Catalan existential sentences produced by Chinese learners

Lluïsa Gràcia Solé

Departament de Filologia i Comunicació, Universitat de Girona, Spain
<lluisa.gracia@udg.edu>

In this paper we intend to show how L1 influences the Catalan existential sentences produced by Chinese learners of Catalan. This study is based on data generated by means of semi-structured interviews to 6 adult learners living in North-Eastern Catalonia. In order to better understand the Catalan existential sentences they produce, we also take into account their production of attributive, locative and possessive sentences, as well as their use of the verbal inflection in L2 and the use of the clitic *hi*, which also appears in the existential verb *haver-hi*. We conclude that all these factors are relevant to explain why Catalan existential constructions are so difficult to acquire for Chinese learners.[*]

KEY WORDS: second language acquisition, existential sentences, Catalan, Chinese

1. Introduction

In this paper we want to demonstrate that the differences observed between the Catalan existential sentences produced by native speakers and those produced by Chinese learners of Catalan are related to their first language (L1), both in the distribution and use of copulas in attributive, locative, existential and possessive sentences (hereafter, ALEP) as well as in the characteristics of verbal inflection.

The relationship between these four types of constructions received much attention in the literature: Benveniste (1950) and (1960), Allen (1964) and Lyons (1967); within the early Generative Grammar framework, Fillmore (1966), Bach (1967), Jackendoff (1972), (1974) and (1976), and Clark (1978) tried to account for these relationships by assigning them identical or very similar deep structures. Later, Freeze (1992) explained the relationship between locative, existential and possessive sentences in typologically very different languages. He postulated the same initial structure and considered that copulas were not properly lexical items but the realization of the locative feature of Inflection. More recently, germane studies focusing on these constructions from a typological point of view have also been published (e.g., Stassen 1997; Pustet 2003).

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As for the acquisition of a second language, our basic hypothesis is that the universals proposed since the 1970's authors such as Dulay & Burt (1974), Liceras (1996), Hawkins (2001), White (2003), etc. can explain some of the common properties of the production of all learners regardless of their L1. However, we consider that the typological differences between the languages involved (L1 and L2) may not be transparent in the process of acquiring an L2. Otherwise, the characteristics of the correct and wrong production would be very similar in all groups, which is actually not the case (Gass 1996; van de Craats 2002; van de Craats *et al.*, 2002; Odlin 2003; Gràcia 2007; Gràcia *et al.* 2008, etc.). Sequences such as those in (1) are only produced by learners whose L1 tends to have right-headed phrases, as Punjabi ((1a) and (2a)), Chinese ((1b) and (2b)) and Turkish ((1c) and (2c)):[1]

(1) a. L1 Punjabi - L2 Catalan

ESO	*de*	segon
ESO	of	second

'segon d'ESO' ('second year of obligatory second education').

     b. L1 Chinese - L2 Spanish

Y	*están*	*subido*	*una*	*de*	*piedras*	*arriba.*
and	are	climbed	a	of	stones	up

'Y están subidos encima de una piedra' ('and they are on a rock').

     c L1 Turkish - L2 Dutch (van de Craats 2002: 38)

Die	*mijn*	*vrouw*	*oma*	*andere*	*man*	*dochter.*
that	my	wife	grandmother	other	hausband	daughter

'That is the daughter of the second husband of the grandmother of my wife'.

(2) a. Punjabi (Bhatia 1993: 82)

faaras	*daa*	*baadshaa*
Persia	of	king

'the king of Persia' (Cat: 'el rei de Pèrsia').

     b. Chinese (Li & Thompson 1981: 399)

tā	*tiào*	*zài*	*zhuōzi*	*shàng.*
he	jump	at	table	on

'He jumped on the table' (Sp: 'Subió encima de la mesa').

     c. Turkish (van de Craats 2002: 39)[2]

(ben-im)	*eş-im-in*	*babaanne-sin-in*	*ikinci*
I-GEN	wife-POSS-GEN	grandmother-POSS-GEN	second

koca-sIn-I   kIz-I
husband-POSS-GEN   daughter-POSS
'the daughter of the second husband of the grandmother of my wife'.
(Dutch: '(Zij is) de dochter van de tweede echtgenoot van de
grootmoeder van wijn vrouw').

As can be observed in (1), the learner generates a sequence in L2 that is unintelligible for a native speaker. This sequence is almost the 'mirror image' of the corresponding well-formed construction in L1, a language whose phrases are usually left-headed. As shown in (2), the syntactic order used by Punjabi, Chinese and Turkish learners of Catalan, Spanish or Dutch follows the word order in their L1, which clearly contrasts with the L2 structure, as it can be seen in the respective Catalan, Spanish and Dutch translations.

This influence is also evident in the case of speakers with a high level of L2, even if that L2 is very similar to their L1. The example in (3) clearly reveals that the person speaking Spanish has Catalan as L1:

(3)   a.   *   *¿Que*   *hay*   *tu*   *madre?*   (Spanish)
            Q   has.there   your   mother
       '¿Está tú madre?' ('Is your mother here?').

     b.   *Que*   *hi*   *ha*   *la*   *teva*   *mare?*   (Catalan)
          Q   there   has   the   your   mother?
       'Is your mother here?'.

Whereas Spanish total interrogative sentences are never introduced by a question marker, in Catalan *que* can be used at the beginning of the sentence. Sentences such as (3a) are really bizarre for Spanish speakers and immediately identify the speaker as a Catalan person.

So, we assume the idea that some properties of the L1 grammar are transferred to the L2 during the acquisition process. More precisely, we presuppose that at the early stages of the process there may be some similarities between the productions of all learners (omission of copulas or lack of verbal inflection, for example). Nevertheless, other grammatical properties influence the process in such a way that errors may reflect grammatical differences between L1 and L2, both at early and at later stages.

Part of the data we use here (XIT1, XIT2 and XIT3) comes from a larger transversal study in which we analyzed the Catalan and Spanish speech produced by learners whose L1 was Chinese, Moroccan Arabic or Romanian. Two of the grammatical topics we studied were attributive, locative, existential and possessive sentences, and verbal inflection (Gràcia 2007; Gràcia *et al.* 2008).

Although the acquisition of existential sentences was difficult for all learners of Catalan and Spanish L2 analyzed in those studies, we found that difficulties were different depending on their L1 (e.g., the omission of the existential verb when no verb is needed in the L1, and the choice of an inadequate verb when a single verb is used for more than one kind of ALEP constructions in the L1). Some of the reasons why all learners have problems are the complexity of L2 structures, the relationships between existential and the other constructions which also pose difficulties to them (i.e., attributive, possessive and locative constructions), and the fact that these relationships are different in L1 and L2. Differences between groups of learners are determined, first, by how the relationships between the four mentioned constructions are structured in L1, and, secondly, by the nature of the verbal inflection in L1. We provide more information about these data in section 2.

Since we argue that the differences and similarities between L1 and L2 are important in the acquisition of L2, first, in section 2, we describe Catalan and Chinese existential structures, and we very briefly refer to the verbal inflection in both languages. Section 3 is devoted to present some empirical findings on Chinese production of existential sentences in various L2. In section 4, we present the Catalan existential sentences produced by Chinese learners of our sample, and, in Section 5, we discuss the data, relating them to the ALEP constructions, to some features of verbal inflection, and to the use of the clitic *hi*. Finally, in section 6 we present our conclusions to the study.

2. Short description of Catalan and Chinese existential sentences

Since we start from the idea that L1 is one of the factors that influence the acquisition of L2, before analyzing existential sentences produced by the Chinese learners that constitute our sample, we need a brief introduction to the most relevant characteristics of these constructions in the two languages, i.e., Catalan (L2) and Chinese (L1). In this section we do not have the aim to be exhaustive. We only introduce some of the characteristics of the existential sentences and other related structures that are relevant to account for L1 influence on L2 acquisition.

2.1. Catalan data
2.1.1. Existential sentences
Catalan existential sentences are usually formed with the verb *haver-hi* (to have + there), as presented in (4):

(4) a. *Hi   havia   molta   gent.*
      there   had   many   people
      'There were many people'.

   b. *Hi   ha   formigues   a   tota   la   casa.*
      there   has   ants   in   all   the   house
      'There are ants all over the house'.

   c. *Aquí   hi   ha   boira / núvols.*
      here   there   has   smog   / clouds
      'There is smog here / there are clouds here'.

   d. *En   aquell   carrer   hi   havia   una   escola.*
      in   that   street   there   had   a   school
      'There was a school in that street'.

As observed in (4), all these sentences have the verb *haver-hi* and a noun phrase (NP): *gent* 'people' in (4a), *formigues* 'ants' in (4b), *boira / núvols* 'smog / clouds' in (4c) and *una escola* 'a school' in (4d). Very often they also contain a locative complement that locates the entity denoted by the NP in a certain place: *a tota la casa* 'all over the house' in (4b), *aquí* 'here' in (4c) and *en aquell carrer* 'in that street' in (4d). The NP must be explicit in the sentence, either by means of a full NP (*No hi ha* gent 'There is no one') or by the partitive clitic pronoun *en* (*No n'hi ha*). The structure with none of these two elements (*No hi ha) is ungrammatical and it is only used by speakers who are strongly influenced by Spanish, which has no partitive pronoun corresponding to Catalan *en*. As for the clitic *hi*, according to Creissels (2014: 38) it can be considered an expletive locative, that is, «an element generally used with a meaning such as 'there' or 'in it', but whose only function in existential predication is to distinguish existential predication from other types of predication» (Creissels 2014: 26). In fact, the clitic *hi* in existential sentences does not refer to a specific place and it is not incompatible with a referential locative phrase.

As noted by Ramos (2002: 2000), some of the sentences we consider existential are often called *presentational*, because these constructions introduce the referent of the NP in the discourse. Note also that the NP in these sentences must be postverbal, i.e., it appears in the rhematic position, as shown in (5) below:[3]

(5) a. *Hi   havia   molta   gent.*
      there   had   many   people
      'There were many people'.

b. * Molta *gent* *hi* *havia.*
   many people there had

As for the locative phrase, it may appear at the beginning or at the end of the sentence. The position depends on whether it is old information (theme), as in (4c,d), or new information (rheme), as in (4b).[4]

According to Catalan prescriptive grammar, the verb does not agree with the postverbal NP, which, from this point of view, acts as a direct object and not as a subject. This means that existential sentences with the verb *haver-hi* are considered impersonal. However, in much of the Catalan linguistic domain, including the area where the learners of our sample are acquiring the L2, the verb agrees with the NP, as in the examples in (6):[5]

(6) a. *Aquí* *hi* *han* *núvols.*
       here there have.3PL clouds
       'There are clouds here'.

   b. *En* *aquesta* *habitació* *hi* *han* *molts* *quadres.*
       in this room there have.3PL many paintings
       'There are many paintings in this room'.

In the examples in (4) above, the NP is always quantified or it is a bare noun, but, unlike most languages, it can also be a definite NP.[6] Existential sentences with a definite NP are common in Catalan and occur in different contexts, such as enumerations, in (7a), in questions when asking for somebody, as in (7b), but also in many other cases like those in (7c):[7]

(7) a. *Aquí* *hi* *ha* *la* *vaixella,* *la* *cristalleria*
       here there has the crockery the glassware

   i *la* *coberteria.*
   and the cutlery
   'Here is the crockery, the glassware and the cutlery'.

   b. *Que* *hi* *ha* *la* *Teresa?*
       Q there has the Teresa
       'Is Teresa there?'

   c. *Allà* *hi* *ha* *aquella* *noia* *que* *volies* *veure.*
       there there has that girl that wanted see
       'There is that girl you wanted to see'.

Vigila!	*Que*	*hi*	*ha*	*la*	*taula.*	*No*	*caiguis.*
look.out	that	there	has	the	table	not	fall

'Look out! Mind the table. Don't fall'.

The verb *haver-hi*, however, is not the only verb that can be used to form the Catalan existential sentences. In some cases, as in (8), the verb *ser* 'to be' with the locative clitic *hi* is used (for the sake of simplicity, from now on, *ser-hi*):[8]

(8)
L'any	*passat*	*ja*	*hi*	*eren,*	*aquestes*	*esquerdes*	*aquí.*
the.year	last	already	there	were	these	cracks	here

'Last year these cracks were already here'.

Nevertheless, as can be seen in (9), the two verbs cannot be used interchangeably:[9]

(9) a. —
Que	*hi*	*ha*	*la*	*Maria?*
Q	there	has	the	Maria

'Is Maria here?'

—
No,	*(la Maria)*	*no*	*hi*	*és.*
no	the Maria	not	there	is

'No, (Maria) / she is not here'.

—
No,	**no*	*hi*	*ha* /	**no*	*la*	*hi*	*ha.*
no	not	there	has	not	her.ACC	there	has

b. —
No	*hi*	*ha*	*ningú?*
not	there	has	nobody?

'Is anyone there?'.

—
Sí,	*hi*	*sóc*	*jo* /	*hi*	*som*	*nosaltres* /
yes	there	am	I	there	are.1PL	we

hi	*són*	*ells.*
there	are.3PL	they

'Yes, I'm / we are / they are'.

—
Sí,	**hi*	*ha*	*jo* /	**hi*	*ha*	*nosaltres* /
yes	there	has	I	there	has.1PL	we

?hi	*ha(n)*	*ells.*
there	have.3SG/PL	they

c. —
Què	*hi*	*havia*	*al*	*pot?*
what	there	had	in.the	pot

'What was there in the pot?'

—	*Hi*	*havia*	*una*	*granota,*	*però*	*ara*
	there	had	a	frog	but	now

	ja		*no*	*hi*	*és.*
	already		not	there	is

'There was a frog, but now it is not there anymore'.

—	**Hi*	*era*	*una*	*granota,*	*però*	*ara*
	there	was	a	frog	but	now

	ja	*no*	*hi*	*ha.*
	already	not	there	has

In (9a), the answer could only contain the verb *haver-hi* if the NP was repeated in postverbal position (*No, no hi ha la Maria*), because, as we have already said, the NP cannot be replaced by an accusative clitic, nor it can be omitted. In this case, however, the answer would be interpreted as having an emphatic value of insistence, or it would appear in a contrastive focus reading (*No hi ha la Maria, hi ha en Joan*). The examples in (9b) would suggest that subject personal pronouns, especially first and second person, are incompatible with *haver-hi* and they can only appear with *ser-hi*. According to Brucart (2002: 1460), the only restriction related to the type of NP that can appear with *haver-hi* in Catalan is that they cannot be personal pronouns.[10] Finally, with respect to (9c), the ungrammaticality of **ara ja no hi ha* [now-already-not-there-has] can be explained in the same way as in (9a). The problem in *hi era una granota* is due to the fact that the argument of the verb *ser-hi* cannot appear in a rhematic position.

In some cases it seems that both constructions, the one with *haver-hi* and the other with *ser-hi*, are interchangeable, as in (10):

(10) a. — *Que   hi   ha   la   Maria?*
          Q   there has   the   Maria
          'Is there Maria?'

   a.' — **Que   hi   ha,   la   Maria?*
           Q   there has   the   Maria

   b. — *#Que   hi   és   la   Maria?*
          Q   there is   the   Maria
          'Is there Maria?'

   b.' — *Que   hi   és,   la   Maria?*
           Q   there is   the   Maria
           'Is there Maria?'

However, (10a) and (10b) are actually different. According to Solà (1994: 131ff.), the interpretation of (10b) as synonymous of (10a) is not a genuine Catalan structure and its use can be explained by a tendency to self-correction, in response to the more and more widespread use of *estar* as an influence of Spanish (#*Que està la Maria*?).

So, in (10a), containing the verb *haver-hi*, *la Maria* is interpreted as rheme and, consequently, it does not admit any intonational change between the verb and the NP (here, marked by a comma). This intonation, corresponding to the theme phrase, is the one in (10b'), with the verb *ser-hi*.

It should also be noted that the verb used in Catalan locative sentences is *ser*, leaving aside the uses of *estar* that are influenced by Spanish:[11]

(11) a. — | *Segur* | *que* | *en* | *aquell* | *moment* | *en* | *Pau* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| sure | that | in | that | moment | the | Pau |

no	*era*	*a*	*l'estació?*
not	was	at	the.station

'Are you sure that Pau was not at the station at that moment?'

— | *No,* | *no* | *hi* | *era,* | *a* | *l'estació.* | *Encara* | *no* | *hi* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| no | not | there | was | at | the.station | yet | not | there |

podia	*haver*	*arribat.*
could	have	arrived

'No, he was not at the station. He could not have arrived there yet'.

b. — | *Et* | *dic* | *que* | *els* | *llibres* | *són* | *sobre* | *la* | *taula!* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| you.DAT | say | that | the | books | are | on | the | table |

'I tell you that the books are on the table!'

— | *Doncs* | *jo* | *no* | *veig* | *que* | *hi* | *siguin!* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| so | I | not | see | that | there | were |

'But I don't see that they are there!'

c. — | *Quan* | *érem* | *petits,* | *a* | *les* | *nou* | *els* | *nens* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| when | were | small | at | the | nine | the | children |

ja	*érem*	*al*	*llit.*
already	were	at.the	bed

'When we were small, at nine o'clock children were already in bed'.

— | *Tan* | *aviat,* | *ja* | *hi* | *éreu?!* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| So | early | already | there | were |

'So early were you already in bed?!'

As observed in the second part of the examples (11) above, the locative argument can be pronominalized with the clitic *hi*. Consequently, the resulting structures are often difficult to distinguish from the existential sentences we are studying, and sometimes they are seen as belonging to the same group. In this paper we do not deal with this issue, and, in simple terms, we only suggest that both elements in locative sentences and those in existential constructions with a locative complement are the same. But in the case of the locative sentences, as in (12a), the subject NP is definite and behaves as the theme, whereas in the existential sentences, as in (12b), the NP is the rheme:

(12) a. *Els   meus   pares   són   a   casa.*   LOCATIVE
        the   mine   parents   are   at   home
        THEME
        'My parents are at home'.

    b. *A   casa   hi   ha   els   meus   pares.*   EXISTENTIAL
       at   home   there   has   the   my   parents
                                RHEME
       'At home there are my parents'.

Finally, we need to refer to the relationship between the possessive sentences and the existential ones. The difference between these two types of structures is smaller than it might seem if we only take Catalan data such as those in (13) into consideration:

(13) a. *A   casa   hi   ha   formigues.*
        at   home   there   has   ants
        'There are ants at home'.

    b. *La   Maria   té   una   faldilla.*
       the   Maria   has   a   skirt
       'Maria has a skirt'.

In the existential sentence in (13a), the verb *haver-hi* is preceded by a locative and followed by the NP (*ants*). (13b) is a possessive sentence with the verb *tenir* and a subject that corresponds to the owner (*Maria*) and a direct object referring to the possessee (*skirt*). From a crosslinguistic perspective, however, looking at other languages like French, we see that existential and possessive constructions are closer to each other than the Catalan data in (13) suggest. In fact, in French

both existential and possessive structures contain the verb *avoir*, and the only difference is that, unlike possessive sentences, the existential ones, as in Catalan, have the clitic *y* (equivalent to Catalan *hi*):

(14) a. *Chez-moi   il   hi   ha   des   fourmis.*
     home.me   it   there   has   of.art.PL   ants
     'There are ants at home'.

 b. *Marie   a   une   jupe*
    Marie   has   a   skirt
    'Maria has a skirt'.

Nonetheless, the Catalan examples in (15) show that, at least from a semantic point of view, the relationship between existential and possessive sentences is very clear:[12]

(15) a. *A   l'habitació   hi   ha   un   armari.*
     in   the.room   there   has   a   wardrobe
     'There is is a wardrobe in the room'.

 b. *L'habitació   té   un   armari.*
    the.room   has   a   wardrobe
    'The room has a wardrobe in it'.

Both sentences state the existence of a wardrobe and relate it to another entity, the room, which in (15a) is seen as the place where the wardrobe is and, in (15b), as the entity that contains or 'owns' it. In section 2.2.1, we come back to this issue again.

Before concluding this brief description of the Catalan data, it is important to make a brief presentation of Spanish existential sentences, which are quite different from the Catalan ones. This information is important because the Chinese speakers studied in our sample have learned or are also learning Spanish.

Spanish sentences usually contain the verb *haber*. Besides the absence of the clitic *hi*, the main difference is that the NP can be definite only in very exceptional cases. As shown in (16b,c), in this case the Spanish construction contains the verb *estar*, which is also used in locative and some attributive sentences:

(16) a. Hay[13]   *mucha   gente.   Aquí   había   un   banco.*
     has.there   many   people   here   had   a   bank
     'There are many people'.   'There was a bank here'.

b. *¿Hay   Teresa?   ¿Está   Teresa?
    has.there   Teresa   is   Teresa

c. *Aquí   hay   aquella   chica   que   querías   ver.
    there   has.there   that   girl   that   wanted   see

    Aquí   está   aquella   chica   que   querías   ver.
    there   is   that   girl   that   wanted   see
    'Here is that girl you wanted to see'.

Nevertheless, there are some exceptions to this restriction on the NP. In (17) we give two examples, the second one from Leonetti (1999: 817):

(17) a. En   el   armario   de   la   cocina   hay   la   vajilla
         in   the   cabinet   of   the   kitchen   has.there   the   crockery

         y   la   cristalería   y   en   el   del   pasillo,
         and   the   glassware   and   in   the   of.the   corridor

         los   trapos   de   cocina   y   los   manteles.
         The   dishcloths   of   kitchen   and   the   tablecloths
         'In the kitchen cabinet there is the crockery and the glassware, and in
         the corridor, the kitchen dishcloths and the tablecloths'.

b. —   ¿Qué   tenemos   para   cenar?
         What   have.1PL   for   dinner
         'What are we having for dinner?'

    —   Pues   ya   lo   sabes,   hay   el   arroz
         so   already   it   know   has.there   the   rice

         que   ha   sobrado   del   mediodía.
         that   has   left   of.the   noon
         'Well, you know already, there is the rice leftover from lunch'.

In these examples, although the NP is definite, it provides information that is considered new to the listener or it is not shared with the interlocutor. In (17a) two enumerations are contrasted, and this kind of construction facilitates the appearance of *haber*; in (17b), despite the fact that the information is supposed to be known (*pues ya lo sabes*), it is presented as a reminder to the listener and, therefore, it is treated as new information and the existential verb *haber* is used.[14]

2.1.2. Verbal inflection

Like other Romance languages, Catalan is an inflectional language that has a relatively complex verbal inflection. Verbs are classified into three conjugations: in the first one the infinitive ends in *-ar* (*ballar* 'to dance'), in the second one, in *-er* (*córrer* 'to run') or in *-re* (*perdre* 'to lose'), and in the third conjugation the termination of the infinitive is *-ir* (*dormir* 'to sleep', *cobrir* 'to cover'). There are six personal forms according to the person and number of the subject, three non-personal forms (infinitive, gerund and participle), three moods (indicative, subjunctive and imperative) and several simple tenses as well as compound tenses formed by using an auxiliary verb: *haver* ('to have') + participle:[15] *ha cantat* 'he has sung'; or *anar* ('to go') + infinitive: *va cantar* 'he sang'. There is also a verbal form with a progressive value that is formed by *estar* as an auxiliary verb and the gerund (*està cantant* 'he is singing'), and the passive voice containing the verb *ser* (*serà castigat* 'he will be punished').

In order to explain the errors produced by Chinese Catalan learners, it is important to note that *haver* and *estar* are used as auxiliaries as well as verbs in existential sentences (*hi ha cotxes* 'there are cars'), and in locative or attributive sentences (*s'està a Barcelona* 'he is (living) in Barcelona'; *està cansat* 'he is tired').

2.2. Chinese data

In this section we give some data about existential sentences in Chinese. As all the subjects of our sample were schooled in China for some time, all of them are fluent speakers of Putounghua, the common language based on Mandarin. Their first languages are Mandarin, Cantonese or Wu. Most of the data we present here correspond to Mandarin (Li & Thompson 1981, among others), but we also introduce some Cantonese and Wu data.

The results obtained by Chan (2004) and He (2012) concerning the learning of English existential sentences by students from Hong Kong (speakers of Cantonese) are consistent with the data we collected. This fact, together with the descriptions of the existential sentences in Cantonese and in Wu we found, allows us to believe that the existential sentences in the three languages share the basic main features (see Mathews & Yip 1994; Zhu 2006; Yip & Matthews 2000; Yue 2003 for more information about Cantonese and Wu).

2.2.1. Existential sentences

The structure of Chinese existential and possessive sentences is very similar: as in French (ex. (14)), they share a common element,

yǒu (有) in Mandarin (*haver-hi* and *tenir*, respectively, in Catalan). The NP in existentials and the possessee NP in possessives occur after *yǒu*. The locative or the possessor NP appears in initial position in the sentence (Ramsey 1987: 80; Li & Thompson 1981: 513):[16]

(18) a. *Zhèr*   yǒu   *qián.*
      here   *yǒu*   money
      'There is (some) money here' (Cat: 'Aquí hi ha diners')[17].

    b. *Zhīzhū*   yǒu   *bā*   *ge*   *tuǐ.*
      spider   *yǒu*   eight   CLF   leg
      'Spiders have eight legs' (Cat: 'Les aranyes tenen vuit potes').

As seen in (19) and (20) respectively, Cantonese and Wu existential and possessive sentences are very similar to the Mandarin ones in (18) (Matthews & Yip 1994: 62, 279; Zhu 2006: 161, 183):

(19) a. *Yahpbihn*   yáuh   *hóu*   *dō*   *fā.*
      inside   *yáuh*   very   many   flowers
      'There are lots of flowers inside' (Cat: 'A dins hi ha moltes flors').

    b. *Kéuihdeih*   yáuh   *sāam*   *go*   *jái.*
      they   *yáuh*   three   CFL   son
      'They have three sons' (Cat: 'Ells tenen tres fills').

(20) a. *Geqtaq*   xieu   *tsaq*   *zong.*
      here   *xieu*   CLF   bed
      'There is a bed here' (Cat: 'Aquí hi ha un llit').

    b. *Papa*   xieu   *jiaokuae*   *memetsir.*
      dad   *xieu*   lots.of   riddles
      'Dad had lots of riddles' (Cat: 'El papa té (sap) moltes endevinalles').

As mentioned, the Catalan sentences corresponding to (18a) and (18b) are not as different as it might seem from their structure and the verbs used: in both cases they state the existence of an entity (*money* or *legs*) that is related to a place in the existential constructions (18a), or to another entity in the possessive sentence in (18b).[18]

In the case of the Chinese existential sentences, like those in (18a), (19a) and (20a), where the noun referring to the entity appears after *yǒu*, the NP is always interpreted as new information. If the NP had a definite value, in the sense of referring to old information,

a locative sentence would be used. As shown by the translation, the locative sentences in (21) have a NP in the initial position followed by the locative phrase, which is preceded by the particle *zài* (在) (Ramsey 1987: 80 and Norman 1988: 168):

(21) a. *Qián*   zài   *zhèr.*
      money   *zài*   here
      'The money is here' (Cat: 'Els diners són aquí').

     b. *Shū*   zài   *zhuōzi*   *shàng.*
       book   *zài*   table   on
       'The book is on the table' (Cat: 'El llibre és (a) sobre la taula').

The examples in (22) and (23) show that Cantonese and Wu present a behavior similar to that of Mandarin (Matthews & Yip 1994: 62; Zhu 2006: 161, 110):

(22)   *Dī*   *fā*   hái   *yahpbihn.*
      CLF   flowers   *hái*   inside
      'The flowers are inside' (Cat: 'Les flors són a dins').

(23)   *Xii*   laqlaq   *uqlii.*
      he   *laqlaq*   home
      'He is at home' (Cat: '(Ell) és a casa').

It should be noted that the order of the constituents in a Chinese sentence is determined more by discursive factors (theme or rheme) than by syntactic functions. The beginning of the sentence is the position reserved for the theme (Li & Thompson 1981: 20-21):[19]

(24) a. Rén   *lái*   *le.*   Shū   *wǒ*   *mǎi*   *le.*
      person   come   ASP   book   I   buy   ASP
      'The person has come'.   'The book, I bought it'.

     b. *Lái*   *le*   rén   *le.*   *Wǒ*   *zài*   *mǎi*   shū   *le.*
      come   ASP   person   PARTICLE   I   ASP   buy   book   PARTICLE
      'Some person has come'.   'I'm buying a book'.

Regarding the particle *zài* in (21), Chinese grammars usually identify a class of words called *coverbs*, which can function both as verbs and as prepositions. In (21) *zài* is considered a coverb with verbal value, whereas in (25) it would have a prepositional value (Li & Thompson 1981: 366):[20]

(25) *Tā*   zài   *guō - li*   *fàng*   shuǐ.
       he   *zài*   pot - in   put   water
       'He puts water in the pot'.

Existential sentences can also be formed with the verb *shì* (是),[21] but they are not used in the same context as those with *yǒu*. These differences are observed in the Mandarin examples in (26) below (Li & Thompson 1981: 514):

(26) a. *Wàimian*   yǒu   *yi*   *zhī*   *gǒu.*
        outside   *yǒu*   one   CLF   dog
        'There is a dog outside' (Cat: 'A fora hi ha un gos').

     b. *Wàimian*   shì   *yi*   *zhī*   *gǒu.*
        outside   *shì*   one   CLF   dog
        'What is outside is a dog' (Cat: 'El que hi ha a fora és un gos').

The basic difference is that in the *yǒu* sentence the speaker simply reports the existence of a dog outside, and he does not presuppose whether his interlocutor knows or ignores that there is something outside. The sentence in (26b), on the other hand, would only be appropriate to inform someone who already knows that there is something outside; the sentence identifies and characterizes this entity (in this case, it says that it is a dog).

2.2.2. Verbal inflection

Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese and Wu) is normally classified as an isolating language, with very little inflectional morphology. Regarding its verbal inflection, the verbal root is invariable with respect to subject person and number and only allows the addition of some aspectual morphemes, as seen in the Mandarin examples in (27) (Li & Thompson 1981:194, 226, 218):

(27) a. *Tā*   *bǎ*   *chē*   mài – le.
       he   PARTICLE   car   sell - ASP
       'He sold the car'.

     b. *Wǒ*   chī - guo   *Rìběn*   *fàn.*
       I   eat - ASP   Japan   food
       'I have eaten Japanese food (before)'.

     c. *Lǐsì*   zài   *jiěshi*   *wénfǎ.*
       Lisi   ASP   explain   grammar
       'Lisi is explaining the grammar'.

Simply put, the particle *le* indicates that the action is viewed as finished (perfective aspect); sentences with *guo* indicate that the event has been experienced or has happened some time at an indefinite moment of the past (experiential aspect), and *zài* expresses duration, an action seen in progress (imperfective aspect). This morpheme *zài* (在) is the same as the coverb in (21) and (25). This issue falls beyond the scope of this paper, and therefore we do not discuss it with further detail.[22]

2.3. The contrastive analysis of L1 and L2: expected errors

The differences between Chinese (L1) and Catalan (L2) that we have presented suggest that, although in the early stages there may be a tendency, common to all learners, to omit the copula in the existential sentences (*haver-hi* or *ser-hi*), some differences between L1 and L2 will be the cause of some errors that are not common to all Catalan L2 learners. In particular, we highlight the following two:

a) The fact that *yǒu* (*yàuh* or *xieu*) appears in existential and possessive sentences (a case of split, in terms of Stockwell *et al.* 1965),[23] involves problems with the distinction between the Catalan verbs *haver-hi* and *tenir*. On the other hand, its existence reduces the initial tendency to omit copulas, which characterizes the early stages of acquisition.

b) The fact that verbal inflection is almost non-existent in Chinese affects the acquisition of Catalan verbs like *haver(-hi)* or *estar*, which are also used as auxiliaries in compound tenses (*ell ha vingut* 'he has come') and in aspectual periphrasis (*ell està cantant* 'he is singing'). The auxiliary verbal form contains the agreement and the tense information required by Catalan verbs, whereas the participle and the gerund include the lexical information (verbal root) and the aspectual value of the complex form. Chinese learners of Catalan produce the participle and the gerund very early because in their first language they need the root and an aspect marker. On the other hand, they usually omit the auxiliaries because Chinese verbs do not mark person, number nor, usually, tense. The initial tendency to omit the form *haver-hi* in existential sentences can result, in later stages, in an omission of *haver* (possibly because it contains the tense and agreement features) and the maintenance of an element equivalent to the invariable clitic *hi*.

In Section 3, we present some results coming from different studies on the acquisition of Catalan, Spanish, Italian and English existential sentences by Chinese learners (and other related issues).

3. Some empirical findings on Chinese production of existential sentences in L2

The data collected in Table 1 show the relationship between the acquisition of the ALEP constructions and the acquisition of the verbal inflection by learners of Catalan and Spanish. Although the data are clearly insufficient to draw definitive conclusions, there is a relation between the errors in ALEP constructions and the errors in verbal inflection in the three linguistic communities studied there (see Gràcia *et al.* 2008: 58-59):

Table 1. Relation between percentages of errors in ALEP constructions and in inflection (Gràcia *et al.* 2008).

	CHINESE	ROMANIAN	ARABIC
ALEP	25.23	11.73	8.48
verbal inflection	16.73	7.76	5.13
errors ALEP / errors verbal inflection	1.5	1.51	1.65

On the other hand, as it can be seen in Table 2, existential sentences are the kind of ALEP constructions that cause more difficulties to Chinese and Arabic learners of Catalan or Spanish as L2, and, in the case of Romanian learners, the errors in existentials are in second position (17.11%). As for the group of Chinese learners (Catalan or Spanish L2), half of the existential sentences they produce are erroneous (50%); in the case of those learning Catalan, the percentage is slightly higher (52.63%), but, given the characteristics of the sample, these differences in the Chinese group are not relevant.

Table 2. Percentage of errors on the total production analyzed of each type of construction (Gràcia *et al.* 2008).

CHINESE		ARABIC		ROMANIAN	
existential	50.00	existential	11.95	locative	18.75
locative	30.00	attributive	9.10	existential	17.11
attributive	21.30	locative	7.32	attributive	12.04
possessive	12.50	possessive	2.70	possessive	0.93

In these data, 10 errors were detected using *tener / tenir* instead of *haber / haver-hi* in the productions obtained from the Chinese learners; the Romanian learners, on the other hand, produced only 2 errors, and only 1 error was observed in the Arabic group (in this case,

a use of *haver-hi* instead of *tenir*). However, the Romanian learners confused the verb *haber/haver-hi* with *ser* or *estar* 9 times. These differences among those different linguistic groups reinforce our hypothesis regarding the influence of L1 since Romanian has only one verb (*a fi*) for attributive, locative and existential sentences and another one (*a avea*) for possessive constructions.

As for Chinese learners of Italian, some authors have found confusion errors between the existential and the possessive verbal forms. Valentini (1992: 193), for example, notes that Chinese learners of Italian use the Italian existential form *c'è*, as in (28c), instead of the possessive verb *avere*:

(28) a. *Io   c'è   amici.   (=Io ho amici)*
       I   there.is   friends
       'I have friends'.

   b. *Lui   c'è   un   moglie.   (=Lui ha una moglie)*
      he   there.is   a   wife
      'He has a wife'.

   c. *C'è   un   ponte.*
      there.is   a   bridge
      'There is a bridge'.

Note that the Italian standard existential verbal form is formally equivalent to the Catalan *ser-hi*, that is, the clitic *ci* (*Non ci vado* 'I don't go there') and the verb *essere*, which can also appear in attributive sentences (*Maria è alta / stanca* 'Maria is tall / tired') as well as in locative constructions (*Maria è a casa* 'Maria is at home').[24] Valentini (1992) reports Berruto's (1991) observations on the Italian speech produced by learners of several L1 (Turkish, Greek, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, etc.), and notices that confusions between existential and possessive verbs are very common. One of the hypotheses he presents to explain the use of *c'è* instead of *avere* is that *c'è* is most commonly used, and it is morphologically simpler than *avere*, because the existential form is only used in the third person singular and plural (*c'è / ci sono*). We think that this use of *c'è* may also be related to the existence of the colloquial form of the verb *avere* preceded by the clitic *ci*, as in (29):

(29) a. *Io   c'ho   amici.   (=Io ho amici)*
       I   there.have.1SG   friends
       'I have friends'.

b. *Loro*   *c'hanno*   *tre*   *figli.*   (=Loro hanno tre figli)
   they   there.have.3PL   three   children
   'They have three children'.

Looking at the Italian data, we see that the clitic *ci* appears both in (28), productions of Chinese learners containing the verb *essere*, as well as in the colloquial Italian possessive sentences in (29), with the verb *avere*.[25]

Other studies cited by Valentini (1992), as Huebner (1983: 176) (L1 Hmong; L2 English), have also observed that a single verb is used for possessive and existential sentences, but in this case the verb was *haev* (*sic*) ('to have'). Berruto (1991) and Schmid (1992) argue that the unification of the verbs in existential and possessive sentences also occurs when the L1 distinguishes two different forms. According to Valentini (1992: 193), this fact could indicate the existence of a general tendency, which also occurs in the creation of Creoles (Mühlhäusler 1986).

Finally, according to Chan (2004: 63-64) and He (2012: 9-10), Chinese learners of English tend to use the possessive verb *have*, which is often preceded by *there* (*there have*), instead of the correct existential form *there be*. In the two cases, the subjects of their sample were from Hong Kong and knew Cantonese and Mandarin. Chan (2004: 63) observes that, when translating the Cantonese sentence in (30), about half of the lower-intermediate students (58%) failed to use it correctly: 43 students used *there have* instead of *there be*; 92 students (lower-intermediate level) omitted *there* and used the verb *have* preceded by an adverbial, and 30 students translated (30) as a possessive:

(30)   *Syun4*   *soeng6*   *jau5*   *han2*   *do1*   *jat6 bun2*   *jau4 haak3.*
       at   ship   on   have   many   Japanese   tourist
       'There are many Japanese tourists on the ship'.

In Chan's (2004: 64) words: «All of these translated versions used structures that resembled the normative sentence structures of Chinese: "*There have/has* many Japanese tourists on the ship / in the vessel." "*The ship has* many Japanese tourists." "On the vessel, *it/here have* many Japanese tourists."»

He (2012: 9-10) notices that:

[a]ll the three learners made a common mistake in expressing the proposition of existence. They replaced the verbs 'be' with 'have' in the 'there be' structure. However, if translated into Chinese word-

for-word, these sentences contain no grammatical errors at all […]. This suggests the students were probably thinking in Chinese and translated the Chinese sentences word-for-word into English, assuming that what works in Chinese grammar would also work in English.

We believe that He's observation is very interesting for our hypothesis, since the author shows an obvious relation between the learners' erroneous production and their L1.

In the next section we present the Chinese learners' production we collected. Our focus is on the existential sentences, and, especially, the learners' errors.

4. Chinese learners' production: presentation and discussion

4.1. Sample and procedure

This is a transversal study based on the data obtained from six Chinese learners of Catalan living in the Northeastern Catalonia (Girona and Osona regions). All the subjects received some formal education of Catalan. The data were collected between 2005 and 2008. Table 3 shows their basic features (CPNL: Consorci per a la Normalització Lingüística / AS: Adult School / ESO: Obligatory Second Education / NC: 'newcomers' classroom' (*Aula d'Acollida*)):

Table 3. Characteristics of the sample.

SUBJECT	SEX	AGE	LANGUAGE	TIME IN CAT.	GENERAL STUDIES	CATALAN LEVEL (CEFR)
XIT1	M	40	Cantonese	20 years	Elementary in China / 2nd year of ESO in progress	AS (A2-B1)
XIT2	F	17	Mandarin	18 months	Secondary in China (until aged 15)	CPNL (A1)
XIT3	F	17	Mandarin	10 months	Bachelor in progress	CPNL (A1-A2)
XIT5	F	15	Mandarin	15 months	4th year of ESO in progress	NC (A1-A2)
XIT6	M	15	Wu	18 months	3rd year of ESO in progress	NC (A1-A2)
XIT7	F	45	Cantonese	20 years	Elementary in progress	CPNL (A2)

The subjects could be divided into two groups: on one hand, XIT1 and XIT7, who were 40 and 45 years old at the time of the data collection and had spent 20 years in Catalonia and had elementary or secondary studies initiated in Catalonia as adults. On the other hand, XIT2, XIT3, XIT5 and XIT6, with ages between 15 and 17, secondary studies in progress, and between 10 and 18 months in Catalonia. When the data were analyzed, all these differences were taken into account when they had an effect on their oral production.

The data for this study were collected by recording a 30-minute semi-structured interview with each subject. The interviews were then transcribed and coded using the CHAT format of the CHILDES project (MacWinney 2000). All the interviews contained some narrative / descriptive common material elicited from Mayer (1969). We analyzed all the production and, therefore, we considered not only errors but also the correct speech.

4.2. Chinese learners' production

In this section we provide some quantitative data followed by a fundamentally qualitative analysis. The goal of the numerical data presented in this section is to describe the subject's production in more detail in order to better understand the significance of the L1 influence: what the most common errors are, their relation with the level of L2, etc. Obviously, we are aware that the study of only 6 subjects does not allow neither generalizations nor predictions that could be found in larger corpora. Nevertheless, the fact that our findings were consistent with those of other researchers (see Section 3) may indicate that some predictions can be made. On the other hand, the contrast between the Chinese data and the data from the Arabic and Romanian learners presented in Table 1 and 2, also suggests that we are on the right track: all the data come from the same corpus, the interviews have the same characteristics and most of the differences in the production of the three groups can be related to the differences in their L1 (see Gràcia *et al.* 2008).

In Table 4 we can see the general data with respect to the existential sentences produced by the subjects of the sample for the present study, and their relationship to the overall production of ALEP:[26]

Table 4. Total production of existential sentences analyzed and their relation with the total production of ALEP constructions.

	XIT1	XIT2	XIT3	XIT5	XIT6	XIT7	TOTAL
EXISTENTIAL							
correct production	12	5	1	0	0	13	31
errors	3	17	2	12	3	1	38
total production	15	22	3	12	3	14	69
% errors / total exi	20.00	77.27	66.66	100.00	100.00	7.14	55.07
ALEP							
correct production	82	29	18	49	26	106	310
errors	7	38	3	21	5	1	75
total production	89	67	21	70	31	107	385
% errors / total ALEP	7.86	56.71	14.28	30.00	16.12	0.93	19.48
EXI / ALEP							
% prod. exi / prod. ALEP	16.85	32.83	14.28	17.14	9.67	12.14	17.92
% errors exi / errors ALEP	42.85	44.73	66.66	57.14	60.00	100.00	50.66

From the information in Table 4 we can gather the following conclusions:

a) The overall percentage of errors in existential sentences is similar to that given in Table 2 taking into account the data from a previous work. In the present study, existential sentences are erroneous by 55.07% and, in the previous work, which included 3 Chinese learners of Catalan and 3 learning Spanish, the percentage was 50.00%, and, as mentioned above, in the case of learners of Catalan, the percentage rose to 52.63%.

b) In two cases, XIT5 and XIT6, the error rate is 100% (12/12 and 3/3) and in other two cases it is also very high: 66.66% for XIT3 (2/3) and 77.27% for XIT2 (17/22).

c) The lowest percentages of errors correspond to XIT1 and XIT7, the older subjects, having lived in Catalonia longer (20 years), but who received little formal education (see Table 3).[27]

d) The error rate in existential sentences is very high with respect to the overall percentage of errors in all the ALEP constructions: 50.66% of the errors produced in ALEP sentences by all six learners (38/75) are related to existential constructions; individual percentages ranging from 42.85 in XIT1 (3/7) to 100% in XIT7 (1/1).

e) The percentage of existential sentences produced is only 17.92%, approximately between 10% and 17% of all ALEP constructions, except in the case of XIT2, where the percentage is 32.83% (22/67). Considering this, we can conclude that the percentage of errors in existential sentences is quite high.

In Table 5 we present the details of the production of existential sentences of the 6 Catalan learners that constitute the sample of this study:[28]

Table 5. Detailed production of the existential sentences.

	XIT1	XIT2	XIT3	XIT5	XIT6	XIT7	TOTAL
ERRORS							
tenir = haver-hi	1	6	1	8	1	--	17
Ø = haver-hi	--	5	1	2	--	1	9
hi = haver-hi	2	6	--	--	--	--	8
ser = haver-hi	--	--	--	--	2	--	2
tenir-hi = ser-hi	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
haver-hi = ser (loc)	--	--	--	1	--	--	1
total	3	17	2	12	3	1	38
% / total exi	20.00	77.27	66.66	100.00	100.00	7.14	55.07
CORRECT PRODUCTION[29]							
haver-hi	12	5	--	--	--	12 [30]	29
ser-hi	--	--	1	--	--	1	2
total	12	5	1	0	0	13	31
% / total exi	80.00	22.73	33.34	0.00	0.00	92.86	44.93
TOTAL EXI PRODUCED	15	22	3	12	3	14	69

Table 5 shows that the differences between the Catalan existential sentences produced by the Chinese learners and those produced by Catalan native speakers are mainly of three types: first, the most common are those in which the verb *tenir* is used instead of *haver-hi* (see 4.2.1); second, those in which the learner omits the verb *haver-hi* (see 4.2.2); and, finally, the most surprising cases were those where, at a glance, the verb *haver* is omitted but the clitic *hi* is maintained (see 4.2.3). The first two types of errors are quite general, while the third one was produced only by two learners. It is worth noting that the amount of errors in which *tenir* is used instead of *haver-hi* (17) is identical to the sum of omissions of *haver-hi* (9) and the apparent omissions of *haver*, that is, the use of *hi* instead of *haver-hi* (8).

4.2.1. Use of tenir *instead of* haver-hi
The most common error was the confusion between the verbs *haver-hi* and *tenir*. This type of error is the one observed in (31) below (we bracket the Catalan correct form after the error):[31]

(31)   TENIR = HAVER-HI

    a. *En*   *l'any 70*   tenia [hi havia]   *una*   *guerra*   *allà.*   XIT1
        in   the.year.70   had   a   war   there
        'In 1970 there was a war there'.

    b. *En*   *Pequín*   té [hi ha]   *Gran Muralla.*   XIT2
        in   Beijing   has   Great Wall
        'In Beijing there is the Great Wall'.

    c. Fora   *del*   *cau,*   té [hi ha]   *un*   *ratolí.*   XIT3
        out   of.the   burrow   has   a   mouse
        'Out of the burrow there is a mouse'.

    d. *La*   *noi*   *mira*   *allà*   *si*   tinc [hi ha]   *la*   *granota.*   XIT1
        the   boy   watches   there   If   have.1SG   the   frog
        'The boy watches if the frog is there'.

    e. *Però*   *aquí*   *la*   *pastanaga,*   *enciam,*   *així*   *tot,*   no,   XIT6
        but   here   the   carrot   lettuce   like.this   all   no

        no   té [hi ha].
        not   has
        'But here [China], there are not carrot, lettuce, all these things like here'.

These errors could be related to general issues, such as the close semantic relationship between existential and possessive constructions, and to some structural similarities in many languages. In Catalan, for example, as we saw in (15) (repeated here for the reader's convenience), the same meaning can be expressed by means of the existential verb (*haver-hi*) and by the possessive verb *tenir*:

(15) a. *A*   *l'habitació*   *hi*   *ha*   *un*   *armari.*
         In   the.room   there   has   a   wardrobe
         'There is a wardrobe in the room'.

    b. *L'habitació*   *té*   *un*   *armari.*
        the.room   has   a   wardrobe
        'The room has a wardrobe in it'.

We could think that these uses are confusing for L2 learners. However, the fact that the amount of errors of this type obtained in the Chinese group is considerably higher than those found in other groups of learners, such as Romanian or Arabic L1 speakers, suggests that L1 plays an important role. Indeed, the confusion between *haver-*

hi and *tenir* in Chinese learners can be explained by the data in (18): as we have seen, in Chinese the same verb (*yǒu*, in Mandarin) is used for existential and for possessive sentences, and this fact makes the distinction between the two Catalan verbs very difficult for Chinese learners.

Finally, in the 8 cases in which XIT5 used *tenir* instead of *haver-hi*, this participant used the first person singular form of the present tense (*tinc*), as in (31d), and clearly used it as an invariable form, not as a first person, this being simpler in the sense of the afore-mentioned explanation by Berruto (1991). XIT5 also produced the sequence in (32), with 2 erroneous uses of *haver-hi* and *tenir*:

(32)	*La*	*nena*	*està*	*dormit*	*però*	*la*	*granota*	hi	ha[és]	XIT5
	the	girl	is	asleep	but	the	frog	there	has	

	fora	*de*	*pot* […]	*i*	*mira*	*com*	*a*	*sabata*	*a*
	out	of	pot	and	looks	as	in	shoe	at

	dins,	*mira*	*a*	*dins*	*si*	tinc [hi és].
	inside	looks	at	inside	if	have.1SG

'The boy is asleep, but the frog is out of the pot […] And he looks inside the shoe, he looks inside if it is there'.

In (32) the two verbs commonly confused (*haver-hi* and *tenir*) appear erroneously: the existential form *hi ha* is used instead of the locative *ser* (*the frog* is *out of the pot*), and, in the second part, the possessive *tinc* is used in place of *ser-hi* 'to be there' (see Section 2.1.1). In both cases, the Catalan sentences should have a locative form, *és* or *hi és* (the last one with the clitic *hi*), because the NP (*la granota* 'the frog') is definite. Nevertheless, both sentences were constructed with the existential verb *haver-hi* if the NP would be indefinite and the NP, if present, in postverbal position (*hi ha una granota*). This leads us to believe that the learner is in the process of acquiring the Catalan existential and locative sentences, but he is not yet able to distinguish between them and to use the correct verbal form and the right order according to the definiteness of the NP.

We think that one of the reasons that explains the tendency of Chinese learners of Catalan to overextend *tenir* to *haver-hi* in existential sentences has to do with the fact that *haver* is interpreted as an inflectional functional element that Chinese learners often ignore in the formation of Catalan compound tenses, whereas *tenir* is considered a verb with more lexical content, which can be more easily compared to the Chinese *yǒu*. We discuss the relationship between the verbal inflection and the existential sentences in the following section.

4.2.2. Omission of the verb haver-hi

The second most common error we found in the data we collected is the omission of the verb *haver-hi*. We give some examples below:

(33)   Ø =HAVER-HI

  a. *Y   cuando   yo   era   en   China,   en   China*   XIT2
   and   when   I   was   in   China   in   China

   Ø [hi havia / había]   *coche   poc,   no   como   España,*
   Ø   car   few   not   as   Spain

   Ø [hi ha / hay]   *coche   mucho.*
   Ø   car   many
   'And when I was in China, in China there were few cars, not as in Spain, where there are many cars'.

  b. Ø [hi ha]   *molts   lletres,   només   la   Xina*   XIT5
   Ø   many   letters   only   the   China

   és   diferent,   no?
   is   different   not
   'There are many letters, Chinese writing is different from all, isn't it?'

  c. *Ahí e:*   Ø [hi ha]   *tres   o   quatre   dies   de*   XIT7
   there e: Ø   three   or   four   days   of

   festa,   tothom   no   treball.
   holliday   everybody   not   work
   'There, there are three or four days off, nobody works'.

As shown in Table 5, we observe that 5 out of the 9 errors of this type detected have been produced by XIT2, the speaker who makes more errors, both in existential sentences (77.27%, 17/22) and, as seen in Table 4, in all the ALEP constructions (56.71%, 38/67). The fact that most Chinese attributives do not have a copula can explain the frequent omission of the copula in Catalan attributives produced by Chinese learners. However, this kind of explanation does not apply to the omission of *haver-hi* in existential sentences since the corresponding Chinese sentences include the verb *yǒu*. Therefore, this error cannot be directly related to an L1 feature. Rather, it should be thought that a general strategy of simplification operating in the early stages of learning has been applied. This strategy remains in the learners' speech to a greater or lesser extent depending on the differences between L1 and L2, and depending on their skills, among other factors. The fact that the verbal element of the existential form is *haver*, which precisely coincides with the auxiliary verb used in compound

tenses and that Chinese learners very often omit in their early learn-
ing stages, could be linked to the omission of the entire form *haver-hi*
at this stage. However, the fact that XIT2 incorrectly omitted the aux-
iliary verb only once and produced it correctly 8 times (see Table 6 in
Section 4.2.3) could indicate that the auxiliary use of *haver* is learned
before the existential one. The limited data currently available about
the learning sequence of *haver / haver-hi* in Chinese learners are not
conclusive either way.

The analysis of the production of SHS,[32] a 15 years old Mandarin
Chinese student interviewed seven times during the first 18 months
of learning, reveals that there is no spontaneous *haver-hi* (non-repe-
tition of what the interviewer says) throughout the period. From the
fourth interview session on, there are 6 omissions and 2 cases of pos-
sible uses of *hi* instead of *hi ha*. There are 3 uses of the Spanish form
hay, 2 in session 3 and another one in session 6. As for the auxiliary
verb *haver*, since 9 omissions were detected in the second session and,
apparently, there were 18 correct forms, this could indicate that the
auxiliary is acquired first. Yet, the fact that the supposed uses of the
auxiliary (*ha*) in a compound tense occur only with verbs that begin
with a schwa (*enfadar-se* 'to get angry' and *anar-se'n* 'to go away')
and that the omissions were in verbs starting with consonant (*bus-
car* 'to search', *trencar* 'to break' and *córrer* 'to run') question that the
sequences [səɱfɚ'ðat] (*s'ha enfadat*) and [sɚ'nat] (*s'ha anat = se n'ha
anat*) actually contain the auxiliary *ha*. Needless to say that more lon-
gitudinal studies would be needed to clarify this issue.

4.2.3. Apparent omission of the verb haver *and the maintenance
of the clitic* hi

Finally, we present the 8 cases in which, at first sight, speakers
have omitted the verb *haver*, as in (34), but they have maintained the
clitic *hi*. We found this error in XIT1 and XIT2 production:

(34) a. *Perquè*   *a*   *Lao*   *n'hi*   Ø [hi ha]   *molta*   XIT1
　　　because in   Laos PARTITIVE.there Ø   many

　　　comunitat   xinesos.
　　　community   Chinese
　　　'Because in Laos there is a large Chinese community'.

　 b. [...]   *si*   hi Ø [hi ha]   *una*   *altra*   *llengua.*   XIT1
　　　　　if   there Ø   one   other   language
　　　　　'[…] if there is another language'.

c. *En   Xina   hi Ø [hi ha]   sud   i   nord.*   XIT2
   in   China   there Ø   South   and   North

   Jo   vivia   sud.
   I   lived   South
   'In China there is the South and the North. I lived in the South'.

d. *Sí.   Hi Ø [hi ha]   ciutat   molt   gran*   XIT2
   yes   there Ø   city   very   big

   a   prop   de   la   Fu Shun.
   at   near   of   the   Fu Shun
   'Yes. There is a very big city near Fu Shun'.

e. *Aquí   primer hi Ø [hi ha]   ensalada,   hi Ø [hi ha]   bistec*   XIT2
   here   first   there Ø   salade   there Ø   steak

   e: hi Ø [hi ha]   moltes   coses   m'agrada[33]
   e: there Ø   many   things   me.likes
   'Here, first there is salade, then there is steak, there are a lot of things that I like'.

f. *Autobús hi Ø [hi ha]   muchos.*   XIT2
   autobús   there Ø   many
   'There are a lot of buses'.

It is worth pointing out that, when speaking Catalan, XIT2 omitted the complex form of *haver-hi* only once. In the other 4 cases seemingly she only omitted the verbal element *haver*. The sentences that contain no element to express the notion of existence are all produced in Spanish. This may be so because this language does not have the equivalent to the Catalan clitic *hi* and only the verb can be omitted. We have found this behavior only in Chinese learners of Catalan, which suggests an L1 influence on L2 production in some way. We have to explain why, when they speak Catalan, they apparently often omit only one of the two parts of the Catalan existential *haver-hi* and why the omitted part seems to be the verb but not the clitic *hi*. Before answering this question, we must take into account some of the results of the data analysis related to the verbal inflection and the use of the clitic *hi*.

As we have shown in Table 1, the percentage of errors in the two considered grammatical aspects (ALEP constructions and verbal inflection) follows the same pattern. First, although this fact could be related to some differences between the three groups in the sample, we observe that the highest percentage of errors corresponds to the Chinese group, whereas the lowest one is found in the Arabic learners. Secondly, however, in all cases the percentage of errors was high-

er in the ALEP constructions than in the verbal inflection. As we suggested, this could also indicate that the inflection is acquired before the attributive, locative and existential constructions.[34] If we look at the ratio between the two types of errors, we find that it is similar in the three groups and that it always implies a preponderance of those linked to ALEP constructions.

In this paper, we look at the use of the verb *haver* as an auxiliary in the compound tenses because this is the verb that most directly affects existential sentences in Catalan. We present the data in Table 6:

Table 6. The use of the auxiliary *haver* in compound tenses.

	XIT1	XIT2	XIT3	XIT5	XIT6	XIT7	TOTAL
Correct uses	14	8	1	0	8	16	47
Omissions	0	1	3	3	1	0	8
Total	14	9	4	3	9	16	55
% errors	0.00	1.11	75.00	100.00	1.11	0.00	14.54

As it can be observed in the table above, the percentage of cases of omission of the auxiliary *haver* is 14.54%. In Table 5, we saw that the verb *haver-hi / haver* in existential sentences was incorrectly omitted 17 times and correctly used in 29 cases. This means that, if it was to appear 46 times,[35] the percentage of omissions would be 36.95%, much higher than the omission of *haver* as an auxiliary. This also suggests that the acquisition of the inflection occurs before that of the existential verb *haver-hi*.

As for the clitic *hi*, which the verb *haver* incorporates in existential sentences, it should be noted that it is only omitted in one case, i.e., when the verb is not in the present but in the imperfect past tense (XIT7: *a costat de tronc Ø havia dos granota* 'beside the trunk there were two frogs')[36]. It is interesting to point out that people who speak Catalan with a strong Spanish influence also omit *hi* in all cases except in the present tense (*ha hagut / va haver / haurà / havia un accident*, but not **ha un accident*). It is also important to note that, as we have seen, *hi* apparently appears 8 times as the single morpheme representing the existential verb *haver-hi*, with no explicit verbal element.

In Table 7, we present the use of the clitic *hi*, both as part of the existential verbal form *haver-hi*, and as a locative complement:

Table 7. The use of the locative and existential clitic *hi*.

	XIT1	XIT2	XIT3	XIT5	XIT6	XIT7	TOTAL
hi locative							
Correct	1	--	--	--	--	4	5
Omission	--	2	--	--	--	2	4
Total (error percentage)	1	2	--	--	--	6	9 (44.44%)
hi existential							
Correct	12	5	--	1^{37}	--	5	23
Omission	--	--	--	--	--	1	1
Total (error percentage)	1	2	--	--	--	6	24 (4.16%)

In Table 7 we can see that the amount of locative clitics *hi* that should appear is very low and that the number of omissions is relatively high: 44.44% (4/9). On the other hand, there are many more occurrences of clitics in the existential sentences and, as indicated before, they are omitted once, when the verb is not in the present tense. This means that the percentage of omissions is only 4.16% (1/24).[38] Therefore, it seems that these learners use *hi* as a replacement of the entire verbal form.

4.2.4. Summary

Leaving aside the cases in which the entire verb *haver-hi* is omitted, which are frequent in the early stages of the acquisition of L2 and in the lower levels, the errors in the existential sentences collected in our sample are the result of two different strategies: first, as expected from L1 characteristics, the Catalan existential verb has been substituted by the possessive verb *tenir* and, secondly, some speakers apparently omitted the verb *haver* but keeping the clitic *hi*. This last strategy, however, would not be predicted from a Romance perspective. With regard to the dependence of the clitic on the verb, the omission of the verb would be expected to imply the omission of the clitic, but not viceversa. Obviously, this would require an adequate explanation, but not only this. We should also have to explain what these two strategies have in common and how they can be related to the learners' first language. We deal with these issues in the next section.

5. Towards an explanation

The first obvious observation related to most errors in which the omitted element is not the whole form *haver-hi* is that, in both learn-

ers' strategies, the sentence contains some explicit element equivalent to the Catalan verb: the verb *tenir* or a form allegedly equivalent to the clitic *hi*. The verb *haver*, which also works as the auxiliary in compound tenses, does not seem to appear in any of these two options. The second observation, as mentioned above, has to do with the fact that in Chinese the same verb (*yǒu*) is used in existential as well as in possessive sentences. On the one hand, this fact shortens the initial period in which the omissions of the copula occur. On the other hand, not only does it account for the existence of the frequent confusion between Catalan verbs *haver-hi* and *tenir*, but it also accounts for the fact that the learners overextended *tenir* and used it instead of *haver-hi*, and not vice versa.

At this point, we need to clarify the nature of the form *hi*, which is used instead of the verb *haver-hi*. At first sight, it could be thought that *hi* corresponds to the clitic *hi*. Nevertheless, as indicated before, maintaining a clitic and omitting the verb would be odd, even though it was an auxiliary that Chinese learners frequently omit in verbal inflection. We think that this kind of error is the consequence of identifying the clitic *hi* with the verbal root (the invariable part of the verb).

In the spontaneous and colloquial Catalan spoken in the North-East of Catalonia (Barcelona and Girona areas), the part corresponding to the clitic of the verb *haver-hi* is stable ([i] or [j]), whereas the vowel [ə] of the verbal root can disappear, as in (35b); in some cases, the clitic may be directly linked to the inflection morpheme, as in (35c), where the schwa has been elided:[39]

(35) a. ['j+a]   *hi ha*
          ['j+aɣi]   *hi hagi*

      b. [j+u'ɾa] / [i+w'ɾa]   *hi haurà*
          [j+u'ɾiə] / [i+w'ɾiə]   *hi hauria*

      c. [i+'βiə]   *hi havia*
          [i+'ɣes]   *hi hagués*

Even when *haver* is used as an auxiliary verb, the /e/ of the present first person singular (*he* 'I have') can change into [i], as in (36a) (see Fabra 1914: 3, Mascaró 1986: 129 and Bonet 2002: 986); it is also possible, as in (36b), to elide the initial schwa of the verb in other persons and tenses:

(36) a. [i'βis'tuŋ'gos]
          He vist un gos.
          'I have seen a dog'.

          [miðu'tʃatə'kazə]
          M'he dutxat a casa.
          'I have taken a shower at home'.

      b. ['gesiz'βist]
          Haguessis vist!
          'If you had seen!'

          [u'ɾaðə'nal'medʒə]
          Haurà d'anar al metge.
          'He will have to go to the doctor'

These facts demonstrate the apparent 'weakness' of the root of *haver*, both in its use as an auxiliary verb, and when it appears as part of the existential form *haver-hi*.[40]

These Catalan phonological characteristics allow us to propose that the invariable form [i/j] used by some Chinese learners be analyzed as the existential copula they deduce from the initial [i/j] of many forms corresponding to Catalan *haver-hi* (see (35) and (36a)), and from the lack of the [ə] of the verbal root (see (35b,c) and (36b)).

We argue that the use of this copula can be connected to two factors: a) the lack of inflection (agreement and tense) in Chinese verbs makes the learners produce an invariant copula deriving from the invariant initial Catalan verb form,[41] and b) the fact that this copula coincides phonetically with the locative clitic *hi*. We can say that the copula [i/j] works as a verb and, in some sense, it incorporates a locative semantic value. Let us explain why we need some kind of locative content in an existential sentence.

First, we note that in three of the four ALEP constructions – i.e., locative, existential, and possessive (the "locative paradigm", in Freeze's words) – there is an implicit or explicit element with a locative value.[42] This is obvious in the locative sentences (*En Pau és* a Girona 'Pau is in Girona') and in many existential constructions (A Girona *hi ha quatre rius* 'There are four rivers in Girona'). In existential sentences, the locative may be absent as a complement, but in Catalan, as in other languages, the clitic *hi* appears (*No* hi *ha gent* 'There is no people'). As for the possessive sentences, as mentioned above, the possessor (in Catalan, the subject) can be understood as a locative maintaining a special belonging relationship with the possessee. Thus, in a sentence such

as *En Pere té una casa* 'Pere has a house', the house is placed within the 'scope' of Pere; the resulting reading is that Pere owns the house.[43] This relationship is not obvious in Catalan, but it is very clear in other languages that mark the possessor with a case morpheme or an adposition that indicates some kind of location (Stassen 1997: 149 and Stassen 2009: 51; Shevelov 1993: 988, and Pugh & Press 1999: 191):

(37) a. *Tá   airgead   aig-e.*   (Modern Irish)
    be.3SG   money   at.3SG
    'He has money'.

    Tá   sé   sa   tseomra.
    be.3SG   he   in.the   room
    'He is in the room'.

  b. *u   n'óho   je   hrós'i.*   (Ukrainian)
    at   he.GEN   COP   money
    'He has money'.

    v   odn'íj   xát'i
    in   one.LOC   house.LOC
    'in one house'

From what we have said, we can postulate that languages tend to make the underlying locative relationship existing in all the three constructions explicit in some way. Compare the Catalan and Chinese examples in (38) (Li & Thompson 1981:533, 536; 509 and Norman 1988: 168):

(38) a. *Ell   és   aquí / a la Xina.*
    he   is   here / in the China
    'He is here / in China'.

    Tā   zài   zhèr / Zhōngguó.
    he   *zài*   here / China
    'He is here / in China'.

  b. *A   la   ciutat   hi ha   parcs.*
    in   the   city   there.has   parks
    'There are parks in the city'.

    Chéng   li   yǒu   gōngyuán.
    city   in   *yǒu*   parks
    'There are parks in the city'.

c. *Jo tinc un llibre.*
   I have a book
   'I have a book'.

   Wǒ yǒu shū.
   I *yǒu* book
   'I have a book'.

In Catalan, these three types of sentences contain a verb, and the locative element (in a broad sense) can be expressed by a prepositional or adverbial phrase in locative and existential sentences. In the latter case, the clitic *hi* attached to the verb *haver* is also needed. In possessive sentences the verb *tenir* is the only element that expresses the abstract locative relation between the subject and the object. In Chinese, locative sentences contain the particle *zài*, a coverb that can be used as a verb or as a locative preposition (see Section 2.2.1), whereas both existential and possessive constructions include the same form, *yǒu*, which relates an entity to a place or to a possessor.

As shown in section 3, the explanation we propose for Catalan existential sentences produced by Chinese learners is consistent with data corresponding to Chinese learners of English or Italian. In (39) we present the correlations that occur in the ALEP constructions in all three L2 and the corresponding production of Chinese learners:

(39)

	ATTRIBUTIVE	LOCATIVE	EXISTENTIAL	POSSESSIVE	EXISTENTIAL L1 CHINESE
Italian	essere	essere	esserci	avere	esserci
English	to be	to be	there be	to have	(there) have
Catalan	ser	ser	haver-hi	tenir	tenir
	estar		ser-hi		[i/j]

As it can be seen in (39), in all three L2 the existential form includes an element that can be related to an adverb or a locative clitic (*there*, *ci* and *hi*), and a verb that also appears in the attributive and locative sentences (*essere*, *to be* and, in some cases, *ser* in Catalan), or one of the verbs that work as the auxiliary of the compounds tenses (*haver* in Catalan and *essere* in Italian).[44]

As for the possessive sentences, all three languages have a verb that differs from those appearing in the other three constructions

(*avere* in Italian, *to have* in English and *tenir* in Catalan). Chinese learners of Catalan or English tend to overextend the possessive verb to existential sentences.[45] In cases in which the L2 is English, learners sometimes combine the form *there* with the possessive verb *to have* (*there have*); some learners of Catalan, as noted, reduce the existential verb to the form [i/j], apparently with no explicit verb. Finally, learners of Italian, as seen in section 3, usually distinguish the two verbs, *essere* and *avere*, but, according to Valentini (1992), they overextend the existential form, which includes the clitic *ci*, to possessive sentences, which in colloquial Italian may have the same clitic but combined with the verb *avere*. Thus, in all three cases there is a clear tendency to unify the two types of sentences, either by means of the verbal form or through the Romance clitic *ci / hi* or the adverbial form *there* in English.

6. Concluding remarks

The aim of our study was to provide some data in favor of the hypothesis that the L1 is one of the factors that influence the acquisition of L2. In particular, we wanted to explain Catalan existential sentences produced by Chinese learners. On the basis of an initial contrastive analysis (see section 2.3), we initially expected that, once the early phase of complete omission of the copula common to most learners of an L2 was over, the grammatical properties of Chinese would induce learners to easily overcome the phase of entire omission of the verb *haver-hi*, to omit the verbal form *haver*, and to produce many errors of confusion between the Catalan verbs *haver-hi* and *tenir*.

The result of the data analyzed has been consistent with these predictions and the proposed explanation has also allowed us to relate our data to the production of existential sentences by Chinese learners of English and Italian. When such a structure is learned by a Chinese speaker, three properties of the L1 influence the process:

a) The fact that Chinese existential sentences contain the form *yǒu* reduces the cases of omission that could be expected, particularly in early stages.

b) The fact that *yǒu* is used in existential as well as in possessive sentences explains the frequent confusions between the verbs *tenir* and *haver-hi*, and it also prevents omission errors.

c) The isolating verbal morphology of Chinese, at least for agreement and tense, facilitates the tendency of some learners to

reduce the verb *haver-hi* to the invariable form [i/j]. This form has been created by equating the clitic *hi*, that usually precedes the verb *haver*, with the root of the existential verb. This process has been favored by a weakness of the Catalan verb and the consequent phonological processes it causes (vowel raising and elision of /a/) (see Section 5).

In future longitudinal studies it would also be interesting to carefully analyze two issues: the process of acquisition of existential sentences and other related structures (attributive, locative and possessive), and the process of acquisition of verbal inflection, particularly the use of *haver* and *estar* as auxiliaries in compound or periphrastic verb forms. These studies will allow us to establish the order in which these grammatical elements (copulas and inflection morphemes) are acquired, and to check if, as we have suggested here, inflection is learned before ALEP constructions. Finally, the results of these future studies could also be useful to prepare materials for teaching Catalan L2 to Chinese learners. This would be especially valuable if we take into consideration that the verbs involved in this study (*ser*, *estar*, *haver-hi* and *tenir*) already appear in the first lessons and, clearly, they are not easy to acquire because of their grammatical complexity.

Notes

1   The data in (1a) and (1b) have been extracted from the corpus compiled by the Grup de Lèxic i Gramàtica / Gabinet d'Assessorament Lingüístic per a la Immigració (GALI) of the Universitat de Girona. This corpus includes Catalan and Spanish speech produced by L2 learners. All L2 Catalan and Spanish data in this article, including those corresponding to the sample of this study, belong to the same corpus.
2   Unless we say the contrary, we use the "List of Standard Abbreviations" proposed in the document "The Leipzig Glossing Rules: Conventions for interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses" (http://goo.gl/oTJk04) [consulted: July 19, 2013].
3   The NP can precede the verb in certain contexts when it has been emphasized, as in the following dialogue:

(i)   —   *Hi*   *anirà*   *força*   *gent,*   *a*   *la*   *manifestació,*   *oi?*
             there   will.go   many   people   to   the   demonstration   Q
             'A lot of people will go to the demonstration, won't they?'

       —   *Sí!*   *Molta*   *gent,*   *hi*   *haurà*
             yes   many   people   there   will.have
             'Oh yes! There will be a lot of people, there!'

[4]   See Creissels (2014) for a definition of existential sentences based on the figure-ground distinction. In his own words: «In other words, in this paper, 'existential clauses' must be understood as referring to clauses analyzable as instantiations of a predicative construction sharing with plain locational predication the hability to encode prototypical figure-ground relationships. What distinguishes existential clauses from plain locational clauses is a different perspectivization of figure-groung relationships […].» (pp. 1-2). In this paper we will use the term 'existential' as a descriptive label that includes also presentational sentences as well as the constructions in (8), with the verb *ser*.

[5]   See Rigau (1993) and Ramos (2002) for a more exhaustive explanation of the syntactic behavior of existential constructions in Catalan dialects.

[6]   Despite being defined and considered a direct object, as Fabra (1956: §72) noted, these NP cannot be pronominalized by an accusative clitic: *Abans aquí hi havia l'armari* 'Before, there was the wardrobe here' vs. **Abans aquí l'hi havia* [before here it.ACC there had]. In fact, more recently this NP has been analyzed as the internal argument of an unaccusative verb. This idea was implicit in Fabra's grammar when he related the colloquial existential sentences to sentences containing verbs like *anar* 'to go', *venir* 'to come', *arribar* 'to arrive', etc., in order to explain the speakers' tendency to agree the verb with the NP. See the classic works on Italian: Burzio (1986) and Belletti (1988), and those on Catalan: Gràcia (1989a) and (1989b).

[7]   As pointed out by Leonetti (2008), however, Catalan has some definiteness restrictions in existential sentences:

(i)   *??Hi*   *havia*   *el*   *degà*   *a*   *la*   *reunió*
       there   was   the   dean   at   the   meeting

(ii)   *Hi*   *havia*   *el*   *degà,*   *a*   *la*   *reunió*
       there   was   the   dean,   at   the   meeting
       'There was the dean, at the meeting'

The Coda Constraint formulated by Leonetti (2008: 142) explains the difference between (i) and (ii): «The presence of the locative coda inside the VP blocks the insertion of definite DPs: these are excluded unless the locative coda is itself (right- / left-) dislocated or removed.»

[8]   As G. Rigau pointed out (p.c.), *ser-hi* is not a lexicalized form like *haver-hi*, because the clitic *hi* in *ser-hi*, unlike in the case of *haver-hi*, can be changed by an adverb or a PP (*No és allà / a casa* 'He is not there / at home').

[9]   Todolí (2002: 1424) states that «the verb *haver-hi* is used in questions because the subject has rhematic value, whereas in answers, where the NP is the theme, the verb *ser-hi* is used; for example, *—Que hi ha el Jordi? —No, no hi és.* '—Is Jordi there? —No, he isn't'» [our translation]. For more information on the use of *haver-hi* and *ser-hi*, see Rigau (1988), Ramos (2002), Todolí (2002) and Brucart (2002).

[10]   Note, however, that a sentence such as *Vam entrar a l'habitació i hi havia ell tocant el piano i ella que se l'escoltava* 'We entered the room and there was him

playing the piano and her listening to him' is grammatical. It seems that the use of the gerund sentence or the one introduced by *que* legitimizes the appearance of a third person nominative pronoun. Possibly *ell tocant el piano i ella que se l'escoltava* could be analyzed as a small clause that would fill the NP position of the existential structure. With regard to the first and second personal pronouns, sentences such as *Va entrar a l'habitació i hi havia jo tocant el piano i tu que m'escoltaves* 'He entered the room and there was me playing the piano and you listening to me' are not admitted by some speakers, but they are possible for the author and for many other Catalan speakers in colloquial speech. Probably, there is a hierarchy in the pronominal system related to the possibility of appearing in these constructions and to the nominative case assignment (F. Roca, p.c.). We leave this issue for further studies. See Bentley (2013) for more examples of nominative pronouns in Romance existential sentences.

[11]   In order to indicate the stay or residence in a place, the pronominal form *estar-se* can also be used, as in *La Berta s'estarà sis mesos al Senegal* ('Berta will stay in Senegal for six months').

[12]   See Picallo and Rigau (1999: 1019) for some similar examples in Spanish. These equivalences, however, are not always possible and they are subject to restrictions related, among others, to the animacy value and to the type of possession: *La Maria té una piga / un fill / un cotxe* 'Mary has a freckle / a son / a car' vs. **A la Maria hi ha una piga / un fill / un cotxe* '*At Mary there is a freckle / a son / a car'.

[13]   Ethimologically, *hay* corresponds to the third person singular form of the present of the verb *haber* 'to have' (*ha*) plus the old locative clitic (*y*).

[14]   For a brief presentation of the existential Spanish sentences, see also Garganta (2008).

[15]   It is interesting to observe that in other Romance varieties like Asturian, Portuguese and, in a more restricted way, Galician, the verb used in compound tenses is the one corresponding to *tenir*, not the one for *haver*. In Asturian, for example, *tengo bebío* ('I have drunk') corresponds to the Catalan form *he begut*.

[16]   The abbreviation CLF in the glosses of Chinese means *classifier*. They are not relevant to the topic of this paper.

[17]   In 2.2.1 we add the Catalan translation of Chinese ALEP sentences in order to facilitate the comparison between the two languages.

[18]   This entity, the possessor, is usually animate, so, the difference between the locative (in existential sentences) and the possessor (in possessive sentences) lies basically in the [±animate] feature.

[19]   The abbreviation ASP means *aspect*, and PARTICLE is a particle whose function and distribution fall beyond the scope of this paper.

[20]   Similar examples can be found in Cantonese and in Wu. As shown in (25), the coverb *zài*, which here corresponds to a preposition, may be complemented by a postpositional phrase whose head, in this case, is the postposition *li*. Notice that in some colloquial Catalan varieties it is common to use a locative prepositional group formed by the preposition *en* followed by the preposition *a* (*Posa aigua* en a *l'olla* 'Put water in the pot') or by the adverb *aquí* or *allà* (*Posa-ho* en aquí / en allà 'Put it here / there'), or by *a* and another preposition such as *sobre* o *sota* (*És a sobre / a sota la taula* 'It is on / down the table').

[21]   *Shì* is the copula that appears in the attributive sentences with a nominal predicate (Li & Thompson 1981: 149): *Tā fùqin shì wàijiāo bùzhǎng* (he father *shì* foreign.affair minister) 'His father is the Foreign Minister'.

[22]   Whereas the Mandarin existential verb *yǒu* does not allow any aspectual markers, the Cantonese verb *yàuh* can take the aspectual markers *jó* (perfective) and *gwo* (experiential) (Matthews & Yip 1994: 279). On the other hand, according

to Yue 2003: 90-91, «[t]he Southern dialects maintain a distinction between the perfective aspect and the past tense (past) which have merged in the great majority of Northern dialects. The so-called past tense is expressed with the existential verb (Vex) occurring before the verb modified». See also Matthews & Yip (1994) and Yip & Matthews (2000).

[23] Stockwell *et al*. (1965) formulated the so-called *Hierarchy of difficulty* according to which cases of split (one element in L1 corresponds to more than one in L2) were one of the most problematic for L2 learners.

[24] See Cruschina (2012) for a detailed analysis of the Italian existential sentences.

[25] Rohlfs (1954: 250) considered that the construction *ci avere* with a possessive meaning became the verb *ciavere* in the Rome area. In some dialects and in some varieties of regional Italian, the verb *avere* and the verb *tenere* can be used in the same context, as in the Neapolitan song performed by Renato Carosone *La pansè*: "*Che bella pansé che* tieni*, che bella pansé che* hai..." 'What a nice pansy you have, what a nice pansy you have'. In standard Italian, *tenere* means *to hold, to keep safe* and cannot be used as a possessive verb.

[26] In this calculation, as in our previous studies, we did not include those sequences that are considered incorrect by the prescriptive grammar, but that are usually produced by native Catalan speakers. We are referring, firstly, to cases in which the verb agrees with a plural NP (*hi han cotxes*), which are general in a large part of the Catalan area, and, secondly, to other constructions produced by Catalan speakers strongly influenced by Spanish (at least in the case of the Catalan spoken in Catalonia): the omissions of *hi* (*no havia gent*), or *en* (*hi havia molts*), or both clitics (*no havia*), and the cases of insertion of *en* (*n'hi havia un cotxe*), in this case, usually pronounced [nəˈβiə] or [ɲaˈβia].

[27] This suggests that the length of stay in the country where the L2 is spoken and the exposure to this language (the amount of input) may be relevant to the acquisition, and can even replace some disadvantages resulting from a low level of formal education.

[28] In this table, x = y means that the subject has used *x* instead of *y*.

[29] The calculation of right production has not included the correct omissions of verbs *(—Què hi ha aquí? —Ø un gos* '—What is here?' '—A dog'). We have only considered those sequences in which there was some explicit element in the position of the existential verb.

[30] Although the interview was in Catalan, XIT7 mixed a lot Catalan and Spanish. He produced 12 existential sentences: 5 in Catalan (with the verb *haver-hi*) and 7 with the Spanish form *hay*. For the purposes of our study, we considered that they could be counted together as correct production. It is worth noting that the only Spanish form he used is the present, the only containing the historically equivalent locative clitic (*ha+y*). In Catalan he used 4 present forms (with *hi*) and 1 imperfect past (without *hi*). The tense used was always the right one.

[31] In order to facilitate the reading of examples corresponding to the learners' production, we simplify the transcripts made according to the CHAT program of the Childes Project. We only mark the errors in the existential sentences.

[32] SHS attended an Aula d'acollida (newcomers' classroom) in a secondary school in Girona. The interviews were completed between 01/18/2011 and 05/31/2012 approximately every two or three months, depending on the school calendar. SHS arrived in Catalonia directly from China in November 2010 and joined the Catalan education system one month before the first interview.

[33] Admittedly, these errors are not always easy to identify because sometimes the sound [i] could also correspond to the Catalan copulative conjunction *i* 'and'. Some unclear cases have not been considered errors.

[34] In Table 2, however, we saw that possessive sentences constructed with the verb *tenir* were the least problematic of the four constructions for all groups of speakers, and even less than the verbal inflection (Chinese: 12.50 vs. 16.73; Arabic: 2.70 vs.7.76; Romanian 0.93. vs. 5.13). To these general data, we can add that in the Chinese group the omission of the auxiliary *haber / haver* or *estar* in compound tenses and in the progressive periphrasis with a gerund accounted for 15.44% of all errors in the verbal inflection (19 cases): *Ah, sí, el perro Ø tirado esto* 'Oh, yes! The dog Ø thrown that'; *Al bosc tots Ø buscant la granota*, 'In the forest, everybody Ø looking for the frog'.

[35] This calculation does not take into account the errors of confusion (*tenir* instead of *haver-hi*, etc.) because now we are only interested in those errors in which the verb has been omitted.

[36] Maré (2012) analyzed 9 interviews to Catalan learners with L1 Tagalog and 11 to learners with L1 Romanian. He found no omissions of the clitic *hi* in the verb *haver-hi* when it was in present tense. Maré's interviews had the same characteristics as the ones we use for the analysis in this paper.

[37] The sentence in which this *hi* appears has the form of an existential one, but, as said before, in Catalan it should be built with the locative verb *ser*: *La nena està dormit però la granota hi ha [és] fora de pot* ('The boy is asleep but the frog *hi ha* [és] outside the can').

[38] We did not take into consideration the Spanish productions (*hay*).

[39] Although it does not refer to the dialect of Catalan corresponding to our data, it is interesting to reproduce this observation from DCVB (*sub voce* 'haver') [our translation]: «Dialectally, in the Southern regions of the Principat and in the North of València, the particle *hi* is used preceding the infinitive *haver* or *haure*; so instead of *haver-hi* they say *hi haver* or *hi haure*, and also *n'hi haure* (pronounced *nyaure*) by the addition of the pronominal particle *ne*». We report a couple of examples from DCVB:

(i) | *No* | *ha plogut,* | *i* | *no* | *pot* | n'hi | *haver* | *collita* |
| not | has.rained | and | not | can | PARTITIVE.there | have | harvest |

'It has not rained and there can be no harvest'

(ii) | *Va* | *hi* | *haure* | *un* | *home* | *que* | *tenia* | *sis* | *dits* |
| PST | there | have | a | man | who | had | six | fingers |

'There was a man who had six fingers'

[40] Notice that, in the monosyllabic forms of the present, the auxiliary, whose underlying vowel is /a/ (*has* (2SG.), *ha* (3SG.) and *han* (3PL.)) is unstressed and then pronounced [ə]. This vowel raising, as well as that which raises /e/ into [i] in examples such as (36a), is a typical phenomenon related to weak positions (see Crosswhite 2001). I thank M.R. Lloret for this information.

[41] As mentioned in Section 4.2.1, XIT5 produced 8 errors in which *tenir* has been used instead of *haver-hi*. In all the cases she used the first singular person of the present (*tinc*) as an invariable form.

[42] Some generative linguists defend the idea that verbs equivalent to *estar*, *haver-hi* and *tenir* are the surface realization of a complex structure formed by the copula *be* plus a locative particle. The aspectual value of the particle would determine the choice of the verb. See Kayne (1993), Batllori et al. (2009), Gallego & Uriagereka (2009), and Batllori & Roca (2011).

[43] Note that, as said in section 2.1, a possessive sentence can be directly related to an existential one: in *A Girona hi ha quatre rius* 'There are four rivers in Girona', Girona is clearly presented as a place; in *Girona té quatre rius* 'Girona

has four rivers', Girona is understood as a locative entity, a place that 'possesses' or 'contains' four rivers.

[44] The auxiliary in Italian compound verbal forms is *avere* or *essere* depending on the verb or the construction type.

[45] For the case of Chinese learners of English, see Chan (2004) and He (2012), among others.

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