

Review of **The L2 Acquisition of Tense-Aspect Morphology**

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This volume is a collection of papers presented at a colloquium on "Description and explanation in L2 acquisition of tense-aspect morphology: complementary perspectives" at the 21st Annual Meeting of American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL), with several additional contributions. The papers in this volume deal with the issues related to second language (L2) acquisition of tense and aspect (T&A) morphology, and cover a wide variety of languages, including English, Spanish, Italian, French, Chinese and Japanese. The papers also represent a variety of theoretical approaches ranging from generative grammar to functional-typological linguistics. In addition, the volume provides a review of first language (L1) acquisition research on T&A. Although the main focus of the volume is on the theoretical conclusions that can be drawn from the research, methodological issues involved in such research are attended to as well. Overall, this book is a great contribution to the field and will be of interest to both theoretical linguists interested in tense and aspect and applied linguists who study L2 acquisition.

In the remainder of this review, I will briefly summarize each paper and give critical comments where appropriate. The general evaluation follows at the end of the review.

The volume opens with an introductory chapter "L2 acquisition of tense-aspect morphology" written by the editors, Rafael Salaberry and Yasuhiro Shirai. In this chapter, they provide a comprehensive overview of the issues addressed in the rest of the volume, as well as the controversies involved. It must be noted that the authors do a good job in clarifying the terminological confusion that exists in the field of aspectology, providing definitions of key concepts and addressing the reasons that led to this confusion. They also alert the reader to some potential methodological sources of discrepancy among the findings in the other chapters of the

volume.

The rest of the volume may be divided into two parts: five introductory chapters which address general issues and review previous research in the field, followed by 10 empirical studies that present results of the authors' recent research.

Chapter 2 by Richard Weist provides a review of the findings in the field of L1 acquisition of T&A. This review is particularly relevant since much of the research in L2 acquisition of T&A came after and was largely based on the research in the L1 acquisition field. Just like the volume itself, the review of L1 acquisition covers studies in a variety of theoretical frameworks ranging from functional-cognitive to generative approaches. In addition, Weist compares the main findings in L1 and L2 acquisition, and points out the differences (e.g., L2 learners acquiring tense before aspect) and similarities (both acquisition patterns being congruent with the Aspect Hypothesis). In this way, this review chapter sets out the goals for the rest of the chapters in the volume.

Chapter 3 "The dimensions of pastness" by Roger Andersen provides an overview of his earlier work and updates it with Expanded Aspect Hypothesis. He discusses six factors that determine the acquisition of T&A: (1) verb semantics (i.e., Vendlerian verb classes), (2) event type (i.e., unitary vs. habitual or iterative events), (3) realis/irrealis, (4) pragmatic role, (5) grounding, and (6) discourse structure. As can be seen from this list, Andersen highlights the role of pragmatic factors (at least three factors in the list involve pragmatics). Thus, it is not surprising that Andersen advocates a discourse-functional perspective on L2 acquisition. What remains to be seen is how to implement Andersen's call for "a more rigorous research methodology that allows us to tease apart these six dimensions in our predictions" (p. 102).

Chapter 4 "Temporal relations in learner varieties: Grammaticalization and discourse construction" by Colette Noyau starts out with the observation that in the early stages of L2 acquisition learners can and do mark temporality with means other than inflectional morphology (e.g., adverbials, narrative sequences, etc.). This observation leads her to ask the question of what motivates learners to go beyond this (arguably) communicatively successful strategy of marking temporality. Noyau's claim is that learners go through a stage of systematic uncertainty at which three types of hypotheses 'lexical, semantic and discourse' are competing with each other. In other words, specific verbal endings can be associated alternatively with specific verb types, specific temporal concepts or specific discursive structures. Noyau builds on Bates and MacWhinney's (1989) competition model to show how these conflicts are resolved with illustrative examples from L2 acquisition of French.

Chapter 5 "Analyzing aspect" by Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig alerts the reader to important methodological issues involving the Aspect Hypothesis, one of the central hypotheses in the literature on the acquisition of T&A. She outlines two main approaches to calculating form-meaning correlations, the so-called across-category method (which asks the question of which morphological form is correlated with which semantic types of the verbs) and the so-called within-category method (which asks which semantic types of verbs are marked by which morphological form). She reanalyzes data from two previous studies (including one of her own) from both perspectives and shows that, surprisingly, the two approaches need not lead to the same conclusions.

The second part of the volume begins with Alex Housen's contribution "The development of tense–aspect in English as a second language and the variable influence of inherent aspect". This chapter provides a comprehensive report on a large–scale study of L2 acquisition of English by two L1 groups of learners (French and Dutch). The point of departure for this study is the Aspect Hypothesis, which Housen claims to be only partially supported by his study. Furthermore, he discusses other factors that are at play in the L2 acquisition of T&A, including L1 interference, properties of the specific markers in the input language (frequency, saliency, transparency, etc.), morphological regularity and processing mechanisms. He highlights the importance of the distinction between regular and irregular morphology, which has played an important role in the study of L1 acquisition of T&A, as well as in the study of aphasic patients.

Chapter 7 "The aspect hypothesis in naturalistic L2 acquisition: What uninflected and non–target–like verb forms in early interlanguage tell us" by Andreas Rohde provides yet another counterexample to the Aspect Hypothesis. Much like Housen, Rohde studies child L2 acquisition of English (his subjects are German–speakers); his results do not necessarily support the predictions of the Aspect Hypothesis. Consequently, Rohde proposes to replace the absolute Aspect Hypothesis (which can be either supported or rejected) with "aspectual effect" (which admits varying degrees of strength). Finally, Rohde proposes to refocus the attention of the research from looking for evidence supporting the Aspect Hypothesis to investigating conditions under which the "aspectual effect" can be suspended.

Picking up threads from chapters 6 and 7, Sonia Rocca's contribution "Lexical aspect in child second language acquisition of temporal morphology: A bidirectional study" investigates child L2 acquisition in light of the Aspect Hypothesis. Unlike the other contributions in the volume, this chapter involves a bidirectional study of English–speaking children acquiring Italian and Italian–speaking children acquiring English. Her results seem to support the Aspect Hypothesis, by indicating that inherent lexical aspectual classes constrain the acquisition of verb morphology. It would be interesting to see whether a different methodological approach (as discussed in Bardovi–Harlig's contribution) would bring Rocca's results more in line with Housen's and Rohde's conclusions that the Aspect Hypothesis is not supported by child L2 acquisition patterns.

Chapter 8 "How do learners acquire the classical three categories of temporality?" by Anna Giacalone–Ramat adds to our understanding of L2 acquisition of Italian by investigating adult learners' interlanguage. Two L1 groups of L2 learners are considered: German speakers and English speakers; interesting differences emerge between these two groups. English speakers appear to overextend the use of the Imperfect to perfective situations, whereas German speakers identify both Imperfect and Passato Prossimo as markers of the past tense only. This leads the author to a discussion of L1 interference effects. An analysis in terms of prototype theory is developed within the functional approach to acquisition. The results of Giacalone–Ramat's study largely support the Aspect Hypothesis.

Chapter 10 "Information structure in dialogic future plans: A study of Italian native speakers and Swedish preadvanced and advanced learners of Italian" by Eva Wiberg continues with the theme of L2 acquisition of Italian; however, her subjects are L1 speakers of Swedish. She investigates their "procedural knowledge" (knowledge stored in working memory and useful for "on–line" speech production) and compares it to that of native speakers of Italian. Her results show that even fairly advanced L2 learners exhibit

shortcomings in procedural knowledge in the context of quick tense changes linked to future reference. Furthermore, Wiberg claims that this deficit in procedural knowledge limits the L2 learners to the use of prototypical telic verbs at the expense of other verb types. This raises the following important methodological issue: to what extent research on the correlation between verb types and acquisition of T&A morphology is biased by the limitations in the data due to the learners' strategies in coping with their grammatical shortcomings. This issue has been addressed by Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig in her recent presentation at the Workshop on Syntax, Semantics and Acquisition of Aspect (University of Iowa, May 2002). However, it will be nice to see more research on this issue in the future.

Chapter 11 "Reference to past events in dialogue: The acquisition of tense and aspect by advanced learners of French" by Maria Kihlstedt investigates data from Swedish L1 speakers as well; however, she focus is on L2 French learners. Unlike much of the research in this area, Kihlstedt's study concentrates on learners in the advanced end of the learning continuum. One of her goals is to establish criteria that can distinguish between "more advanced" and "less advanced" learners all of whom use past tense morphology "in a virtually systematic way" (p. 323). The main criteria that Kihlstedt identifies is the use of *Imparfait*: less advanced learners use it only with states, whereas more advanced learners extend it to dynamic verbs as well. This developmental feature is shown to correlate nicely with other features, including overuse of *Passe Compose*, use of non-target-like base forms, use of pluperfect and lexical variation of verbs. This research has interesting implications for language pedagogy as well as for linguistic theory.

Like the previous chapter, "On viewpoint aspect interpretation and its L2 acquisition: A UG perspective" by Roumyana Slabakova and Silvina Montrul focuses on advanced learners. Their subjects are English speakers learning Spanish. The authors adopt the UG perspective on acquisition and, unlike much of the research in the field, investigate comprehension of aspect rather than its production. The experiment centered around the learners' intuitions about sentences that validate the semantic entailments associated with either *Preterite* or *Imperfect*. The main conclusion is that English speakers are capable of acquiring the semantic contrast of Spanish viewpoint aspect, which is not instantiated in their native language. Interestingly, the results do not provide a strong support for one the main tenets of the Aspect Hypothesis, namely that the semantic aspectual contrast for past tense is represented earlier among telic events than among statives. This particular result may be an artifact of the methodology and the subject pool involved in this study.

The theme of L2 acquisition of Spanish is continued in chapter 13, "Tense and aspect in the selection of Spanish past tense verbal morphology" by Rafael Salaberry. His main conclusions is that the effect of lexical aspectual semantics on the choice of past tense markers in L2 Spanish is not as strong with intermediate learners as with advanced learners. This relates nicely with Rohde's proposal that the Aspect Hypothesis should be replaced with "aspectual effect", which can be more or less perceptible depending on various factors. If Salaberry's findings are correct, one such factor will be the level of proficiency in L2.

The final two chapters analyze data from the acquisition of non-Indo-European languages. Chapter 14, "The acquisition and use of perfective aspect in Mandarin" by Patricia Duff and Duanduan Li, focuses on the perfective marker "-le" in Mandarin Chinese. Interestingly, the results depend on the methodology chosen: in oral narratives L2 learners tend to

undersupply the perfective marker, whereas in a written editing task they both under- and oversupply the marker. Duff and Li identify several factors which are involved in the acquisition of aspect in L2 Mandarin, including inherent aspect, instructional variables and L1 transfer.

Chapter 15 "The prototype hypothesis of tense-aspect acquisition in second language" by Yasuhiro Shirai focuses on L2 acquisition of Japanese. The starting point for this paper, as for many other papers in this volume, is the Aspect Hypothesis, which predicts a correlation between inherent aspect and the choice of tense-aspect markers in learners' interlanguage. According to Shirai, the Aspect Hypothesis is only one part of a larger picture, whereby various prototypical form-meaning associations play a role in determining the pattern of acquisition. Inherent aspect is only one such prototype association; another one considered in detail in this paper is habituality, which interacts with inherent aspect in terms of past tense marking and durative aspect marking. The spreading activation model of speech production is applied to account for the data.

Overall, this volume is a great contribution to the field of L2 acquisition of tense and aspect. The articles in this book cover a diverse range of topics from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Yet, the authors adhere to a common theme, and certain issues (e.g., the nature of the Aspect Hypothesis) come up in several of the papers. One topic that could have been addressed in more detail in a volume like this is the role of explicit instruction in the acquisition of tense and aspect. Although several contributions report on studies involving instructed learners (chapters 12-15), none of the papers address the question of instructional input directly.

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