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Review: Salaberry, Past Tense Morphology in L2 Spanish

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What follows is another discussion note contributed to our Book Discussion Forum. We expect these discussions to be informal and interactive; and the author of the book discussed is cordially invited to join in. If you are interested in leading a book discussion, look for books announced on LINGUIST as "available for discussion." (This means that the publisher has sent us a review copy.) Then contact Simin Karimi at simin @ linguistlist.org or Terry Langendoen at terry @ linguistlist.org. <p> Subscribe to Blackwell's LL+ at <http://www.linguistlistplus.com/> and donate 20% of your subscription to LINGUIST! You get 30% off on Blackwells books, and free shipping and postage!

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Message 1: review of The Development of Past Tense Morphology in L2 Spanish

Date: Thu, 8 Nov 2001 16:03:02 +0000

From: Emmanuelle Labeau <E.Labeau @ aston.ac.uk>

Subject: review of The Development of Past Tense Morphology in L2 Spanish

Salaberry, M. Rafael (2001) *The Development of Past Tense Morphology in L2 Spanish*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, viii+257pp, hardback ISBN 1-55619-954-6, \$76.00, Studies in Bilingualism 22

Salaberry's book relies on the fundamental assumption that the mastery of a language includes knowing "the semantic values of aspectual contrasts" (p.9) and the way how to mark them in verbal morphological endings.

On this basis, the study tackles three major issues: (1) the sequence of acquisition of Spanish past tense morphology by Anglophone academic learners ; (2) the factors responsible for the distribution of morphological endings at any stage of the learning process and (3) the role of instruction in the developmental pattern. According to the author, the study can be justified on the following grounds: (i) the scarcity of aspectual development in general and in Spanish in particular, (ii) the cross-sectional and longitudinal dimensions allowed by the data, (iii) the fact that aspect development is studied through the medium of a variety of tasks and (iv) the inclusion of less common tasks such as oral narratives and the recourse to joint problem-solving think-aloud exercises where pairs of students discuss their answers to a cloze test and acceptability judgements.

The book initially provides the background to the actual analysis. After an introduction where the general purposes are spelled out, the second chapter presents the problems faced by English native speakers when learning Spanish, before describing the notion of aspect within the context of temporality marking. Chapters 3 and 4 respectively are devoted to literature reviews of tense and aspect in L1 and L2 acquisition. Salaberry's original contribution is presented in the last three chapters: chapter 5 describes the design of the research, chapter 6 offers the results of the study whilst in chapter 7, those results are compared to other related research projects. Appendixes include the material used for data collection as well as a very small sample which could be expounded upon of the production on which the study is based.

Let's try now to evaluate Salaberry's contribution. First, the study is consistently backed by previous research. The second chapter, devoted to aspect, offers while offering a good overview of the topic, focuses almost exclusively on lexical aspect and relies heavily on the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Some interesting insights from Francophone research on aspect (as provided by Guillaume and his followers, for example) could have been introduced here.

Although the development of aspect in first language acquisition is covered only briefly (14 pages), the longest chapter (a fourth of the book) tackles it in second language acquisition. An impressive literature review is provided as well as a selection of previous empirical studies dealing with Romance languages (Spanish, French and also Portuguese).

The design of the research design is clearly presented and justified in chapter 5. There is an obvious care to integrate the research within the existing field - for instance in the choice of the film extracts used as a basis for the narrative- whilst at the same time using new developments such as the joint editing tasks.

Chapter 6 provides a thorough analysis of data from a variety of viewpoints and is generally clearly and systematically presented. As the concluding chapter replaces the results within the context of earlier studies, it somewhat blurs the actual input of the present study.

In conclusion, this book is interesting for various reasons. It offers some good theoretical information on aspect acquisition in general; it also offers a clear and well-designed analysis based on a good knowledge of earlier studies. The development of past tense morphology in L2 Spanish is thus not strictly addressed to researchers working on Spanish but also to those focussing on other languages, especially French. It finally also provides a good example of the interaction between linguistic description and applied linguistics: a trend that is beneficial to both fields.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Emmanuelle Labeau is a lecturer in the School of Languages and European Studies of Aston University (Birmingham, Great Britain). Her research interests include French past tenses, evolution of French and French in Belgium.

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