

## Second Language versus Heritage Language Acquisition – The Case of Spanish Aspect

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In this talk we will compare the results of our acquisition studies within the generativist framework (Chomsky 2015) on the morphology and semantics of Spanish past tenses in different bilingual settings involving each the language combination of Spanish and German.

Recently, the investigation of a possible persistent inaccessibility of certain forms sharpened the question of whether different feature configurations cause difficulties in L2 acquisition, as stated by the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (FRH) (Hwang & Lardiere 2013). According to this approach, learners pass successively from their L1 to the L2 configuration. Conversely, the Interpretability Hypothesis (IH) claims an inaccessibility of uninterpretable features in the L2 system (see Prentza & Tsimpli 2013), while interpretable features can be fully acquired.

Aspect represents an adequate testing ground for the IH and FRH, since languages differ in how this phenomenon is overtly marked via morphology and syntax. While German has no grammatical aspect at all (Heinold 2015), Spanish past tenses require the marking of the Imperfect (*comía* ‘I was eating’/‘I would eat’) or the Preterit (*comí* ‘I ate’). According to Zagona (2007) and Leonetti (2004), this contrast encodes the aspectual feature [ $\pm$ perfective]. In Spanish, aspectual levels, i.e., lexical, grammatical aspect and adverbials, are independent. Telic and atelic verbs can be combined with both perfective and imperfective forms (see 1-4). Adverbials can specify contexts, but do not directly relate to grammatical features (see 5-6).

Studies on L2 acquisition with different language combinations have recently brought interesting insights into the processes of acquiring and maintaining the various aspectual systems (see Comajoan 2013, Domínguez et al. 2013, Salaberry & Comajoan 2013). Thus, our research questions are: (a) Which aspectual features are crucial when Germans acquire the Spanish verb system? Do some impose more difficulties in the feature reassembly process than others? (b) To which extent do the various aspectual levels interfere with each other, and can an inaccessibility of certain UG areas be sustained that contain uninterpretable features?

To investigate these questions, we conducted two empirical studies comparing instructed learners of Spanish in Germany (n=80) with L1 German learners of Spanish L2 in Spain (n=60). Three groups with different proficiency levels (i.e., ranging from low-intermediate to advanced learners) were studied. With a Grammatical Judgment Task (48 items) we examined contexts in which distinct aspectual levels were congruent (examples 1, 2, 5) and contradicting (examples 3, 4, 6). A further Completion Task (30 items) tested the participants’ linguistic production. For control reasons, the same tasks were given to a monolingual group of native Spanish speakers (n=15). An analysis of interviews with 13 Spanish heritage speakers, between 13 and 35 years of age, reveals possible cross-linguistic interferences. Here, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the same questions for all speakers who had to speak for approximately 40 minutes in Spanish and a further 20 minutes in German.

A statistical analysis revealed that in the case of the L2 learners, telicity and perfectivity were taken to be identical, resulting in significant results when contrasting them with the native speakers in the Grammatical Judgment data (ANOVA  $F(6, 144)=2,377$ ,  $p=0.032$ ). A Chi-Square-Test confirmed significance in the production, e.g., comparing the non-natives and the monolingual control group in sentences with temporal adverbs ( $\chi^2(3,246)=15.682$ ;  $p=0.001$ ).

The heritage speakers (Spanish L1), conversely, separated telicity and perfectivity like monolingual controls. Non-prototypical pairings of atelic verbs with perfective morphology, as well as imperfective telic verb forms are attested throughout all interviews.

Since aspect is encoded in semantically interpretable features, the IH does not predict the difficulties our learners are facing. Only the FRH as proposed by Lardiere (2009) explains why Germans face difficulties in bundling the context features with the corresponding morphological forms when acquiring Spanish in an L2 context. The dissociation of the aspectual levels sharply distinguishes the L2 from the 2L1-learners.

## Examples:

- (1) **El tren llegó a Madrid.**  
The train arrived at Madrid. (telic verb, Preterit)
- (2) **Hacía calor en el avión.**  
It was warm in the airplane. (atelic verb, Imperfect)
- (3) **Leían el capítulo 17.**  
They were reading chapter 17. (telic verb, Imperfect).
- (4) **Fue una gran experiencia.**  
It was a great experience. (atelic verb, Preterit)
- (5) **Siempre cantaba sonatas.**  
She always used to sing sonatas. (adverb of duration, Imperfect)
- (6) **En esta región, siempre se habló el catalán.**  
In this region, Catalan was always spoken. (adverb of duration, Preterit).

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