Revista Letras Raras

ISSN: 2317-2347 – v. 14, n. 3 – e6534 (2025)

Between Theory and Practice: Contributions of the Null Subject Parameter to L2 Teaching /

Entre teoria e prática: Contribuições do Parâmetro do Sujeito Nulo para o ensino de L2

Marina Verniano[*]
PhD student in Linguistic Studies at the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), with a Master's degree in the same field. Research focuses on second language acquisition, examined through the framework of Generative Theory.
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0055-4153

Received: February, 15, 2025. **Approved:** May, 4, 2025.

How to quote this article:
VERNIANO, Marina. Between Theory and Practice: Contributions of the Null Subject Parameter to L2 Teaching. *Revista Letras Raras.* Campina Grande, v. 14, n. 3, e6534, jun. 2025. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15612177

ABSTRACT
This article shows how knowledge about parametric variation between languages (Chomsky, 1981) can help second language (L2) teachers in the classroom, facilitating the process of L2 acquisition (AL2) by students. Based on the Principles and Parameters Theory (Chomsky, 1981) and research on parametric (re)setting (Ionin et al., 2004; Montrul; Yoon, 2009; Ionin; Montrul, 2010), this paper presents the data collected by Verniano (2022), which show the impacts of planned linguistic input (Marcelino, 2017) on the acquisition of existential sentences in English by children who speak Brazilian Portuguese (BP) as their first language (L1). The data collected by the author demonstrate that solid knowledge about the parametric variation between BP and English, in addition to an effective understanding of the easiest and most difficult structures to acquire, can improve the teacher's performance in the classroom and, consequently, that of their students, corroborating the idea that understanding the Theory of Principles and Parameters can effectively improve L2 teaching.
KEYWORDS: L2 acquisition; Null Subject Parameter; Linguistic input; Bilingual Context; Teaching practice.

RESUMO
Este artigo tem como objetivo mostrar como o conhecimento acerca da variação paramétrica entre as línguas (Chomsky, 1981) pode auxiliar o professor de segunda língua (L2) em sala de aula, facilitando o processo de aquisição de L2 (AL2) pelos alunos. A partir da Teoria de Princípios e Parâmetros (Chomsky, 1981) e de pesquisas sobre a (re)marcação paramétrica (Ionin et al., 2004; Montrul; Yoon, 2009; Ionin; Montrul, 2010), este trabalho apresenta os dados coletados por Verniano (2022), que mostram os impactos do input linguístico planejado (Marcelino, 2017) na aquisição de sentenças

[*] marinaverniano@gmail.com

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existenciais em língua inglesa por crianças falantes de português brasileiro (PB) como primeira língua (L1). Os dados coletados pela autora evidenciam que o conhecimento sólido sobre a variação paramétrica entre PB e inglês e o entendimento eficaz das estruturas mais fáceis e mais difíceis de serem adquiridas, podem aprimorar o desempenho do professor em sala de aula e, consequentemente, o de seus alunos, corroborando a ideia de que a compreensão da Teoria de Princípios e Parâmetros pode efetivamente melhorar o ensino de L2.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aquisição de L2; Parâmetro do Sujeito Nulo; Input linguístico; Contexto bilíngue; Prática docente.

1 Introduction

The Principles and Parameters Theory (Chomsky, 1981) posits that all natural languages are governed by universal principles and specific parameters. These principles account for the similarities among languages, such as the fact that they all have a syntactic position for the subject, known as the Extended Projection Principle (Chomsky, 1988). In contrast, parameters are responsible for the variety among languages: while they all have a syntactic position for the subject, the way in which it is expressed may vary depending on the language, which relates to the Null Subject Parameter (NSP) (Chomsky, 1981; Rizzi, 1982) setting. The original notion of parameter is binary, allowing for either a positive or negative setting. Recent studies, however, indicate that not all structures[1] licensed by a parameter are consistently present in all languages, suggesting that partial setting is also possible (Roberts, 2019). Thus, languages that license all structures without restriction conditions are considered positive languages with respect to the NSP, as is the case with European Portuguese (EP) and Italian; if none of the structures are licensed, the negative setting is considered, as in English or French; finally, languages in which structures are licensed under restriction conditions are referred to as partial null subject languages, as is the case of Brazilian Portuguese (BP) or Finnish[2] (Holmberg, 2010).

In light of the Generative Theory (Chomsky, 1981; 1986; 1995) and acquisitionist studies focusing on bilingualism (Herschensohn, 2000; Slabakova, 2016; Marcelino, 2017; 2018; 2019), Verniano (2022) conducted an experiment with 8 Brazilian children aged 5 and 6, inserted in a bilingual

[1] Structures related to the Null Subject Parameter setting are presented in Table 1 of subsection 2.2.

[2] In addition to the positive, negative and partial setting for the NSP, Holmberg and Roberts (2010) proposed 5 variations of it, which will be discussed in section 2. For further information on this discussion, see Holmberg, Nayudy and Sheehan (2009), Roberts and Holmberg (2010), Holmberg (2010), Sheehan (2014), Roberts (2019), and Kato and Duarte (2021).

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context, in which they acquired English as a second language (L2). The main goal of the study was to verify the effects of planned linguistic input on the acquisition of existential sentences in English, which were selected due to their parametric difference: while BP is partially set for the NSP, allowing null subjects under specific circumstances, English is negatively set for it, prohibiting null subjects under any kind of conditions (Nascimento; Kato, 1995)[3]. To this end, the participating children were divided into two groups, in which group 1 was exposed to planned input, rich in existential sentences, such as: "There is an apple on the table", and group 2 was exposed to unplanned input[4]. The results revealed that the first group was able to produce existential sentences both spontaneously and in elicited production contexts, whereas group 2 did not present any occurrence of this structure. These findings, thus, confirm the importance of planned linguistic input during second language acquisition (SLA) (Verniano, 2022; Marcelino; Verniano, 2022).

Beyond these findings, the author also identified other fundamental aspects for effective SLA, such as the negative impacts of using the L1 in the classroom, the importance of creating contexts conducive to the production of specific structures, the influence of teacher discourse on student speech, and the relevance of understanding parametric differences between the L1 and the L2 for more efficient SLA. This latter point served as the foundation for the author's research, as the study was based on the parametric variation between BP and English. Hence, this article, drawing on Verniano's research (2022), aims to demonstrate how knowledge of parametric variation among languages (Principles and Parameters Theory - Chomsky, 1981), and, consequently, an understanding of which structures are easier and more challenging to acquire, can better prepare L2 teachers for the classroom and, thereby, improve and/or facilitate the process of second language acquisition for their students.

There is a wide range of studies on SLA and parameter resetting (Ionin *et al*., 2004; Ionin; Montrul, 2010; Marcelino, 2017a; 2017b; Bruhn de Garavito; Valenzuela, 2008; Montrul; Yoon, 2009; Roberts, 2019) and, in general, most of them suggest that, when acquiring a new language, it is

[3] The details of the parametric differences between BP and English are presented in section 2.2.

[4] During SLA, planned input refers to the idea that it is insufficient for teachers to merely use the L2 in the classroom. Instead, they should plan the discourse that will be used, considering structures that are crucial for their students' L2 acquisition process (Marcelino, 2018). In Verniano's (2022) research, one of the teachers was instructed to enrich her input with existential sentences, while the other did not receive the same guidance. The results of these two types of input will be presented later.

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necessary to either set new parameters or to reset parameters that were already set during first language acquisition. However, the majority of these studies are restricted to the linguistic scope and do not provide efficient ways of using parametric knowledge in the classroom. Thus, this article will focus on presenting the differences in NSP settings in BP and English, in order to demonstrate how knowledge of these differences can improve the SLA process and how this can be used by teachers in the classroom.

This article is organized as follows: this Introduction; Section 2, divided into three subsections, which address L1 and L2 acquisition, the notion of the Null Subject Parameter (NSP) and how it applies to existential constructions in BP and English, and parametric (re)setting in L2; Section 3 presents the methodology used by Verniano (2022) for data collection and analysis; section 4 focuses on the quantitative and qualitative data presented by Verniano (2022); and finally, the last section is dedicated to the final considerations.

2 Second language acquisition and parametric variation

This section presents the theoretical foundations underpinning the idea defended by Verniano (2022), namely that knowledge of parametric variation is fundamental for effective L2 teaching. To this end, this section is divided into 3 subsections: in 2.1 I briefly present the SLA process; in 2.2 I discuss the NSP and its relationship with existential sentences, the focus of Verniano's (2022) study; finally, in 2.3 I present the data from Ionin *et al.* (2004) and Ionin and Montrul (2010) in light of Montrul and Yoon (2009), which address parametric (re)setting during SLA and, thus, I establish the relationships of these studies with Verniano's (2022) proposal.

2.1 Language acquisition

L1 acquisition, within the generative perspective (Chomsky, 1981; 1986; 1995), begins with the child's exposure to linguistic input, which necessarily contains the primary linguistic data (PLD) of the language (Chomsky, 1981; 1986; Marcelino, 2018). According to Marcelino (2018), the PLD

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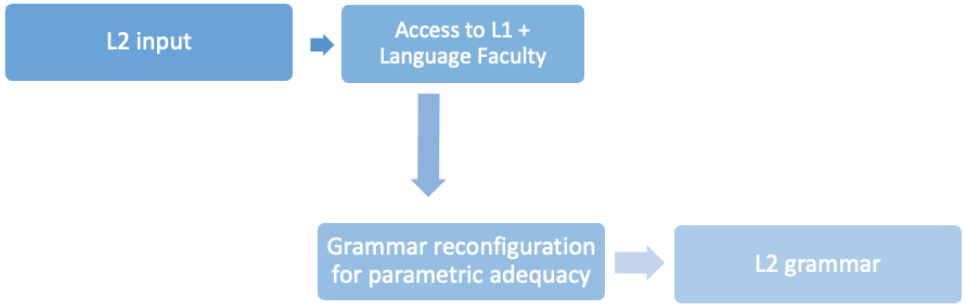
provides learners with the essential information about the language being acquired, and it is through exposure to this input that the speaker begins to set its parameters. When a parameter is set - whether positively, partially, or negatively - it instantly triggers a cluster of structures related to it, thus, with each set parameter, several structures are triggered, ultimately forming the speaker's L1 grammar.

With regard to SLA, the process is similar; however, since the speaker has already acquired a dominant language (L1), parameter setting may not occur as readily. In such cases, the learner must set new parameters, or even reset existing ones according to the L2 that is being acquired. For instance, BP speakers while acquiring English as a second language must reset the NSP to a negative value, as English prohibits null subject constructions. Thus, SLA can be summarized as shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: L2 Acquisition.



Source: Verniano (2022, p. 52, translated by the author of this article)

Building on Figure 1, Verniano (2022) argues that SLA does not follow a linear progression, as opposed to first language acquisition. The presence of a dominant linguistic system may trigger transfers from L1 to L2, which can be attributed to the lack of fluency in some learners, or to fluctuation periods (Ionin, 2003). These fluctuations are characterized by moments in which the speaker oscillates between L1 and L2 structures during parametric setting, until the (re)setting of the parameter actually occurs. The next subsection elaborates on how the PSN works and explains its relevance to the acquisition of existential sentences.

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2.2 The Null Subject Parameter and existential sentences

The Null Subject Parameter (NSP) (Chomsky, 1981; Rizzi, 1982) determines whether null subjects are licensed in natural languages. As the most extensively studied parameter within generative theory, it is now recognized that languages can be classified into five categories: consistent null subject languages, radical null subject languages, partial null subject languages, null expletive languages, or negative null subject languages (Roberts; Holmberg, 2010). For the scope of this article, I will adopt three settings for the NSP: positive, negative, and partial. A positive setting licenses the full cluster of structures associated with the parameter, a negativa setting prohibits null subjects entirely, and a partial setting permits them only under specific conditions, as observed in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). Table 1 summarizes the cluster of structures linked to the NSP.

Table 1: Cluster of structures related to the Null Subject Parameter

Cluster (Chomsky, 1981; Rizzi, 1982)	[+PSN]	[-PSN]
Null subjects	*Ø Bebi água.*	**Drank water.*
Null expletives	*Ø Chove.*	**Rains.*
Post-verbal subjects	*Ø Chegou um pai na reunião.*	**Arrived a parent at the meeting.*
Long -wh movement	*Quem$_i$ você falou que __$_i$ vem pra festa?*	**Who$_i$ did you say that __$_i$ comes to the party?*
Null resumptive pronouns	*Este é o cachorro que eu acho que (ele) fugiu de casa.*	**This is the dog that I think that (he) ran from home.*
Violation of the that-trace effect	*Quem$_i$ você acha que __$_i$ saiu?*	**Who$_i$ do you think that __$_i$ left?*

Source: Made by the author of this article.

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In BP, classified as a partial null subject language (Holmberg; Nayudy; Sheehan, 2009; Kato; Duarte, 2022), the NSP cluster is licensed. Nevertheless, not all of structures are freely permitted[5]. In opposition, English prohibits all such structures due to its negative parameter setting. When examining existential sentences, the focus of Verniano's research (2022), one key distinction between both languages lies in their syntactic strategies. While BP employs the verb *existential-ter*[6] (*to have*) (Nascimento; Kato; 1995; Viotti, 1999; Callou, 2019) and the subject position is filled with a null clitic (Nascimento; Kato, 1995)[7], a feature phonetically unrealized, English constructions rely on the *copula be* and the subject position is filled with the expletive *there*, which moves for the specifier of IP/TP in order to supply the negative setting for the NSP (Nascimento; Kato, 1995; Kato, 2019)[8]. Table 2 illustrates existential sentences in both languages, followed by Figures 2 and 3, which depict the syntactic representation in BP and English respectively.

Table 2: Existential sentences in BP and English

Brazilian Portuguese (BP)	English
Ø Tem uma maçã em cima da mesa. (*Have an apple on the table.*) Ø Tem um homem no jardim. (*Have a man in the garden*)	There is an apple on the table. There is a man in the garden. There are many animals in the garden.

[5] According to Kato and Duarte (2022), one of the factors contributing Brazilian Portuguese shifting from a [+NSP] language to a partial null subject language is the erosion of the inflectional paradigm. This weakening was partly driven by the introduction of the pronouns *você* and *a gente*. For further details on the reasons that led BP to become a partial null subject language, see Kato and Duarte (2022).

[6] According to Viotti (1999), existential sentences in BP can be formed by *ter*, *haver* or *existir*. Conversely, as noted by Callou (2019), the most common sentences in BP are those constructed by using *ter*. Hence, Verniano (2022) limited the study to constructions with this type of verb.

[7] For Viotti (1999; 2002), on the other hand, the subject position in BP existential sentences is not filled with a null clitic because the position itself is not projected. For further details on this approach, refer to chapter 5 of Viotti (1999) and Viotti (2002).

[8] There is a vast discussion regarding the derivation of existential sentences in English, mainly in respect to the position in which the expletive *there* is generated. Here, I assume the proposal adopted by Verniano (2022), wherein *there* is generated as the specifier of a small clause [there in the room], subsequently moving to the specifier of IP/TP to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) (Nascimento; Kato, 1995; Kato, 2019). Alternative approaches assume that the expletive must be moved to the specifier of IP/TP, but are not generated as the specifier of a small clause - these will not be discussed here (Hazout, 2004; Zawawi; Sultan; Jaludin, 2023). Finally, for views in which *there* is inserted directly into the TP specifier position after syntactic derivation, refer to Carnie (2006).

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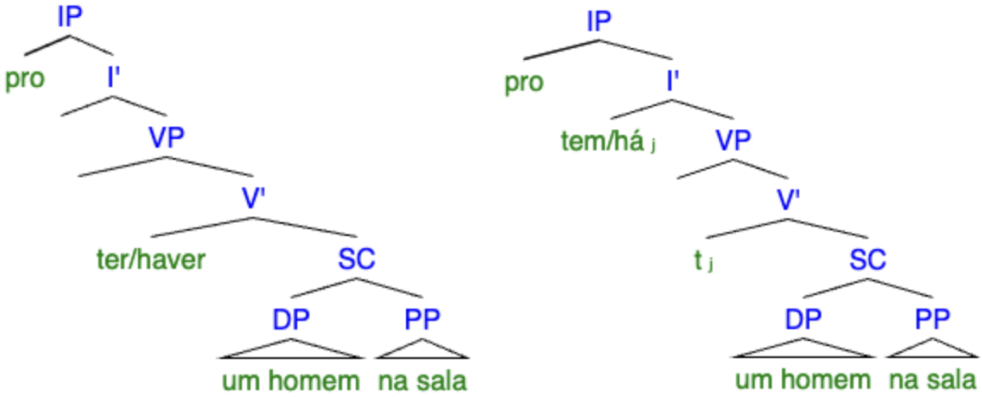
Ø Tem vários animais no jardim. (*Have many animals in the garden.*)	

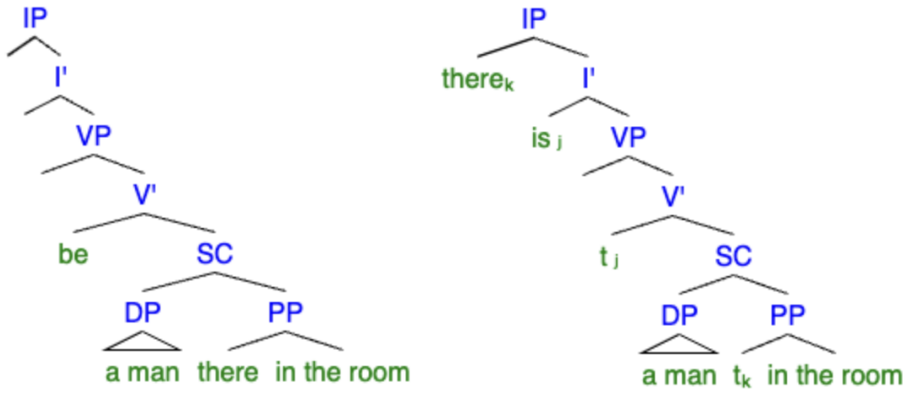
Source: Verniano (2022, p. 21) adapted by the author.

Figure 2: Syntactic representation of "Tem/Há um homem na sala" (*Have a man in the room*).



Source: Made by the author of this article.

Figure 3: Syntactic representation of "*There is an actor in the room*".



Source: Made by the author of this article.

The examples in Table 2 and in Figures 2 and 3 highlight key aspects of existential sentences. First, the presence of the expletive *there* in the specifier of IP imposes a higher burden on the computational system, as the operation move is present during the derivation. According to Chomsky (1995), the greater the number of syntactic operations, the more computationally costly the derivation

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will be for the system. Second, it is possible to notice that verb agreement is present in existential sentences in English[9], whereas in BP it is not . Corroborating the analyses of Viotti (1999; 2002), Nascimento and Kato (1995) and Kato (2019), Verniano (2022) argues that existential sentences in BP are exempt from agreement because they do not have a subject, making verbal agreement impossible. In English, by contrast, the presence of a subject entails mandatory agreement, as seen in these constructions with post-verbal nominals.

In addition to the differences, in agreement with Nascimento and Kato (1995), Verniano (2022) further highlights that this type of structure presents similarities between the languages investigated in this study. Both BP and English utilize unaccusative verbs in existential sentences, that is, those that select only the internal argument. Furthermore, their complement exhibits properties of a small clause, characterized by a combination of [subject] and [predicate], as in [homem na porta] (*man at the door*) or [actor in the room][10].

Expanding upon this framework, Verniano (2022) argues that parametric variation between languages accounts for the differences in existential constructions, despite their similarities. Moreover, the author states that constructions in English are more costly for the computational system compared to structures in BP. This disparity could generate possible transfers from L1 to L2, giving rise to ungrammatical constructions, as in (1), or even generate the production of equivalent structures in BP and English, but which do not present the syntactic structure of existentials, as in (2). The constructions arranged in (2) function as possessive clauses, adhering to the SVO [subject-verb-object] syntactic order in both languages, and do not require syntactic movements for their formation, thus being less costly for the computational system (Verniano, 2022).

(1) **Have an apple on the table. (in BP: Tem uma maçã na mesa).*

**Have an actor in the room. (in BP: Tem um ator na sala).*

(2) *I have a table in my house. (in BP: Eu tenho uma mesa na minha casa).*

[9] In English, *there is* is used for singular sentences, *there are* for plural sentences and *there's* is an informal way for both singular and plural uses (Verniano, 2022).

[10] The concept of *small clause* as a complement of existential sentences was first proposed by Stowell (1981; 1983). For further details on the behavior of small clauses as existential sentences complements in BP and English, see Nascimento and Kato (1995) andKato (2019).

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I have plants in my house. (in BP: Eu tenho plantas na minha casa).

The data collected by the author include constructions such as in (1) and (2). The productions in (2), though not existential constructions, are an alternative for BP speakers because, in addition to being less costly, they do not involve the resetting of the NSP, precisely by virtue of the equivalence of this structure in both languages. I conclude this subsection with Table 3, which summarizes the main characteristics of existentials in BP and English.

Table 3: Existential sentences in BP and English

	Brazilian Portuguese (BP)	English
Parameter setting	[partial to NSP]	[-NSP]
Verb type	unaccusative	unaccusative
Subject position	null clitic	expletive *there*
Post-verbal complement	small clause	small clause
Verb agreement	no agreement	agreement

Source: Verniano (2022) adapted by the author.

2.3 Parameter (re)setting: an overview of Montrul and Yoon (2009)

In order to explain how parameter (re)setting happens in SLA, Verniano (2022) cites Montrul and Yoon (2009), who propose two mechanisms to reset parameters:

> If a feature does not exist in L1 but exists in L2, parameter resetting involves adding (and assembling) a formal feature to the relevant functional category in L2. If a feature exists in L1 and L2, but is packaged differently, parameter resetting would entail figuring out the correct assemblage of the feature in L2. (Montrul; Yoon, 2009, p. 297)

To illustrate this claim, Montrul and Yoon (2009) present some SLA studies in which parametric resetting is used. For the purposes of this article, I will present the data from Ionin *et al.* (2004) and Ionin and Montrul (2010)[11], as these resemble the data from Verninao's (2022) research.

[11] Montrul and Yoon's (2009) paper presents a preview of the data from Ionin and Montrul (2010), which were only published in November 2010.

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Ionin *et al.* (2004) and Ionin and Montrul (2010) investigated genericity between English and Spanish. As presented by the authors, in English, the use of the definite article *the* is mandatory in sentences with definite plurals but prohibited when the plural is not definite. In contrast, Spanish employs the definite article *los* for both definite and non-definite plurals. Examples of these structures are presented in (3).

(3) ***The*** *hungry dogs are dangerous.* [plural definido]

Hungry dogs are dangerous. [plural não definido]

Los *perros hambrientos son peligrosos.* [plural definido e não definido]

(The dogs hungry are dangerous)

(Montrul; Yoon, 2009)

Based on the authors' prior data, Montrul and Yoon (2009) demonstrate that speakers of Spanish as L1 acquiring English as L2 need to reorder the generic features and subtract the [+generic] feature, since this will only be used in the absence of the definite article: [D, +Def, ±Pl, ±Generic] → [D, +Def, ±Pl]. In contrast, speakers of English as L1 acquiring Spanish as L2 need to incorporate the [+generic] feature into constructions with the definite article: [D, +Def, ±Pl] → [D, +Def, ±Pl, ±Generic]. Additionally, Ionin et al. (2004) also investigated how speakers of Korean as L1, a language lacking determiners, acquire English. According to their analysis, no feature reorganization is required, only addition: Korean speakers must learn about the concept of determiners and integrate their associated features [D, +Def, ±Pl].

Montrul and Yoon (2009) demonstrate that 60% of Korean speakers acquired the new feature, contrasting with Spanish speakers, who had more difficulty in subtracting and adding new features. As Montrul and Yoon (2009, p. 301) state, "(t)his study suggests that feature re-assembly is a difficult task even when the L1 and the L2 share the same features; however, it is not impossible [...]". Based on this, Verniano (2022) affirms that English L2 teaching often oversimplifies "learning" of existential sentences as a mere replacement of *existential-ter* by *there to be,* whereas , in fact, it involves "the resetting of a parameter in all its complexity". According to the author:

> With regard to the children participating in this research, their role was to understand that BP allows sentences without a subject, due to partial setting to the

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> NSP and, therefore, to understand that English behaves differently, as it requires a subject in all types of sentences. Thus, the participants in this research needed to subtract the [+ null subject] feature and add the [- null subject] feature, that is, they needed to reset the NSP to acquire the existential structures in English. (Verniano, 2022, p. 55)[12]

This subsection sought to explain the complexity of parametric resetting during SLA. From it, it is possible to understand which factors are involved in this process and how parameter resetting occurs within the scope of existential sentences in BP and English. While the potential benefits of parametric knowledge for L2 teaching are already apparent, their full significance will become more evident in the presentation and analysis of data, as presented in section 4.

3 Methodology

Verniano's (2022) research was conducted based on the collection of spontaneous production (Demuth, 1998) and elicited production (Thornton, 1998) from two groups of children aged 5 and 6 years old and their respective teachers[13]. All participants were enrolled in a school in the northern part of the city of São Paulo, and were part of the school's Bilingual Program, being exposed to 5 hours of English per week (1 hour per day), via Google Meet[14]. Group 1, which received robust and planned input, comprised 6 children; group 2 received unplanned input and included only two children. The disparity in the number of children, according to the author, was a consequence of the COVID-19

[12] Original text: "No caso das crianças participantes desta pesquisa, o papel delas foi o de compreender que o PB pode possuir sentenças sem sujeito, devido à marcação parcial ao PSN e, por isso, entender que o inglês se comporta de forma diferente, pois necessita do sujeito em todos os tipos de orações. Assim, os participantes dessa pesquisa precisaram subtrair o traço [+ sujeito nulo] e adicionar o traço [- sujeito nulo], ou seja, elas precisaram remarcar o PSN para adquirir as estruturas existenciais no inglês." (Verniano, 2022, p. 55)

[13] The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee on November 21st, 2020, under CAAE number: 38351420.1.0000.5505.

[14] Verniano's (2022) data collection took place during the pandemic of COVID-19. As a result, English classes were conducted remotely. Furthermore, the author notes that, in a face-to-face environment, children were exposed to 10 hours of English per week (2 hours per day), and the reduction to 5 hours per week was a consequence of the pandemic.

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pandemic, which caused several cancellations of school enrollments[15]. Despite this imbalance, Verniano (2022) states that the data from both groups could be analyzed and compared through their normalization/normalized frequency. According to the author:

> [...] the normalization base used for the corpus of this research was set at 1,000, and the normalized frequency calculation was performed to compute the occurrences of all relevant structures. Consequently, the data analysis became egalitarian, in spite of the disparity in the number of members. (Verniano, 2022, p. 59)[16]

Verniano (2022) considered the 5 structures listed below, which are related to existential sentences and the NSP setting. Also, structures 1 through 4 exhibit semantic equivalence. Such structures are listed below:

1. Sentences with *there to be* (grammatical and ungrammatical): *There is a monkey on this page*;
2. Sentences with **existential-have*: **Have a monkey on this page*;
3. Sentences with *grammatical-have*: *We have a monkey on this page*;
4. Sentences with *existential-ter* in BP: *Tem um macaco na página (Have a monkey on the page)*;
5. Sentences with the correct and incorrect use of the expletive *it*: *It rains in here*[17].

(Verniano, 2022, p. 63, adapted by the author)

For the purposes of this article, I will consider structures from 1 to 4 for data analysis. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that Verniano's (2022) data collection was conducted in two stages: the first involving both groups and their respective teachers, and the second limited to group

[15] For more details on normalized frequency calculations, refer to McEnery and Hardie (2012) and Veirano Pinto (2013). For specifics on the calculations performed specifically in Verniano's (2022) research, consult Chapter 4 of the author's dissertation.

[16] Original text: [...] a base de normalização utilizada para o corpus desta pesquisa foi a base 1.000, e o cálculo de frequência normalizada foi realizado para computar as ocorrências de todas as estruturas relevantes. Por conseguinte, a análise de dados tornou-se igualitária, mesmo com a disparidade de integrantes. (Verniano, 2022, p. 59)

[17] The use of the expletive *it* is related to the NSP setting, as its presence is required to fill the subject position in English. In Verniano's research (2022), however, the number of occurrences of *it* was not computed; there was only a verification of the contexts in which it appeared or not. In this article, I will not address quantitative data on expletive *it* usage.

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1. Here, only the first stage of data collection will be considered, as it is through this stage that the relationship between the NSP and classroom dynamics becomes evident[18]. Table 4 presents a summary of the main characteristics of the first stage of data collection.

Table 4: Characterization of the first stage of data collection.

	Group A	Group B
Period	September/2020 - December/2020	September/2020 - December/2020
Number of classes recorded	69 classes	65 classes
Classes length	1 hour	1 hour
Number of children	6 children	2 children
Number of teachers	1 teacher	1 teacher
Type of data collected	Spontaneous and elicited production	Spontaneous and elicited production
Environment	Remote	Remote
Type of input	Planned and robust	Unplanned

Source: Verniano (2022) adapted by the author.

After recording all the classes, the author reviewed the material and isolated relevant linguistic productions. These productions, in the form of audio recordings, were transcribed and the documents were converted to .txt format. Subsequently, the transcriptions were imported into the #LancsBox software version 6.0 and, through the KWIC (Key Word in Context) tool, which allows the identification

[18] The complete corpus of this study is publicly available in the Unifesp Data Repository. The dataset can be accessed via the link www.repositoriodedados.unifesp.br under the reference Verniano, Marina, 2022, "Corpus de aquisição de língua inglesa por crianças de 5 e 6 anos.", doi:10.5072/FK2/AO8KDJ, Repositório de Dados de Pesquisas UNIFESP Dataverse, V1.

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of all occurrences of a given structure. This enabled Verniano (2022) to quantify the number of occurrences of all relevant structures and to analyze the contexts in which they occurred.

4 Data presentation and analysis

In this section, I will present a subset of data collected by Verniano (2022). The author's research presented a qualitative and quantitative analysis, where the number of occurrences of each structure, the types of linguistic production and the contexts in which they were inserted were relevant for the analysis. Thus, I will begin the section by presenting Tables 5 and 6, which demonstrate frequency counts for teacher and student productions. Following this, I will present some linguistic production data and discuss them. Table 5 details the frequency distribution of structures produced by teachers in groups A and B, as analyzed by Verniano (2022). Table 6 follows, reporting the occurrences of the students in each group[19]. I reinforce that all the numerical values in these tables refer to the standardized occurrences, that is, the number of occurrences per 1,000 words.

Table 5: Normalized occurrences of *there to be*, *grammatical-have*, **ungrammatical-have* and *existential-ter* in teachers' production during stage 1 (september/2020 – december/2020).

Month	Number of classes	Teacher	There to be	Grammatical-have	*Ungrammatical-have	Existential-ter
September	21	GROUP A	20,2	1,9	0	0
	20	GROUP B	3,2	8,5	0	1,7
October	20	GROUP A	10,4	2,1	0	0
	19	GROUP B	1,9	5,3	0	1,6
November	19	GROUP A	6,2	0,9	0	0
	17	GROUP B	0,9	2,5	0	4,3

[19] In order to obtain more accurate data, Verniano (2022) computed the number of occurrences across both groups and at the individual level. Here, however, I will only consider the numbers related to the groups as a whole. For details about individual linguistic production, see Verniano (2022).

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December	9	GROUP A	4,5	1,5	0	0
	7	GROUP B	0,1	0,3	0	0,6
Total number of occurrences among the months	**69**	GROUP A	**41,4**	**6,6**	**0**	**0**
	63	GROUP B	**6,3**	**16,7**	**0**	**8,4**

Source: Verniano (2022, p. 73) adapted by the author.

Table 6: Normalized occurrences of *there to be*, *grammatical-have*, **ungrammatical-have* and *existential-te* in students' production during stage 1 (september/2020 – december/2020).

Month	Number of classes	Students	There to be	Grammatical-have	*Ungrammatical-have	Existential-ter
September	21	GROUP A	4,3	0,5	4,4	3,0
	20	GROUP B	0	0	0	6,9
October	20	GROUP A	2,6	0	1,2	1,8
	19	GROUP B	0	0	0	1,3
November	19	GROUP A	0,1	0,1	0,5	4,3
	17	GROUP B	0	0	0	6,2
December	9	GROUP A	0,3	0,3	0,4	0,9
	7	GROUP B	0	0	0	0
Total number of occurrences among the months	**69**	**GROUP A**	**7,3**	**0,9**	**6,6**	**9,7**
	63	**GROUP B**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**14,5**

Source: Verniano (2022, p. 90) adapted by author.

As shown in tables 5 and 6, the teacher from group A, who planned the linguistic input, produced more existential sentences compared to the teacher from group B, with 41.4 occurrences per

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1,000 words for A, and 6.3 occurrences per 1,000 words for B. This disparity directly influenced the children's linguistic production: while students from group A produced 7.3 occurrences of *there to be* per 1,000 words, children from group B did not present any occurrence of this structure[20]. Examples of these types of occurrences will be presented later[21].

A further observation is that both teachers' and students' use of *there to be* decreased over the months of the study. Verniano (2022) attributes this trend to the types of content that were being taught during classes. According to the author, some topics, such as learning about desert and jungle habitats, increased the use of the structure, as teacher and students talked about what existed in those environments , while other topics, such as Halloween or movement verbs, did not encourage the use of *there to be*. Additionally, the author states that the month of December had a smaller number of classes, which directly affected the amount of production.

With respect to *grammatical-have*, I previously presented that Verniano (2022) highlights three aspects related to this structure: (i) it is an equivalent structure in BP and English, due to the SVO order; (ii) it does not require the resetting of the NSP for its production; and (iii) it is less costly for the computational system, as it does not require syntactic movement. In terms of frequency, the teacher from group A produced 6.6 occurrences of this structure for every 1,000 words, whereas the teacher from group B produced 16.7 occurrences for every 1,000 words. Verniano (2022), when presenting examples of this type of production, elucidates that all occurrences could be transformed into sentences with *there to be*. In (4) I present some of such examples, where TA refers to teacher A (teacher from

[20] The number of *there to be* occurrences in students' production align with the structural priming effect, a cognitive phenomenon identified in psycholinguistics (Bock, 1986). According to Bock (1986), *structural priming* consists of a cognitive phenomenon that leads speakers to reuse and/or produce syntactic structures to which they have already been exposed (Santos; Mota, 2022). This article is based on Verniano's research (2022), in which the author uses the term *planned input* and does not delve into issues regarding linguistic priming. For this reason, the terms *planned input*, *robust input* or *enriched input with DLP* will be adopted here. For more details on priming effects, refer to Bock (1986) and Santos and Mota (2022).

[21] The data collected by Verniano (2022) are situated within a Brazilian bilingual context of L2 acquisition. As such, instances of code-switching between the L1 and L2 (Brazilian Portuguese and English) are observed, as well as occurrences in which learners transfer syntactic structures from BP into English. To aid the reader's comprehension, two types of glosses were implemented: (i) ***literal transcription***, where participants' speech is transcribed verbatim into English; and (ii) ***English version:*** , in which the utterances are translated into English. It is important to note that glosses are provided exclusively in cases involving language mixing or syntactic transfer from one language to the other; in instances where learners adhere to fully target-compliant English syntax, no glosses are included.

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group A), and TB to teacher B (teacher from group B). In (5) I present how these sentences could be restructured with *there to be*.

(4)

a. TA: It's a toilet paper roll, **do you guys have toilet paper rolls in your houses?** Yes? Do you have it, STE? (SET/2020)
b. TA: K5, take a look at the page. **Here, we have the words on the bottom of the page.** So: snow, cloud, hail and raindrops, ok? So I'll say the words again: snow, cloud, hail and raindrops. (OUT/2020)
c. TB: Sunny is hot. Sunny is hot for you, right? I think it's a beautiful weather today. **Do you have a swimming pool in your house**, AYR? (SET/2020)
d. TB: And letter A lowercase, **we have two types of letter A.** (SET/2020)

(5)

a. Are there toilet paper rolls in your houses?
b. Here there are words on the bottom of the page.
c. Is there a swimming pool in your house?
d. There are two types of letter A.

(Verniano, 2022)

Drawing on the examples in (4) and the amount of production by both teachers, the author states that the high rate of *grammatical-have* and the low rate of *there to be* by teacher B may reflect BP speakers' challenges in producing existential sentences in English. This difficulty stems from the fact that this structure has a higher cost for the computational system (Chomsky, 1995) and it diverges from syntactic structure in BP and English, leading speakers to opt for equivalent structures in L1 and L2, as presented in (4). Furthermore, as pointed out by Verniano (2022), Teacher's A data corroborate this idea:

(6)

a. TA: Jet ski. Good. So **I have a word here, take a look, there's a word here: jellyfish.** Jellyfish is with J, LO said. (SET/2020)

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b. TA: Ok, so take a look B-O-Y, what is written here, K5? It's written BOY, yeah? Boy. **Here we have // there's only one boy**. (NOV/2020)

(Verniano, 2022, p. 83)

Examples in (6) illustrate that teacher A initially produces sentences with the *grammatical-have* and subsequently reformulates them using *there to be*. According to the author:

> These examples [...] indicate, once more, the ease with which BP speakers follow the SVO structure, instead of using sentences with *there to be*, which require a syntactic movement. Moreover, it is important to observe that the restructuring [of the sentences] occurs exclusively due to the teacher's prior linguistic planning, although it is clear that her computational system opts for less costly sentences. Verniano, 2022, p. 83)[22]

This aspect addressed by Verniano (2022) demonstrates teacher A only produced more sentences with *there to be* through deliberate self-regulation, otherwise, the number of occurrences would likely have been lower. This observation refers to the central idea of this article: teacher's knowledge about acquisition challenges can facilitate L2 teaching. Evidently, it is not possible to claim that teacher A possessed knowledge of the parametric variations between BP and English, that is, conscious metalinguistic knowledge of the NSP resetting. However, her speech monitoring prompted her to produce sentences that were more costly to BP speakers, thus leaving her habitual linguistic patterns. In addition, it is worth pointing out that both teachers exhibited unconscious knowledge of the parameters, as evidenced by their avoidance of **have-existential sentences*. However, implicit competence alone proved insufficient for delivering quality input in the classroom, evidencing the necessity for L2 teachers to be aware of the parametric variation.

Another aspect addressed by the author, which becomes relevant for the current analysis, is that all analyzed structures present semantic equivalence, as can be observed in (7). It is worth recalling that this is where the glosses, previously mentioned in footnote 22, begin to appear.

[22] Original text: "Esses exemplos [...] indicam, mais uma vez, a facilidade de falantes de PB de seguirem a estrutura SVO, ao invés de utilizarem sentenças com *there to be*, que necessitam de um movimento sintático. Ainda, é importante notar que a reestruturação [das sentenças] só acontece devido ao planejamento linguístico prévio da professora, mas fica evidente que o seu sistema computacional opta por sentenças menos custosas." (Verniano, 2022, p. 83)

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(7) TB: Look at that, AYR, now they are still scared, eles continuam com medo, because now **they have different things** to be scared of, **tem um monte de coisa nova** pra ficar com mais medo, **there's a tiger, a monkey, a different snake.** (SET/2020)

Literal transcription: *Look at that, AYR, now they are still scared, they keep with fear, because now they have different things to be scared of, have a lot of stuff new to be more scared, there's a tiger, a monkey, a different snake.*

English version: *Look at that, AYR, now they are still scared, they are still scared, because now they have different things to be scared of, there is a lot of new stuff to be scared of, there's a tiger, a monkey, a different snake.*

(Verniano, 2022, p. 85)

The example in (7) illustrates that the teacher from group B used *existential-ter*, *grammatical-have* and *there to be* in a single sentence. According to Verniano (2022, p. 86), "(t)his type of construction [...] is a reflection of the relationships existing in all the structures selected for this research, which share an existential meaning and allow different realizations[...]."[23] Additionally, the author argues that the semantic equivalence existing among these structures enables speakers to oscillate between sentences with *grammatical-have* and *there to be*, both of which are possible and grammatical in English. With respect to teachers' overall linguistic production, it is possible to affirm that both negatively reset the NSP, as neither produces ungrammatical sentences such as **Have an apple on the table*. Despite this the alternation between *grammatical-have* and *there to be* persists.

In contrast to the teachers' production, the students in group A produced, in every 1,000 words, 6.6 occurrences of **existential-ter*, 7.3 occurrences of *there to be*, as previously mentioned, and 0.9 occurrences of *grammatical-have*[24]. Students in group B, in turn, did not present any occurrences of any of these structures. In (8) I present some examples of **existential-ter,* while in (9) I present examples of *there to be* in group A's speech.

[23] Original text: "(e)sse tipo de construção [...] é um reflexo das relações existentes em todas as estruturas selecionadas para esta pesquisa, em que todas possuem o sentido existencial e podem ser utilizadas de diversas maneiras [...]." (Verniano, 2022, p. 86)

[24] The occurrences of *grammatical-have* in students' production will not be presented or discussed here. According to Verniano (2022), the number of occurrences of this type of structure is low because children in group A remain in the process of resetting the NSP. Hence, they resort to transferring L1 structure into L2 in most cases, thus producing more ungrammatical sentences with **existential-ter*.

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(8)

a. MAY: Teacher…

TA: So you will tell me what's there in the jungle. Yes, MAY.

MAY: **Have a lot of girls and one boy?**

English version: *Are there a lot of girls and one boy?*

TA: Yes! Today there's lots of girls and only one boy. (09-SET-2020)

b. TA: MAR, MAR, talk in English. You know how to say it in English. Hm… "when we…".

MAR: And when we **the entrada have a robot, have a lot of robot and people with costume.**

Literal transcription: *And when we the entrance have a robot, have a lot of robot and people with costume.*

English version: *And when we (were) at the entrance, there was a robot, there were a lot of robots and people wearing costumes.*

TA: Uhum. (03-NOV-2020)

(Verniano, 2022, p. 100)

(9)

a. TA: On this page, **what's there on the page? There is a whale, there's a mouse, there's a hippo, there's an elephant, there's a chick and there is a bird, ok? And here on the balance…**

LO: **And there is a dog.**

TA: What, LO?

LO: **And there is a dog**. (01-DEZ-2020)

b. CLA: LIV, **what's there in the sky?**

LIV: MAR, **what's there in the sky?**

LIV: **What is there on Halloween?**

(Verniano, 2022, p. 96-97)

Taking the examples in (8) and (9) into account, Verniano (2022) states that group A students continue in the process of resetting the NSP, as they oscillate between grammatical structures with *there to be*

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and ungrammatical **existential-have* ones. The author further observes that the linguistic production of most students in group A is, in general, consistent: there are times when students produce sentences in BP and mix BP and English, but they are able to produce complete sentences in English. In regard to group B, Verniano (2022) demonstrates that their linguistic productions are exclusively characterized by *existential-ter* reflecting the production in L1. Finally, the author highlights that, in general, these children displayed inconsistency: most of the sentences produced were in Portuguese, with sporadic isolated English words, suggesting these students are at a different stage of second language acquisition compared to group A. This disparity may be a reflection of the type of linguistic input they received, particularly the absence of PLD in such input (Marcelino, 2017). In (10) I present some examples of these students' linguistic production.

(10)

a. TB: Do you have a swimming pool in your house? Uma piscina? Do you have a swimming pool in your house?

English version: *Do you have a swimming pool in your house? A pool? Do you have a swimming pool in your house?*

AYR: **Tem swimming pool.**

Literal transcription: *Have swimming pool.*

English version: *There is a swimming pool.*

TB: Tem swimming pool? Tem? Yes or no?

Literal transcription: *Have swimming pool? Have? Yes or no?*

English version: *Is there a swimming pool? Is there? Yes or no?*

AYR: Quê? Que que é isso?

Literal transcription: *(What? What that is that?)*

English version: *What? What is that?*

TB: é piscina. (04-SET-2020)

Literal transcription: *Is pool.*

English version: *It's a pool.*

b. LIVM: Olha a capinha do meu tablet.

Literal transcription: *Look the case of my tablet.*

English version: *Look at my tablet's case.*

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TB: Ah, it's red, very good.

LIVM: **Tem um flamingo aqui.**

Literal transcription: *Have a flamingo here.*

English version: *There's a flamingo in here.*

TB: Yes, and it's red, very good. I have something red too, Livia. Livia, look what I have, look. It's a flower. (05-NOV-2020)

(Verniano, 2022, p. 105)

In broad terms, Verniano's (2022) data demonstrate the benefits of planned input in L2 teaching, as previously discussed by the author and by Marcelino and Verniano (2022). In addition to planned input, the findings reveal the difficulty of acquiring and producing existential sentences (*there to be*) by BP speakers as L1, which, as previously analyzed, stem from the computational cost of this type of structure and the requirement for parametric resetting [+PSN] → [-PSN].

Importantly, while the results do not indicate conscious metalinguistic knowledge of parametric variation between BP and English in group A's teacher, they reveal that her deliberate self-monitoring carried out by her in the classroom resulted in an increase in the production of *there to be*. This, hence, led students of group A to begin to reset this parameter, evidencing the necessity for conscious metalinguistic knowledge of L2 teachers in this domain.

Conclusion

This article presented the parametric differences between BP and English, with a focus on existential sentences. While BP is partially set for the NSP and presents existential sentences with *existential-ter* and with a null clitic in subject position (Nascimento; Kato, 1995), English is negatively set for the NSP, requiring the expletive *there* to fulfill the subject requirement via movement to IP specifier in order to satisfy the [-PSN] setting. Based on this explanation, as well as on the presentation of research involving parametric (re)setting (Ionin *et al.*, 2004; Montrul; Yoon, 2009; Ionin; Montrul,

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2010), this paper presented the data collected by Verniano (2022) as a means to demonstrate how parametric variation explicit knowledge - and the notion of which structures are easier and/or more difficult to be acquired - can help L2 teachers to perform better in classroom setting, thereby facilitating and boosting their students' SLA processes.

Verniano's (2022) data reveal that existential structures in English pose acquisition challenges for BP speakers due to parametric variation between languages and their higher cost for the computational system (Chomsky, 1995). These factors result in BP speakers fluent in English, such as teachers, to resort to less costly alternatives for the system, such as the use of *grammatical-have*. Moreover, L2 learners still in the process of resetting the NSP tend to transfer the structure from L1 to L2, producing ungrammatical sentences, which is the case of **existential-have* constructions. Thus, it is necessary for the L2 teacher to not only recognize the syntactic factors underlying L1 to L2 transfer in the classroom. but also to comprehend what makes, for example, existential sentences a difficult topic to be acquired and even produced by the teachers themselves.

In conclusion, this article has demonstrated how the Principles and Parameters Theory (Chomsky, 1981) can be applied in the classroom. Through empirical language production data, the research illustrates how parametric variation knowledge enhances the development of SLA. Hence, it is important that teachers delve deeper into the theory in order to understand the possible similarities and differences between L1 and L2, therefore modifying the input provided to students based on scientific evidence, and identifying the reasons for each “mistake” made in the classroom.

CRediT
Acknowledgement:
Financing: Not applicable.
Conflicts of interest: The authors certify that they have no commercial or associative interest that represents a conflict of interest in relation to the manuscript.
Ethical Approval: The research was submitted to and approved by the Ethics Committe: **Federal University of São Paulo**. Process. 38351420.1.0000.5505, Approval.: 4.412.981.
Contributor Roles: **VERNIANO, Marina.**

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Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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