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Differences in L1-effects between near related languages

The acquisition of the Spanish past tenses by German, English and Dutch L2 learners

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Contributors

- **González, P. & Quintana, L.** (in review). Inherent Aspect and L1 transfer in the acquisition of Spanish grammatical aspect as a second language. Sent to Modern Language Journal.
- **González, P. & Diaubalick, T.** (in process). Subtle differences but rigorous implications: German and Dutch representation of tense-aspect features. Evidence from SLA. Asked for submission in “German and Dutch in Contrast: synchronic, diachronic and psycholinguistic perspectives”, to be published by Mouton de Gruyter.
- **Ten Dijke, L. & González, P.** (in process). Choosing between preterit and imperfect: Interlanguage and acquisition of grammatical aspect in Spanish by Dutch students. To be presented at TAML2 Leiden 2018.

Utrecht, January 1999 until February 2003

- Aspects on Aspect : Theory and Applications of Grammatical Aspect in Spanish
- (L1 Dutch)
- Theory
- Language Use
- SLA
- Instruction



General thoughts

- Especially when the L2 has a more complex/richer tense-aspect system than the L1, acquisition may be challenging
- Regarding Spanish as L2, the most investigated learner group has English as L1
- Inherent aspect seems to play a role in the acquisition, but how, and why?
- Research about the L1 effect is still finding its way

Goal of this talk

- In this talk, I want to share insight about the **L1 effect** by comparing three closely related languages with little to no aspectual marking: Dutch, English and German
- The target language is Spanish. Spanish possesses a relatively complex aspect system

Inherent aspect

- Inherent property of the verb and universal to all languages. Many theoretical frameworks, among others:
- *Vendler (1957): states, activities, accomplishments and achievements*
- *Moens and Steedman (1988): dynamic, non dynamic*
- *Verkuyl (1993): terminative, durative*

3 past tenses in Spanish (L2)

- **Perfect:**
- Used in perfect contexts (in European Spanish)
 - *He comido hoy* (I have eaten today)
- **Preterit:**
- Used in perfective contexts
 - *Comí anoche* (I ate last night)
 - **Comí hoy* (I ate today) (however fully accepted in LA Spanish)
- **Imperfective:**
- Used in imperfective contexts (episodic, progressive and habitual readings)
 - *Desayunaba cada mañana* (I had breakfast every morning)

Germanic Systems (L1s)

- At first sight, Dutch, German and English tense systems seem rather similar (Borik, González & Verkuyl 2003, ten Cate 2004)

present	past
PRES Ik schrijf een brief Ich schreibe einen Brief I write a letter	PAST ik schreef een brief Ich schrieb einen Brief I wrote a letter
PRES(POST) Ik zal een brief schrijven Ich werde einen Brief schreiben I will write a letter	PAST(POST) Ik zou een brief schrijven ./. I would write a letter
PRES(PERF) Ik heb een brief geschreven Ich habe einen Brief geschrieben I have written a letter	PAST(PERF) ik had een brief geschreven Ich hatte einen Brief geschrieben I had written a letter
PRES(POST)(PERF) ik zal een brief geschreven hebben Ich werde einen Brief geschrieben haben. I will have written a letter	PAST(POST)(PERF) ik zou een brief geschreven hebben ./. I would have written a letter

Relevant
tenses
encircled

do

Germanic Systems

- In contrast to Romance languages, Germanic languages:
 - share inherent aspect values
 - contain fewer (none?) formal instances of grammatical aspect
- Some of the similarities turn out to be only superficial (similar forms) and do not include the use (different meaning)

Past tenses in English

Perfect: present perfect

- Used in perfect and perfective contexts
 - *I have had breakfast today*
 - *I have had some chocolate yesterday*

Perfective: simple past

- Used in perfective and imperfective contexts
 - *I had breakfast yesterday*
 - *I had breakfast every morning*

Imperfective:

- progressive, used to + infinitive, would + infinitive
 - *I was having breakfast when you came in*
 - *I used to have breakfast every day*

Past tenses in Dutch

Perfect: voltooid tegenwoordige tijd

- Used in perfect and perfective contexts
 - *Ik heb vandaag gegeten* (I have eaten today)
 - *Ik heb gisteren gegeten* (I have eaten yesterday)

Imperfect:

- Used in imperfective and perfective contexts
 - *Ik at elke ochtend* (I ate every morning)
 - *Ik at bij mijn moeder gisteren* (I ate at my mother's yesterday)
 - It has a standardized Progressive:
 - *Ik ben/was aan het lezen* ('I am/was reading')
- (The present tense functions as progressive too:
(compare: *Ik lees op dit moment* vs **I read at this moment*))

German

While in Dutch and English, the contrast between the Simple Past and the Present Perfect involves an aspectual distinction, the corresponding German forms are **entirely interchangeable in colloquial language** (Heinold 2015):

Du hast geschlafen, als ich nach Hause kam.

(You have slept, when I came home)

Du schliefst, als ich nach Hause gekommen bin.

(You slept, when I have come home)

Du hast geschlafen als ich nach Hause gekommen bin.

(You have slept, when I have come home)

Du schliefst, als ich nach Hause kam.

(You slept, when I came home)

‘You were sleeping, when I came home.’

German Progressive

- German lacks a standardized Progressive (like the Dutch *Ik ben aan het lezen*, or the English *I am reading*)
- A similar form in German is restricted to a few regional zones and is highly stigmatized (*Ich bin am Lesen*).

Germanic Systems in short

- All Germanic systems have a less rich aspect system in comparison to Romance languages
- Dutch and English contain a *basic aspectual notion* in its tense system
- Dutch has a wider use of the perfect
- English has a wider use of the progressive
- German does not have any grammatical aspect at all

SLA Research on aspect L2

- LAH
- Default Past Tense Hypothesis
- Dynamicity Effects
- Predication Effect Hypothesis

Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen 1986, 1991)

- The verb form is selected according to the lexical aspect (states, activities, accomplishments and achievements)
- Achievement verbs prefer perfective morphology, states will be combined only with imperfective tenses
- Non-prototypical contexts are acquired in later stages

Default Past Tense Hypothesis (Salaberry 1999)

- The Preterit is used as a Default Form for all past events
- Aspectual values are not considered at all in the beginning stages of acquisition

Dynamicity Effects (Domínguez et al 2013)

- dynamicity contrasts influence the choice of past morphology in early stages of acquisition ((events) dynamic predicates versus (states) non-dynamic predicates).
- beginner and intermediate learners of Spanish use first perfective with events
- ... and later imperfective with states

Predicational Aspect Hypothesis (González 2003, 2013)

- The whole verb phrase is needed to classify inherent aspect
- Verbs are classified into two categories: terminative and durative
- Learners associate the Preterit with terminative predications, and the Imperfect with durative ones

L1 transfer effects

- Izquierdo and Collins (2008), and McManus (2015) studied the effect of the L1 in the acquisition of past tense forms.
- when comparing the L1 of the learners there are significant differences in their interlanguages:
 - the choice of past tense forms is different
 - their accuracy in high levels of proficiency can be explained by comparing the L1 of the learners.

3 studies

- Comparing Dutch, English and German L1 learning Spanish L2
- 1: with Quintana: comparison Dutch and English
- 2: with Diaubalick: comparison Dutch and German
- 3: with Van Dijk: only Dutch, and comparison between tasks
- 3 separate studies and because of different methodology not yet comparable ☹ (but working on it!)

Methodologies

- All participants were low-intermediate level
- Study 1:
 - A written production task based on a mute short movie
 - 22 English, 31 Dutch, 16 control
- Studies 2 and 3:
 - Grammatical Judgment Tasks
 - Production Tasks: Completion Tasks and Free Production
- Study 2
 - 61 German (15 low intermediate), 11 Dutch, 20 control
- Study 3
 - 7 Dutch, 20 control

Conclusions 1st study (English/Dutch)

- Dutch L1 speakers use perfects in perfective contexts, which strongly suggests L1 transfer
- Dutch L1 speakers transfer L1 aspectual differentiations (terminative vs durative inherent aspect) to L2 grammatical aspect verbal forms.
- English speakers use preterit in both perfective and imperfective contexts, which implies L1 transfer, but they do not use the progressive in imperfective contexts (which was expected)
- English speakers transfer L1 aspectual differentiations by paying attention to [dynamicity] to use preterit forms and to [durative] to use imperfect forms

Conclusions 2nd study (German/Dutch)

- None of our tested groups performed on native-like level
- German learners adhered to temporal adverbials. In many cases, these caused a clear deviation from the target system.
- Dutch learners rely on the inherent aspect of the predication

Conclusions 3rd study (Dutch)

- Both in fill-in task and the free production task, there was a tendency towards the use of the imperfect rather than the preterit. This did not happen in the verb election task.
- L1 factor? (the single simple past in Dutch has a value closer to the imperfective aspect)
- This seems to indicate that it is the simple past of the first language Dutch functions as a type of default in Spanish.

TAML2 Leiden April 2018

- <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/events/2017/06/call-for-papers-taml2>