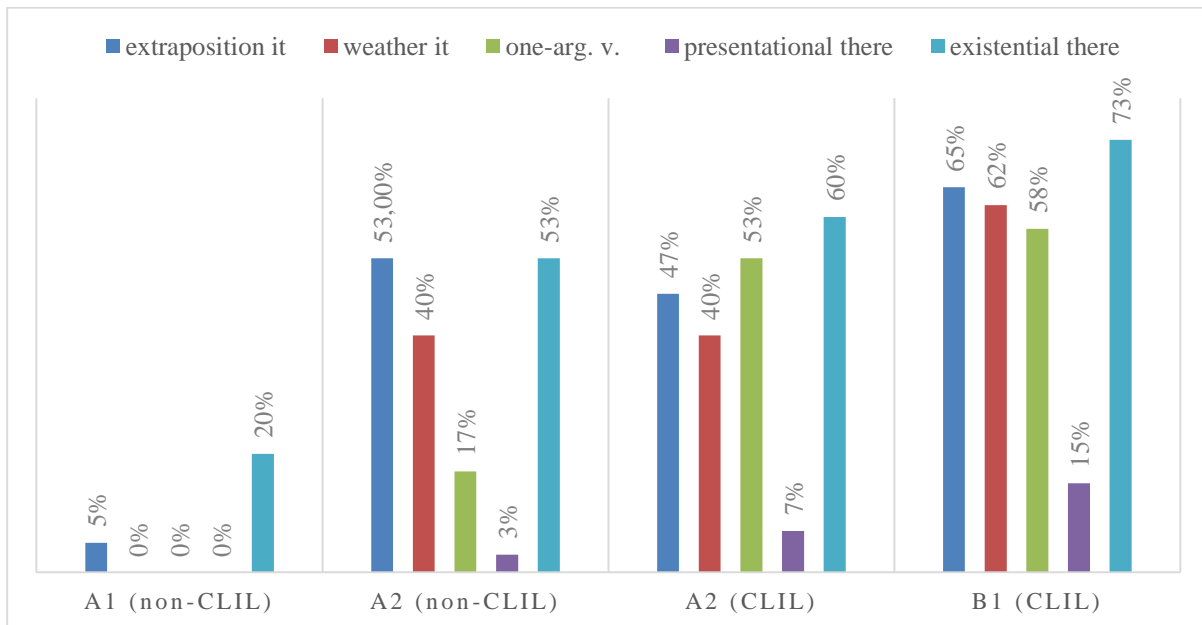
Note: The following abbreviations are used in this figure: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument; Exp.: expletive

Figure 8 shows that there is an increase in the production of expletives with the level of proficiency. The A2 non-CLIL group outperforms the A2 CLIL one in extraposition *it* (non-CLIL 53%, CLIL 47%); in weather *it*, both obtained the same results (40% of expected answers); and elsewhere, the CLIL group outperforms the non-CLIL one. Finally, regarding the general production of *it* and *there* (figure 9), it also increases with proficiency level, according to the program, and in all constructions. Consequently, the first part of the hypothesis is confirmed, as CLIL outperforms non-CLIL. This is possibly due to the longer exposure to the language. Overall, these results seem to indicate that type of instruction does

play a role.

**Figure 8.**

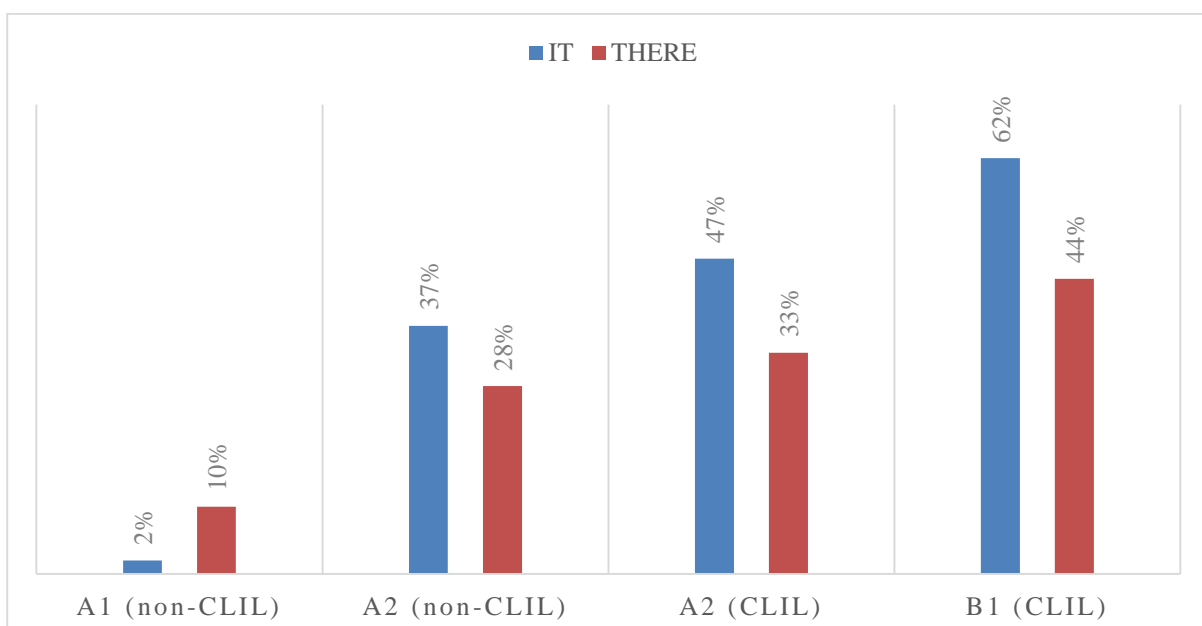
*Production of expected expletive subjects by level of proficiency*



Note: The following abbreviations are used in this figure: One-arg. v.: Constructions with a one-argument verb with clausal argument

**Figure 9.**

*Production of expletives it and there by level of proficiency*



With regards to the last part of the hypothesis that *there*-omission would occur in all levels of proficiency and in both CLIL and non-CLIL groups. The results in table 5 have

already confirmed both hypotheses. This confirms the previous observations made by Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010). Particularly, in table 6 the results also showed that *there*-omission is more frequent in the CLIL groups (20.46%) than in the non-CLIL groups (7.92). This might be due to the fact that students from the lower levels were often unable to produce any of the structures under analysis. Additionally, the transfer of a null expletive has been shown to be more frequent with *it* than with *there*. This can be due to the higher difficulty degree of *it* for learners reported by Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013). Consequently, the third hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

#### **4.4 Final remarks**

The results in this section confirm some of the findings of previous studies, as well as the predictions made in this dissertation. First, that null expletive constructions are transferred. Additionally, CLIL participants are somewhat more proficient in the acceptability and production, and their production improves with the level of proficiency. Finally, there are also frequent cases of using *it* instead of *there*, as well as of *there*-omission.

However, some other parts of the analysis offer new findings to the ones already studied in the literature review. First of all, participants find *it* constructions more acceptable in general than *there* constructions. Secondly, though there are cases of null expletives, these actually increase with the level of proficiency, contrary to the expectations. Finally, *there*-omission occurs, but it is less frequent than *it* omission.

There are still some aspects that need to be explored more. The difference between the A2 non-CLIL and the A2 CLIL participants in some of the findings is difficult to explain, as both groups share the same level of proficiency, but the type of instruction seems to play a role. Particularly, though CLIL participants tend to outperform non-CLIL participants, it was observed that regarding acceptability the A2 non-CLIL group has outperformed A2 CLIL group when comparing their results by type of construction. This issue needs to be further explored, as in the production results it is the CLIL group that outperforms the non-CLIL group.



## 5. Didactic proposal

In light of the information obtained from the theoretical framework and the results of the analysis, a didactic proposal is presented here in order to teach L1 Spanish L2 English students of attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO how to use the different expletive constructions dealt with in this dissertation. The didactic proposal, which consists of one whole session and five other activities, is aimed both at the students in the bilingual program (British Council) and at other 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO students not included in this program.

The proposal is based on the curriculum established by LOMLOE (Real Decreto 217/2022, de 29 de marzo) for the foreign language teaching. We also have to take the CEFR (Consejo de Europa, 2020) into consideration because it is the official European document that describes aspects related to the learning of foreign languages. Finally, the bilingual program (British Council Programme) also has a specific norm that has to be followed and that regulates its application in Secondary Education (ORDEN ECI/1128/2006, de 6 de abril).

The LOMLOE describes some general objectives to be achieved in the ESO stage, some of which are particularly related with the activities proposed here for English as a Foreign Language (EFL):

- h) Understand and express oneself correctly, orally and in writing, in the Spanish language and, where appropriate, in the co-official language of the Autonomous Community, complex texts and messages, and begin to know, read and study literature.
- i) Understand and express oneself in one or more foreign languages in an appropriate manner.
- l) Appreciate artistic creation and understand the language of different artistic manifestations, using different means of expression and representation. (Real Decreto 217/2022, de 29 de marzo, p. 41576)

Apart from the general objectives, some specific objectives of the proposal have also been described:

- a) Understand the meaning of English expletive subjects and compare them to equivalent Spanish constructions.
- b) Produce sentences with English expletive subjects in meaningful contexts, both orally and in written form.
- c) Interact with their classmates in the understanding and production of different expletive constructions.

The purpose of the proposal is to introduce a grammatical aspect in an active way that will require the participation of the students during each activity. To design the session, three phases have been distinguished:

1. Introduction, dealing with the theoretical part;
2. Practice, in which the students produce the target structures orally, in a guided way and in pairs; and
3. Production, which reinforces the contents by making students write a text individually.

Finally, a wrap-up activity has been included in order to revise the contents that they have learned. This activity involves the students standing up and passing a ball among them while using the structures learned during the lesson.

This proposal also regards two hypotheses on which the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrel, 1983) to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is based, particularly the second and fifth hypotheses:

-Monitor hypothesis, by which acquisition (unconscious process) is influenced by learning (conscious process). In other words, learning is a set of rules that “monitor” or guide the acquisition.

-Affective filter hypothesis, by which emotional aspects can affect language acquisition: a higher affective filter acts like a barrier to learning because it hinders communication. A lower affective filter is therefore required in order to achieve more communication and hence more effective learning.

In these activities, the students are expected to be more or less conscious of the type of structures they are being taught, and to be able to apply them in different ways. The last activity is more active and involves improvisation. It does not include visual support, unlike the previous two activities, but since the structure has already been taught and this activity is to function as a review, the students’ affective filter is expected to be low. Therefore, the session begins in a big group so that students understand the concepts, and this gives them confidence to continue with individual work and finally with the game in activity 4, which requires faster thinking.

It can also be observed that the sequence of activities progresses from comprehension to expression skills, and from oral to written skills, following the natural acquisition order. This is why the first two activities are done orally and the third one is written. The last one is

oral, but it is situated at the end of the session, because the students no longer have a visual support as in the previous two activities. The absence of visual aid means that they have to invent the sentences from scratch, but this is expected to be possible for them because of the previous guidance and practice; i.e., scaffolding theory (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). This is also taken into account in the fact that the first activity, as well as the brainstorming in the second one, are done in a big group (the whole class), the second activity then continues with a task that they have to do in pairs, and the third one is individual. The students will be thus gradually capable of carrying out the activities on their own.

The session includes three specific competences from the Education Law (Real Decreto 217/2022, de 29 de marzo, pp. 41716-41717): the specific competence number 2, dealing with expression; the third one, dealing with interaction; and the fifth one, related to knowledge about how language works and about other languages apart from one's own. These specific competences are detailed in the table of the session (appendix 1). The second specific competence is reinforced in activities 2 and 3; the third one, in activities 2 and 4; and the fifth one, in the first activity.

Regarding the general assessment criteria of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years of ESO which have been selected for this proposal, they are also included in the Education Law, and each one is related to one specific competence (the specific assessment criteria are included in the table of the session in appendix 1):

2.1 Orally express short, simple, structured, comprehensible texts, appropriate to the communicative situation, on every day and frequent matters relevant to the students, in order to describe, narrate and inform on specific topics, in different media, using verbal and non-verbal resources in a guided way, as well as planning and production control strategies.

2.2 Organize and write short, comprehensible texts with acceptable clarity, coherence, cohesion and appropriateness to the proposed communicative situation, following established guidelines, using analogue and digital tools, on every day and frequent matters of relevance to the students and close to their experience.

3.1 Plan and participate in short, simple interactive situations on everyday topics of personal relevance and close to the learner's experience, using a variety of media, relying on resources such as repetition, slow pace or non-verbal language, and showing empathy and respect for linguistic politeness and digital etiquette, as well as for the different needs, ideas, concerns, initiatives and motivations of the interlocutors.

5.1 Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between different languages, reflecting on their functioning in a progressively autonomous way. (Real Decreto 217/2022, de 29 de marzo, p. 41719)

Finally, some contents and basic knowledge included in the law for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO have been chosen for each activity. The following are the detailed basic knowledge included in the law, but the specific parts used for each activity are included in the table of the session (appendix 1).

#### A. Communication

a.1 Self-confidence. Error as an instrument for improvement and a proposal for repair.

a.2 Basic strategies for planning, executing, monitoring and repairing comprehension, production and co-production of oral, written and multimodal texts.

a.4 Basic communicative functions appropriate to the communicative domain and context: greeting, saying goodbye, introducing oneself and others; describing people, objects and places; placing events in time; placing objects, people and places in space; asking for and exchanging information on everyday matters; giving and asking for instructions and orders; offering, accepting and refusing help, propositions or suggestions; expressing liking or interest and basic emotions; narrating past events, describing present situations and stating future events; expressing opinion, possibility, ability, obligation and prohibition.

a.7 Commonly used vocabulary of interest to students related to personal identification, interpersonal relationships, places and environments, leisure and free time, daily life, health and physical activity, housing and home, climate and natural environment, information and communication technologies.

#### B. Multilingualism

b.4 Commonly used vocabulary and expressions to understand statements about communication, language, learning and the tools of communication and learning (metalanguage).

b.5 Basic comparison between languages on the basis of elements of the foreign language and other languages: origin and kinship. (Real Decreto 217/2022, de 29 de marzo, p. 41720-41721)

As the participants in this study are in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO in the same high school, this proposal is aimed at students of the same level. Regarding the particular groups studied, there are some things that have to be taken into account. Some students belong to the bilingual program and others do not. Additionally, they show different proficiency levels. According to the CEFR, B1 corresponds to an independent user (Consejo de Europa, 2020, p. 46), and most

of the students from the bilingual program have reached this level (in fact, they are all being taught this level). However, A1 and A2 are described as basic users, while C1 and C2 refer to competent users, both of which distinctions are to be found in the groups, so this means that there is a wide variety of learners in these two groups.

In the bilingual group there are a C1 participant and a B2 participant, and in the non-bilingual group there is one B1 participant. All three of them have been excluded from the analysis in order to be able to reach more accurate conclusions. With that said, the proposal designed also aims at students with those levels of proficiency.

Notwithstanding the variety of proficiency levels between the two groups, if we consider the two groups separately, they are quite homogenous. In the bilingual group, we can find from A2 (3 students) to C1 levels (1 student), including one B2 student, but the majority is situated in B1 (12), so a lesson on expletive constructions might be more effective with them. The other group includes a vast majority of students with an A2 level (14 students), some students with an A1 level (6) and one student with a B1. This makes it even more important to make the proposal flexible for each student's reality and also to focus on the progression of activities as a gradual shift from spoken to written, from comprehension to expression, and from guided practice to individual work.

Regarding the other activities created, these share the same three general objectives of the LOMLOE and the three specific objectives of the session. The specific competences are 1 (dealing with comprehension), 3 (dealing with interaction), and 5 (related to identifying strategies for learning). With respect to the assessment criteria, in these activities they are 3.1 (dealing with interaction with their classmates), already described, and additionally:

1.2 Select, organize and apply in a guided way the most appropriate strategies and knowledge in everyday communicative situations in order to understand the general meaning, essential information and relevant details of texts; interpret non-verbal elements; and search for and select information.

5.3 Identify and record, following models, progress and difficulties in foreign language learning, selecting in a guided way the most effective strategies for overcoming these difficulties and making progress in learning, carrying out self-assessment and co-assessment activities, such as those proposed in the European Language Portfolio (ELP) or in a learning diary, making these progresses and difficulties explicit and sharing them. (Real Decreto 217/2022, de 29 de marzo, p. 41719-41720)

Finally, the contents and basic knowledge of these activities are a.1, a.2, a.7 (“Communication”) and b.4 (“Multilingualism”), already described above.

Overall, it is expected that this didactic proposal is effective for both groups, making the necessary changes in linguistic input in each case. The fact that each group is individually quite homogeneous in terms of proficiency level makes it easier to adapt this input because all the students in a particular group might share similar comprehension problems that can be tackled more easily during the lesson.

## 6. Conclusions

This dissertation has explored the acceptability and production of expletive subjects *it* and *there* by L1 Spanish L2 English students of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of ESO. Through the comparison of students from different proficiency levels (from A1 to B1), as well as different programs (CLIL and non-CLIL), the study set out to explore the participants judgment and production of different types of expletive subject constructions (i.e., both grammatical and ungrammatical).

Three research questions have been formulated: 1) Do students find some expletive constructions more acceptable than others? 2) Is there a negative transfer in the production of expletive subjects at different proficiency levels? 3) Do CLIL students outperform non-CLIL students regarding both acceptability and production of expletive subjects?

For the first research question, it has been hypothesized that constructions with expletive *there* are more accepted than those with *it*, based on Ferrandis and Mendikoetxea (2013)'s findings. This hypothesis has been rejected, as participants find existential *there* constructions to be the more acceptable, while presentational *there* constructions are the least accepted ones.

For the second research question, it has been hypothesized that there is a transfer of the null expletive (*pro*) from Spanish (the student's L1) to English (the student's L2), but especially in lower proficiency levels. Previous studies (Ferrandis & Mendikoetxea, 2013; Lozano & Mendikoetxea, 2010) have shown that, in the case of expletive constructions, negative transfer will take place, especially in lower proficiency levels. This has been partially confirmed, as the frequency is actually higher in A2 and secondly in B1. Additionally, it has been hypothesized that there are some instances of production of *it* in cases where *there* is required, following the findings of Lozano and Mendikoetxea (2010) and Escutia (2012). This has been proven to be a common error in the production task.

The third hypothesis, related to the third research question, has been that CLIL participants outperform non-CLIL participants in both production and acceptability tasks, but also that there are cases of *there*-omission in all levels of proficiency, and both in CLIL and non-CLIL groups. This hypothesis has been confirmed, as CLIL participants have shown better results in both the acceptability and production tasks. Nevertheless, these differences become even more prominent across proficiency levels, as the A2 non-CLIL and A2 CLIL groups include some exceptions to this generalization. Finally, *there*-omission has been

proven to be frequent, but the CLIL group has included more instances in this respect; additionally, and despite the frequency of *there*-omission, omission of *it* has been found to be more frequent.

Finally, a didactic proposal for the introduction of expletive constructions in the EFL classroom is described and included in this dissertation. It is oriented at students of the same level as the participants (namely A1-B1) but also contemplates students of higher levels, and both CLIL and non-CLIL groups. The purpose has been to include this type of constructions in a more explicit way in order to make the students aware of this grammatical aspect; an aspect which is often an obstacle due to the typological differences between English and Spanish.

To sum up, this dissertation shows that the participants find some expletive constructions more acceptable than others. Secondly, it demonstrates that there is a negative transfer from the L1 in the production of expletive subjects in L2 English. Finally, it shows that CLIL participants are in general more proficient than non-CLIL participants and their acceptability and production tasks show higher accuracy. Notwithstanding, these differences seem to be very much related to the differences in level of proficiency. All these findings suggest that the time of exposure to the language, probably together with the variety of this *input* can play a major role in the comprehension and use of these constructions. The study also shows that all groups, belonging to lower levels of proficiency, have not received explicit instruction regarding expletive constructions, which are nevertheless very common in English and therefore can be the key in grammatical application of the correct use of expletive subjects.

Further studies could be carried out in order to examine this grammatical aspect from different perspectives. This study has explored the knowledge of expletive subjects through an AJT, only dealing with comprehension, and a production task, which is a controlled activity requiring participants to translate a given sentence in their L1 into their L2. With a higher number of participants, further research could investigate the issues included in this dissertation using a large corpus, which would make it possible to study expletive subjects in spontaneous data.

Another possible study could investigate the acceptability and production of expletive constructions in students from different school groups, as groups in high schools might differ considerably in terms of other variables apart from proficiency level and type of program. These variables may include the actual interest of the students in the subject, as well as the



academic performance of the students in a particular group. Additionally, students from different years of schooling could be studied so as to assess the impact of age on the learners' performance.

A final suggestion for further investigation deals with the level of proficiency. Both the CLIL and non-CLIL programs included some students with higher proficiency levels to the ones selected for carrying out this analysis (one B2 and one C1 student in the CLIL program, and one B1 student in the non-CLIL program), but these students have been excluded from the analysis, because they were few. Nevertheless, it could be possible to study students who have different levels of proficiency so as to explore expletive constructions in the L2 English of upper intermediate and advanced levels.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1. Table of the session

<b>Session 1</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Specific competences</b></p> <p>2, 3, and 5:</p> <p><b>2.</b> Producing original, medium-length, simple and clearly organized texts, using strategies such as planning, compensation or self-repair, to express messages creatively, appropriately and coherently relevant messages and to respond to specific communicative purposes.</p> <p><b>3.</b> Interacting with others with increasing autonomy, using cooperative strategies and employing analogue and digital resources, in order to respond to specific communicative purposes in exchanges that respect the rules of politeness.</p> <p><b>5.</b> Expanding and using the personal linguistic repertoires across different languages, critically reflecting on how they function and becoming aware of one's own strategies and knowledge, in order to improve the response to specific communicative needs.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Specific assessment criteria</b></p> <p>The students will be able to:</p> <p><b>5.1</b> Identify the meaning of different expletive constructions in English and their characteristics in contrast to Spanish equivalent ones.</p> <p><b>2.1</b> Describe images of landscapes in a coherent way using different expletive constructions.</p> <p><b>3.1</b> Orally describe an image of a landscape by means of expletive constructions so that their classmates guess which image they are referring to.</p> <p><b>2.2</b> Write a medium-length story based on some images of people and landscapes by means of expletive constructions.</p> <p><b>3.1</b> Participate with their classmates in a game involving the use, in a set order, of sentences with expletive subjects.</p>
<p><b>Contents/basic knowledge</b></p> <p>A. Communication</p> <p><b>a.1</b> Self-confidence. The error as an instrument of improvement and repair.</p> <p><b>a.2</b> Basic strategies for planning, executing, monitoring and repairing production and co-production of written texts.</p> <p><b>a.4</b> Basic communicative functions appropriate to the communicative environment and context: describing people, objects and places; placing events in time; placing objects, people and places in space; narrating past events, describing present situations; expressing possibility.</p> <p><b>a.7</b> Commonly used vocabulary of interest to students related to interpersonal relationships, places and environments, leisure and free time, daily life, climate and natural environment.</p> <p>B. Multilingualism</p> <p><b>b.4</b> Commonly used vocabulary and expressions to understand statements about communication, language, and learning (metalinguage).</p> <p><b>b.5</b> Basic comparison between languages based on elements of the foreign language</p>	

and other languages.

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Specific competences</b>	<b>Specific Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Contents / Basic knowledge</b>
Activity 1: “Let’s See What You Know”	5	5.1	b.4, b.5
Activity 2: “Come Rain or Shine”	2, 3	2.1, 3.1	a.2, a.4, a.7
Activity 3: “It’s Anyone’s Guess”	2	2.2	a.2, a.4, a.7
Activity 4: “Brush Up!”	3	3.1	a.1

## Appendix 2. Activities of the session

Activity number 1 - Session number 1		
Title: “Let’s See What You Know”	Type: introduction	Timing: 10 minutes
<p>Classroom management:</p> <p>The students sit individually.</p> <p>The teacher guides the activity and moves around.</p>		<p>Resources:</p> <p>Worksheet activity 1 (appendix).</p>
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>Good morning, students! How are you feeling today? I hope you are all in the mood for today’s lesson. First of all, I will give you a worksheet. Here you are, here you are...</p> <p>Great, you can already guess what you have to do. You have to say which sentences from the left column and which from the right column mean something similar. The idea is that you relate two sentences that mean more or less the same, but one of them uses a particular construction that I want you to learn.</p> <p>Can someone tell me which sentence is similar to a)? Yes, (name of the student).</p> <p>That’s right! Now, what does the next sentence mean? You are right! How about c)?</p> <p>Well, as you can see, this part of the activity is very easy for you. You already understand the meaning of these sentences. But I have a question for you: what do they have in common?</p> <p>Exactly, they begin with the same words: <i>it</i> or <i>there</i>. Have you seen them before? Are they common? Precisely, they are VERY common and for this reason they are also useful. Another question: do we have something similar in Spanish? Exactly, no we don’t, we simply say things like what? Yes, <i>llueve, hay mucha gente</i>, etc.</p> <p>Because we do not have these words in Spanish, many of you might find it difficult at the beginning to use them well. But today we will work on that.</p> <p>For the second part of the activity, I want you to focus on the next sentences that appear in your handout, from 1 to 5. What I want you to do is to tell me what the word <i>it</i> means in the first three sentences. Does anybody want to make a guess?</p> <p>Actually, <i>it</i> in 1 and 3 refers to the whole sentence that comes afterwards, but it does not have a meaning by itself. It is used in these particular constructions. What about <i>there</i>? You are right, the same thing happens. That is, <i>it</i> and <i>there</i> are not objects, nor people, nor anything that we can see or touch. In Spanish, we do not have these words, but they are so common that it is important for you to learn them in English...</p>		



<u>Activity number 2</u> - <u>Session number 1</u>		
Title: “Come Rain or Shine”	Type: reinforcement	Timing: 15 minutes
<p>Classroom management:</p> <p>The students sit individually; the teacher writes words provided by them during the brainstorming on the blackboard</p> <p>Afterwards, they work in pairs; the teacher moves around, solves doubts, and checks the students are using target constructions.</p> <p>Finally, each pair of goes to the front of the classroom in turns and says their clues.</p>		<p>Resources:</p> <p>Worksheet activity 2 (appendix).</p>
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>For the next activity, I will show you some images.</p> <p>I want you to look at these images. We are going to do a brainstorming, so please, tell me words that come to your mind as you look at these images. “Rainforest,” of course, “desert,” be careful, it is written with a single “s.” “Snow” ... “sand” ... “umbrella” ...</p> <p>Okay, enough for now. Now, you will work with a person seated next to you.</p> <p>Well, now that you are in pairs, I want you to pay attention to the constructions included in the handout and use them to describe one of these images with your partners. You have to choose only one of them and describe it. But you have to make an effort and use similar phrases to the ones we have just seen. You do not need to write them if you do not need it. What is important is that you talk with your partner. You can start now.</p> <p>Now that you have already finished, I want two volunteers to read their description, and the rest will have to guess the image they are describing. So, don’t make it too easy! Read your “clues” in order of difficulty to make it more exciting. Who wants to begin?</p> <p>You guessed it! Good work, next volunteers...</p> <p>Well, students! Every one of you did this correctly, and you made some wonderful clues. Now, we have to move on to the next activity. I am sure you will do it as well as this one.</p>		

<u>Activity number 3</u> - <u>Session number 1</u>		
Title: “It’s Anyone’s Guess”	Type: reinforcement	Timing: 20 minutes
<p>Classroom management:</p> <p>The students sit individually.</p> <p>At the end of the activity, the students hand in their writings to the teacher so that he/she gives them feedback in the next session.</p>		<p>Resources:</p> <p>Worksheet activity 3 (appendix).</p>
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>This time, you will work individually, because you have already practiced with your classmates. I am sure this time you know how to use these sentences, so now you will have to write. This time you will also have help. I will give you a worksheet. Here you are, here you are...</p> <p>In this sheet, you have six images. However, these ones are not separated as the previous ones: they are a... yes, a comic strip. So, this is a story! Can you guess what you have to do? Exactly, you have to write a short story in which you describe these images and try to connect them in any way you want: you can make up a story or just describe the situation... Be creative! But remember what we have learnt today because it will give you ideas of how to express what you want to say.</p> <p>You have some examples in the sheet to help you. And before I forget, you just need to write 70-100 words.</p> <p>I see that all of you have finished! Please, hand in your papers, and I will take a look at them for the next class.</p>		

<u>Activity number 4</u> - <u>Session number 1</u>		
Title: “Brush Up!”	Type: wrap-up	Timing: 10 minutes
<p>Classroom management:</p> <p>The students stand up from their seats.</p> <p>The teacher writes the list of the five constructions (from activity number 1) on the blackboard so the students can check them. The teacher passes the ball to one of the students. This student has to use the first construction.</p> <p>Afterwards, the student will pass the ball to another student.</p>		<p>Resources:</p> <p>A foam rubber ball.</p>
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>Well, how about a game for you to relax a little bit? Here, I have a foam rubber ball. Do you remember the example sentences from the first activity? I will write them on the blackboard for you to see them properly. Do you see that the sentences from the first and second part of that worksheet follow an order? Well, if I pass the ball to... (Name of the student), he has to make a sentence similar to “it is a pity that he does not like football.” Please, give it a try.</p> <p>Fine! Now, (name of the student) will pass the ball to someone of his choice..., now (name of the student) has the ball, and he has to make a sentence similar to “It is freezing.” ... Perfect! Now, you will continue doing this until all of you have participated.</p> <p>Alright! The time is up! See you next day, I hope you found the lesson interesting.</p>		

### Appendix 3. Other activities

Activity number 5 - Session number 0		
Title: “The Weather is Fine!”	Type: introductory	Timing: 10 minutes
Classroom management: The students stand up, some of them form a circle looking outward, the others form a circle that surrounds the other students, but looking inward toward their classmates so that they look at each other. Each one receives one card, either a drawing or a sentence. The students make questions to decide if the sentence matches the image, when the discussion finishes, one of the circles moves one step to the right, until all students match the correct sentences to the drawings.	Resources: Flashcards with drawings and sentences on weather conditions (appendix)	
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>For the next activity, I want you to stand up. The people in this part of the classroom will come here and form a circle, looking to the walls of the classroom. That’s it. I am going to give you one card to each of you, with one drawing. The rest of you, I want you to form another circle around them, this time looking at your classmates. I will give each of you one card with a sentence written on it. Do not show it to anyone.</p> <p>Each of you will speak with the classmate you have in front, and decide whether the sentence matches the drawing. After one minute, the circle with the sentences will move one step to the right, and you will continue with a different classmate. When the drawing matches the sentence, you can get out of the circle, until everyone matches their cards.</p> <p>Let’s begin.</p> <p>Well, as every one of you has finished, let me see which matches you have made. Good, you also did it well...</p> <p>Good! Now, let’s continue with a different thing...</p>		

<u>Activity number 6</u> - <u>Session number 0</u>		
Title: “There is/there are”	Type: introductory	Timing: 10 minutes
Classroom management: The students sit in pairs. Each pair receives a set of flashcards, both drawings and sentences. They work in pairs to combine the sentences with the corresponding drawings. They change places with a different pair to check their answers.	Resources: All flashcards with drawings and there is/there are sentences for each pair (appendix)	
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>For this activity, I want you to work in pairs, so you two can sit together, and you two as well... Okay, and the rest of you are already organized.</p> <p>I will give each pair a set of flashcards, some with sentences, some with drawings, and you will have to match the sentences with their corresponding drawings. Heer you are, here you are...</p> <p>Okay, now you can begin.</p> <p>I see all of you have finished more or less, so now I want you to stand up and move one place to the front. The ones at the front of the class, you have to move to the back of the classroom.</p> <p>Now, you have to check how your classmates did it, whether they did everything correctly or if they made some mistake.</p> <p>Well, did any of you find some mistake in your classmates’ matches? Okay, where is the error? Yes, the sentence is not the one that corresponds to the image. Do you think it is a common error, did you do it well? Could you explain your classmates what the correct answer would be?</p> <p>Thank you very much, students, I see that you already know something about these expressions. It is very important to know them because they are very common.</p>		

<u>Activity number 7</u> - <u>Session number 0</u>		
Title: “Let’s Draw!”	Type: introductory	Timing: 20 minutes
<p>Classroom management:</p> <p>The students work in pairs. One student reads the sentence, the other makes a drawing that describes it.</p> <p>The teacher collects the drawings and gives each pair the drawing of another pair.</p> <p>They write a sentence based on the new drawing. All original sentences are displayed on a table, and all pairs go to the table to select the sentence they think was the original that inspired the drawing.</p> <p>Then each pair tells the class the drawing they had, the sentence they wrote, and the original sentence.</p>		<p>Resources:</p> <p>Cards with the sentences and the boxes to draw (appendix)</p>
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>Good morning to everyone! I guess many of you like to do creative things and to draw. Today, you are going to draw, but do not worry, you do not need to be artists. First of all, you have to be in pairs. So, all of you can work with the classmate next to you.</p> <p>Each pair will receive one sentence and one blank card, that is, a card with nothing written on it. Do not show it to anyone. One student will read the sentence for their classmate, and the classmate will have to draw something that represent that sentence. Did you understand? Here you are, here you are... Now, let’s begin!</p> <p>Have you finished? Okay, now, give me your drawings, only the drawings. Now, I will give the drawings to a different pair. Remember, do not show it to anyone. Now, you have to do the opposite, you have to write a sentence based on the drawing you received, but I will give you a clue. You have to use the words that we have learned these days: <i>it</i> or <i>there</i>. In the meanwhile, I will collect the original sentences that I gave you.</p> <p>Okay, now, while you were writing, I put the sentences on this table. Next, I want you to stand up and come here. Now, each pair has to look at the sentences and choose the one that you think corresponds to the drawing you received.</p> <p>(Names of the students), show us the drawing you had, please. What sentence have you written? And what sentences do you think was the original? Is it true, (Names of the students)? Good job!</p> <p>Okay, the time is up, good job every one!</p>		

<u>Activity number 8</u> - <u>Session number 0</u>		
Title: “Where is the Problem?”	Type: wrap-up	Timing: 15 minutes
<p>Classroom management:</p> <p>The students work in pairs. One of them reads the sentence for their classmate. The classmate then identifies the error, and afterwards both decide on the correct answer.</p> <p>The teacher moves around to solve some of the students’ doubts.</p> <p>Finally, they write the correct sentence below the incorrect one.</p>		<p>Resources:</p> <p>Worksheet with the incorrect sentences (appendix)</p>
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>For the next activity, you have to work in pairs. You are already organized, so you can work with the classmate next to you. Today, you will be teacher! Yes, this time YOU will have to correct similar errors to the ones most of have made before, and I think it is great to learn from one’s mistakes. I will give a worksheet to one person per pair. Here you are...</p> <p>Okay, now, as you can see, you have five sentences, but I am already giving you a clue, as you know that each sentence has one error. The one with the worksheet read the sentence for their classmate, and then your classmate identifies the error. Finally, both of you will correct the sentence and write it down. Did you understand? You can start now!</p> <p>Well, who can tell me what the error in the first sentence is? Yes, there is something missing, <i>there</i>, so, <i>There are a lot of people at that party</i> would be the correct answer.</p> <p>Okay, you were very good teacher today! You have been able to correct everything, so this means that you have learned a lot these days. Good job!</p>		

<u>Activity number 9</u> - <u>Session number 0</u>		
Title: “How Many Points Did You Get?”	Type: wrap-up	Timing: 15 minutes
<p>Classroom management:</p> <p>The students sit individually. They use their mobile phones or a computer.</p> <p>When they complete the quiz, they repeat it with a classmate next to them.</p>		<p>Resources:</p> <p>Link to the quiz for reviewing expletive constructions (appendix)</p>
<p>Linguistic input:</p> <p>As I know that you are now a bit tired, we will play a game now. It is a quiz; I have sent you the link to our mail. You can do it with your mobile phones.</p> <p>In this quiz, you will revise all we have learned about <i>it</i> and <i>there</i>, so I hope you do it very well. Do it individually, please.</p> <p>How many points did you get? Great! Now, I want you to repeat the quiz, this time with the person next to you. Ready, steady, go.</p> <p>Have you finished? Did you do it better? Has it helped you to work in pairs? Who got 10 points this time? Fine! And the rest of you, which questions did you get wrong? Why is it wrong? Could someone help them? That’s right, the correct answer was the second one, because that expression is always with <i>it</i>, you cannot omit it.</p> <p>Good! I admit that you have done an impressive progress, you have learned a lot, so great job every one.</p>		



## Appendix 4. Worksheets and links to activities

### Activity 1. "Let's See What You Know." Worksheet

1- Match the sentences from the first column to the sentences from the second column that have a similar meaning.

- |   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| a) It is a pity that he does not like football. | 1) Apparently, they do not agree. |
| b) It is freezing.                              | 2) A girl arrived.                |
| c) It seems that nobody agrees on this.         | 3) I wish he would like it.       |
| d) There arrived a girl.                        | 4) The weather is very cold.      |
| e) There is a tree in the garden.               | 5) The garden has a tree.         |

2- In the following sentences, *it* or *there* is the subject. What do *it* or *there* refer to?

1. *It* is obvious that he will win the match.
2. *It* is too hot outside.
3. *It* seems that the presentation went well.
4. *There* came thousands of people.
5. *There* was a spider in the room.

## Activity 2. “Come Rain or Shine.” Worksheet

Describe the following images.<sup>2</sup> What can you see in them? Choose one of them and describe the climate/weather and what is to be seen in the picture.

Try to use as many constructions as possible:

*There is...*

*It is...*

*It seems/appears...*

*It is obvious/evident that...*

1)



2)



3)



4)



---

<sup>2</sup> Sources:

Wikimedia commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chiapas\\_Rainforest.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chiapas_Rainforest.jpg) (bere69, 2017);  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:White\\_Mountains\\_12\\_30\\_09\\_81.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:White_Mountains_12_30_09_81.jpg) (Barrison, 2009);  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Namib\\_Desert\\_Namibia\\_\(Unsplash\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Namib_Desert_Namibia_(Unsplash).jpg) (Unsplash, 2017).

Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/edenpictures/7444966728> (Edenpictures, 2012)

### Activity 3. “It’s Anyone’s Guess.” Worksheet

Write a story in 70-100 words using these images and try to describe everything in detail, using the constructions seen in class.<sup>3</sup> Do not worry if you do not include every single one of them.

Examples:

*There is a... / It can be seen that... / It appears that the two people are a couple...*



3





Sources:



Cartoon





strip:

[https://www.canva.com/design/DAE4paztuoo/z3Aay0XpkQLvCkz1xGfbFA/view?utm\\_content=DAE4paztuoo&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_source=homepage\\_design\\_menu](https://www.canva.com/design/DAE4paztuoo/z3Aay0XpkQLvCkz1xGfbFA/view?utm_content=DAE4paztuoo&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=homepage_design_menu) (Canva, 2022a); Pixabay: <https://pixabay.com/es/photos/monigote-de-nieve-familia-invierno-574714/> (Bohed, 2022), and <https://pixabay.com/es/photos/para-caminar-pareja-364152/> (TheFourthLink, n.d.); Wikimedia commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Techelsberg\\_Sankt\\_Martin\\_Winterwald\\_31012015\\_750.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Techelsberg_Sankt_Martin_Winterwald_31012015_750.jpg) (Jaritz, 2015); Pxhere: <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/650462> (2017), and <https://pixabay.com/es/photos/nieve-perro-perro-en-la-nieve-1136225/> (n.d.); SnappyGoat: [https://snappygoat.com/free-public-domain-images-winter\\_forest\\_snowy\\_landscape/IJCirpy7uFCNlcjsdrapJRD3FhDK1SpzxLj98JNLxaw.html#.0.0.7dc4a5b6bebd091f0ccb789ccbb571e5d8623849](https://snappygoat.com/free-public-domain-images-winter_forest_snowy_landscape/IJCirpy7uFCNlcjsdrapJRD3FhDK1SpzxLj98JNLxaw.html#.0.0.7dc4a5b6bebd091f0ccb789ccbb571e5d8623849) (SnappyGoat, n.d.)

Activity 5. "The Weather is Fine!"<sup>4</sup>

	<b>IT IS SUNNY</b>
	<b>IT IS PARTLY CLOUDY</b>
	<b>IT'S STARRY</b>
	<b>IT IS RAINY</b>

	<b>IT IS FREEZING</b>
	<b>IT'S HOT</b>
	<b>IT'S FOGGY</b>

	<b>IT IS SNOWY</b>
	<b>IT'S WINDY</b>
	<b>IT'S STORMY</b>
	<b>IT'S CLOUDY</b>

<sup>4</sup> Source: [https://www.canva.com/design/DAFCLkJvRIQ/QVpK5ILcBWArxft55-K1Q/view?utm\\_content=DAFCLkJvRIQ&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_source=home\\_page\\_design\\_menu#1](https://www.canva.com/design/DAFCLkJvRIQ/QVpK5ILcBWArxft55-K1Q/view?utm_content=DAFCLkJvRIQ&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=home_page_design_menu#1) (Canva, 2022c)

Activity 6. There is/there are<sup>5</sup>

	There's a spider in my room.		There will be a lot of traffic.
	There's a sandwich left.		There is a swimming pool in the house.
	There was an error in my homework.		There are ten students in the class.
	There are two people waiting.		There was a party yesterday.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Link to the flashcards: [https://www.canva.com/design/DAFCLuT3b0E/cqIACP635ImPI9hDkpPoiw/view?utm\\_content=DAFCLuT3b0E&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link&utm\\_source=homepage\\_design\\_menu](https://www.canva.com/design/DAFCLuT3b0E/cqIACP635ImPI9hDkpPoiw/view?utm_content=DAFCLuT3b0E&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=homepage_design_menu) (Canva, 2022b)

**Activity 7. “Let’s Draw!”**

There are two sandwiches left in the fridge.

It was raining so much that my umbrella broke.

There came a scary dog.

There are three people waiting in the queue.

In the hotel, there is a big swimming pool.

A drawing grid consisting of five empty rectangular boxes with green borders. The grid is arranged with two boxes in the top row, two boxes in the middle row, and one box centered below the middle row.

### Activity 8. “Where Is the Problem?”

The following sentences contain one error each. Work in pairs:

- One of you reads the sentence for their classmate.
- Your classmate then has to identify the error, and afterwards both of you will decide on the correct answer.
- Finally, write the correct sentence below the incorrect one.

1- Are a lot of people at that party.

Correct sentence: .....

2- In class, it is a lot of students.

Correct sentence: .....

3- Exists a program that can do that.

Correct sentence: .....

4- When the device is turned on, appears a green light.

Correct sentence: .....

5- They came three people to the meeting.

Correct sentence: .....

Activity 9. How Many Points Did You Get?<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Source: Link to the quiz: <https://view.genial.ly/6294dc74df160c0019804678/interactive-content-quiz-how-much-do-you-know> (Genially, 2022)