Meeting 'Time in Translation', Utrecht University, November 30, 2017

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


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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRES</strong></td>
<td><strong>PAST</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik schrijf een brief</td>
<td>ik schreef een brief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ich schreibe einen Brief</td>
<td>Ich schrieb einen Brief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I write a letter</td>
<td>I wrote a letter</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PRES(POST)</strong></td>
<td><strong>PAST(POST)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ik zal een brief schrijven</td>
<td>Ik zou een brief schrijven</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ich werde einen Brief schreiben</td>
<td>I would write a letter</td>
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<tr>
<td>I will write a letter</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PRES(PERF)</strong></td>
<td><strong>PAST(PERF)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ik heb een brief geschreven</td>
<td>ik had een brief geschreven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ich habe einen Brief geschrieben</td>
<td>Ich hatte einen Brief geschrieben</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have written a letter</td>
<td>I had written a letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRES(POST)(PERF)</strong></td>
<td><strong>PAST(POST)(PERF)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ik zal een brief geschreven hebben</td>
<td>ik zou een brief geschreven hebben</td>
</tr>
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<td>I would have written a letter</td>
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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*))
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