Review: Applied Linguistics; Language Acquisition: Comajoan & Salaberry (2013)

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SUMMARY

In addition to having been a longtime focus of study by theoretical and historical linguists (e.g., Bybee et al., 1994), tense and aspect, representing one of the hardest language elements to master by second language (L2) learners, have also received quite a bit of attention from second language acquisition (SLA) researchers (see, for instance, Bardovi-Harlig, 2000).

However, the issue of interaction between research design and methodology and the acquisition of tense and aspect has not been sufficiently addressed in previous literature. Accordingly, the purpose of the volume is to explore methodological characteristics of studies that aim to contribute to our understanding of how learners of different languages acquire these concepts. The volume includes a wide range of perspectives, both quantitative and qualitative. It would be of interest to researchers and graduate students interested in theoretical and experimental issues related to L2 tense and aspect.

Following a short introductory chapter by the editors, the volume is divided into two parts.

Part One ('Theoretical representations of tense and aspect in L2 studies', Chapters 1-4) presents different theoretical approaches to the study of tense and aspect. Part Two ('Research design and methodology in L2 studies of tense and aspect', Chapters 5-12) covers a wide range of methodologies and constraints associated with empirical studies on L2 tense and aspect. The volume also includes a section with author biographies and a subject index at the end.

Chapter 1, 'A Cognitive Grammar perspective on tense and aspect', is written by Susanne Niemeier. Opening the theoretical sequence of the book, this chapter presents a cognitive linguistic analysis of tense and aspect. The author begins with a brief introduction to the field of cognitive linguistics and cognitive grammar, in general, and then demonstrates how the English tense and aspect systems can be explained using Langacker's (1987) Cognitive Grammar, as well as Mental Space Theory (Fauconnier, 1994). Cognitive linguistics provides a set of tools and concepts that allow explaining seemingly idiosyncratic aspects of language in an explicit and straightforward manner, which may be of particular use for language learners. Accordingly,

throughout the chapter, Niemeier emphasizes language teaching applications of cognitive linguistic approaches to tense and aspect.

In Chapter 2 ('The Spanish preterite and imperfect from a cognitive point of view'), Aintzane Doiz presents a cognitive linguistic explanation for aspectual meanings of the Spanish preterite and imperfect tenses. Similar to the author of the first chapter, Doiz bases her analysis upon Langacker's cognitive linguistic representation of tenses (1987), as well as upon his characterization of virtual and non-virtual events (Langacker, 2009). The author further applies these cognitive linguistic tenets to the Spanish preterite and imperfect tenses, providing two sets of key distinctions between them: the actual occurrence/property reading and virtuality/nonvirtuality.

Chapter 3 ('Frequency-based grammar and the acquisition of tense and aspect in L2 learning') is written by Nick Ellis; he aims to investigate the role of frequency-based approaches to grammar in language cognition and SLA. In the first half of the article, Ellis examines basic characteristics of frequency in relation to concept learning and SLA, and further analyzes factors contributing to construction learning (namely, input frequency, form (salience and perception), prototypicality, and contingency of form-meaning mapping). In the second half of the article, Ellis reviews prior research addressing the Aspect Hypothesis and then provides a more detailed example of a tense-aspect acquisition study by Wulff et al. (2009), as well as research by various authors with Spanish L2 data. In sum, Ellis argues for a usage-based model of language that allows for integrating dynamic, multivariate and interactive factors into a cohesive representation of language acquisition processes.

The last chapter of the first part (Chapter 4 — 'Generative approaches to the L2 acquisition of temporal-aspectual mood systems') is written by Dalila Ayoun and Jason Rothman. Unlike the previous three chapters that stem from usage-based approaches to language analysis, this chapter represents an overview of L2 tense, aspect, and modality acquisition from a generative perspective. The authors provide a detailed overview of empirical studies in generative SLA, primarily focusing on syntax and other grammar elements across world languages (namely, L2 English, L2 Spanish, L2 French, L2 Portuguese, and heritage/American Russian). The authors argue that learners in instructed SLA settings show gradual improvement and are able to ultimately acquire tense, aspect and modality systems in their respective L2s; consequently, adults should not be considered deficient, as far as their acquisition of tense and aspect is concerned.

The second part of the volume, per the suggestion provided by the editors in their introduction to the volume, can be further divided into three parts (excluding the final chapter). Chapters 5 and 6 address theoretical issues standing behind research design in tense-aspect studies. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 concern methodological analysis (namely, designing tasks and defining and coding data) of tense-aspect data. Chapters 10 and 11 address qualitative and quantitative approaches to data analysis. Finally, Chapter 12 represents an overview of tense and aspect analyses across different theories and methodologies.

In Chapter 5, 'Research design: A two-way predicational system is better than a four-way approach', Paz González analyzes aspect in Spanish and argues, that "a two-way predicational system is more appropriate for the learning of Spanish as a second language (L2) than a four-way approach" (p. 159). To support her stance, the author provides a theoretical description of the Spanish aspectual system, in particular, distinguishing between predicational and grammatical aspect. González further presents a discussion of native

speaker intuitions and an overview of the two types of forms in learner interlanguage. After reviewing the tenets of the Aspect Hypothesis and the Default Past Tense Hypothesis, the author presents an alternative approach — the Predication-effect Hypothesis — and explains how it is supported by existing data.

In Chapter 6, 'Research design: operationalizing and testing hypotheses', M. Rafael Salaberry discusses how theoretical assumptions, operationalizations, and methodologies utilized in studies on investigating tense and aspect may affect the outcomes of those studies. The author specifically focuses on a single aspect of tense/aspect — iterativity — in Portuguese and Spanish. After providing a general background for the concept and presenting an overview of findings on the L2 acquisition of iterativity, Salaberry discusses three ways to operationalize the iterative-habitual contrast (namely, basic versus derived-level interpretations, accidental versus non-accidental generalizations, and the actual versus structural plane) and explains how these distinctions led to different hypotheses and differing methodological features of study designs (e.g., through the discourse of language prompts). The author ultimately recommends that providing discourse context and extensive details regarding theoretical assumptions should become a more standard part of reporting in new L2 acquisition studies.

Chapter 7, 'Research design: From text to task', written by Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, examines the use of open-ended tasks in L2 research. Unlike controlled production tasks, open-ended tasks do not aim to limit learners' production in any way; rather, they target the type of language that learners would most likely produce in a natural setting/conversation. Bardovi-Harlig first discusses the role of communicative tasks in SLA literature overall and then analyzes each task type in greater detail. More specifically, the author focuses on conversational narrative (both written and oral, elicited and personal) and nonnarrative (description, argument and irrealis) texts, providing an overview of the existing base of knowledge, as well as recommendations on using these task types in future research. She concludes that "the data which extended discourse provides can be used to test a wide range of hypotheses and to understand form-to-meaning and meaning-to-form associations in developing L2 tense-aspect systems" (p. 260).

Chapter 8, 'Defining and coding data: Lexical aspect in L2 studies', written by Yasuhiro Shirai, addresses the issue of lexical aspect across languages. More specifically, lexical aspect subtypes can be classified following a number of principles. The classic categorization by Vendler (1957) includes four types (namely, states, activities, accomplishments, and achievements) and has been used by many researchers working with data from different languages (e.g., English, French, Japanese, Spanish, Korean, and Catalan). However, the analyses highlighting universal features do not address situations of cross-linguistic variation, nor do they address the L1-L2 differences in given languages. After going over a number of issues related to those drawbacks, Shirai presents a description of an aspect classification system first introduced in Shirai and Andersen (1995). The author claims that the proposed procedure should be able to improve the methodological basis for new studies, and prevent difficulties with aspect classification.

In Chapter 9 ('Defining and coding data: Narrative discourse grounding in L2 studies'), Llorenç Comajoan provides an overview of research methodologies used to study discourse grounding. He starts with a detailed discussion of the Discourse Hypothesis and existing definitions of narrative discourse. After that, Comajoan focuses on an analysis of definitions for foreground and background, organizing his discussion in a chronological manner, starting with

what he refers to as 'early' definitions before moving on to 'critical' definitions. In the final part of the chapter, Comajoan focuses on discourse grounding in L2 studies, distinguishing between form-oriented and meaning-oriented approaches, and then analyzes the issues related to data coding in studies investigating the discourse hypothesis, in particular, morphology-syntax interface, coding difficulties related to text types, and ways to interpret learner's meaning.

Chapter 10 ('Data analysis: Quantitative approaches'), written by Robert Bayley, focuses on problems that arise when applying quantitative analyses to L2 data capturing the acquisition of tense and aspect. Bayley starts by going over the steps necessary to prepare data for statistical operations, such as coding and categorizing verb types. The next part of the article aims to "consider appropriate analysis for different kinds of data used to examine the acquisition of tense and aspect" (p. 359), in particular, focusing on multivariate analysis (e.g., using VARBRUL to analyze the acquisition of the Chinese perfective particle '–le'). The last two parts of the chapter focus on testing alternative hypotheses when analyzing L2 tense/aspect data and on using implicational scaling as a method that provides advantages for capturing individual speaker patterns. This chapter essentially characterizes how different variables can interact with each other in creating patterns in data.

In Chapter 11, 'Data analysis: The qualitative analysis of actionality in learner language', Anna Giacalone-Ramat and Stefano Rastelli focus on qualitative aspects of analyzing learner data. Qualitative analysis does not entail using statistical procedures to prove or refute hypotheses associated with research questions; instead, findings emerge and are fine-tuned in the process of data examination. The authors argue for the value of using qualitative analyses that make it possible to disentangle learners' authentic views from the pre-imposed views of researchers. Giacalone-Ramat and Rastelli further provide a qualitative analysis of representations of actionality (verb semantics) in L2 Italian learner data. In the main part of the paper, the authors apply principles of qualitative analysis to that data from beginner/low intermediate Chinese learners of Italian. The qualitative analysis highlights the role of cross-linguistic evidence of actional underspecification. The authors conclude that actionality is learned and demonstrate that qualitative analyses can "tap more directly onto learners' semantic representations" (p. 418).

Finally, the concluding chapter of the volume (Chapter 12 – 'Integrating the analyses of tense and aspect across research and methodological frameworks'), written by M. Rafael Salaberry, Llorenç Comajoan and Paz González, provides an overview of perspectives presented within the volume. The authors highlight the three key themes covered by the volume, namely: relevant theoretical constructs, research methodologies, and results of findings from those different theoretical frameworks and methodologies. The part on theoretical frameworks addresses theoretical framing of dependent and independent variables in L2 tense-aspect studies. In the part on methodology trends, the authors highlight seven factors that need to be taken into account when designing a tense-aspect study (specifically: types of data and data collection procedures, selection and use of operational tests, language-specific characteristics of tense-aspectual contrasts, the effect of learning environment, types of input, subject-related factors, and the definition of ultimate attainment in L2 tense-aspect acquisition) (p. 432). They particularly stress the importance of multivariate analyses and easily replicable approaches to data coding and interpretation. Next, they evaluate the usefulness of integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. Last but not least, the authors highlight a few pedagogical considerations for the

issue of explicit instruction of tense and aspect.

EVALUATION

This volume presents a considerable range of perspectives on research design methodology for tense and aspect. As mentioned earlier, the first four chapters highlight theoretical approaches, while the rest of the chapters (excluding Chapter 12) address issues related to testing these theories within the constraints of specific designs and methodologies. The combination of findings from the volume covers a very wide spectrum, providing insights into researching tense and aspect in a whole range of language combinations, and offering perspectives into different parts of the research process. This book would be particularly helpful for graduate students who are interested in studying the acquisition of tense and aspect, but who are not yet certain about the methodology they should select or the consequences of their possible choices. This book gives a general introduction to a wide range of methods and approaches, and as such, serves as an excellent resource for beginning scholars.

However, because the range of languages and design methodologies is so wide, each topic cannot be covered in sufficient depth. The chapters also represent somewhat different writing styles and levels of detail, which affects cohesion of the entire volume to a certain extent.

As mentioned in the previous section of this review, the majority of the chapters represent theoretical and generative approaches to SLA, with only three chapters (1, 2, and 3) conveying usage-based perspectives. Since usage-based approaches to language analysis are becoming increasingly more mainstream, perhaps the next edition of the volume could aim to represent them to a greater extent.

The other drawback of the volume is the relative paucity of reported findings that might be directly relevant to pedagogical issues regarding tense and aspect. As Salaberry, Comajoan and González propose in their concluding chapter: "the explicit instruction of tense and aspect marking is central to most second language courses, and as such they clearly play an important role in grammatically focused pedagogical materials" (p. 440). Furthermore, tense and aspect also represent a foundational element for the acquisition of other grammatical categories, such as modals and conditionals. Keeping this consideration in mind, it is surprising that the volume included only two chapters (1 and 2) that explicitly highlighted pedagogical implications.

In the grand scheme of things, however, the drawbacks are relatively minor in comparison to the significant value of the book. Overall, the range of topics and perspectives included into this volume provides a highly relevant and much needed contribution to the field of SLA and will be of help to anyone studying the L2 acquisition process of tense and aspect across languages.

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