U N I V E R S I T Y   O F   B E R G E N

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L2 acquisition of temporality: Universal or specific?
Findings from a corpus based study of the grammatical encoding of past time in L2 Norwegian

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Two principally opposite theoretical perspectives

1. a *language-specific* perspective of second language acquisition that assumes that the learners' L1 can affect the acquisition of temporal morphology, and that learners display L1-specific patterns in the acquisition of tense and aspect forms in the L2

2. a *universalistic* perspective of second language acquisition that assumes that the learners' L1 can only minimally affect the acquisition of temporal morphology, and that learners display universal tendencies and patterns in the acquisition of tense and aspect forms in the L2 (as described in the Aspect Hypothesis)

The universalistic perspective: the Aspect Hypothesis

- The most extensively studied assumption in research on L2 acquisition of temporal morphology.

- Learners make associations between grammatical tense and aspect markers and lexical-aspectual categories, e.g. past morphology emerges in telic verb phrases before atelic verb phrases.

- Lexical-aspectual influence put forward as a universal of acquisition.

- "Empirical work on the Aspect Hypothesis has shown an impressive if not total consistency in studies of learners of many different language backgrounds" (Odlin 2005: 12).

L2 acquisition of temporality: the role of learner's L1.

- The role of learner's L1 traditionally downplayed.

- "No *significant L1 effect* has been identified in research on L2 acquisition of temporal expressions" Bardovi-Harlig (2000: 411).

- "What is much more striking, is the **lack of SL influence** where one would expect it [...] We must conclude, therefore, that there is no significant SL influence in the acquisition of temporality" (Dietrich,Klein, and Noyau 1995: 278).

- "[…] in the details rather than in the larger picture that first language influence is found" (Bardovi-Harlig 2000: 411).

- The lack of support for morphological transfer is partly connected to how the transfer phenomenon is approached and understood (Jarvis and Pavlenko 2008, Jarvis and Odlin 2000).

The language-specific perspective: conceptual transfer

- Not a unified paradigm - consists of studies from different research milieus that rest upon somewhat different theoretical frameworks, research designs and objectives.

- Jarvis (2011: 1) describes this research as one *that deals with cross-linguistic differences and cross-linguistic influences in the mental construction and verbal expression of meaning*.

Contrastive analysis: the perfect questionnaire (Dahl 2000)

Nr. 1
[A: I want to give your sister a book to read, but I don't know which one. Are there any of these books that she READ already?] B: **Yes, she READ this book**.

Norwegian:	Ja	hun	**ha-r**	**les-t**	denne	boken
	yes	she	**has-PRS AUX**	**read- PST PTCP**	this	book

Vietnamese:	Vâng	có	chị	ấy	**đã**	đọc	quyển	sách	này
	yes	exist	sister	that	**TM**	read	CLF	book	this

Somali:	Haa,	iyadu	way	**akhrid-ay**	buugan
	yes	she	DM	**read-PST SIMPLE**	book

Research question 1: L1 influence

Do the Vietnamese and the Somali learners display a pattern in their use/non-use of the present perfect and preterite in Norwegian that points to within-group similarities, between group differences and cross-language congruity?

1.1 The Vietnamese-speaking learners will use the present perfect correctly more frequently than the Somali-speaking learners will.

1.2 The Somali-speaking learners will have a higher degree of incorrect use of the preterite in contexts where Norwegian requires the present perfect, and a higher degree of incorrect use of the present perfect in preterite contexts, than will Vietnamese-speaking learners.

Research question 2: lexical aspect

Do the learners' use of the preterite and present perfect in Norwegian agree with the earlier findings that support the Aspect Hypothesis?

2.1 The Vietnamese-speaking and Somali-speaking learners will have higher verb type proportion in telic verb phrases (achievements and accomplishments) with preterite and present perfect inflection than in atelic verb phrases (states and activities) with preterite and present perfect inflection.

2.2 The Vietnamese-speaking and Somali-speaking learners will have higher verb type proportion in telic verb phrases (achievements and accomplishments) with correct preterite and present perfect inflection than in atelic verb phrases (states and activities) with correct preterite and present perfect inflection.

Research question 3: interaction of influences

Do the learners' L1s affect the sequence of development of past morphology as described in the Aspect Hypothesis?

3.1 The Somali-speaking learners will have a higher degree of incorrect use with telic verb phrases, in contexts that require the present perfect or the preterite in Norwegian, than will Vietnamese-speaking learners.

Data

- Written texts produced in response to an official test of Norwegian as a second language.

- Norsk språktest (Folkeuniversitetet/University of Bergen).

- Askeladden project (Faculty of Humanities, University of Bergen).

Proficiency level	Vietnamese	Somali	N
A2	54	67	121
B1	45	30	75
Total N	99	97	196

Analysis procedures

- Encompasses five different types of analysis:

  1. analysis of temporal context
  2. analysis of grammatical encoding
  3. analysis of correctness (which includes error types)
  4. analysis of lexical aspect
  5. and analysis of prototypicality of the present perfect.

Stepwise statistical approach (Gujord 2013:180-184)

- **Analysis of L1 differences**

  Step 1 Mann-Whitney U

  Step 2 Chi-square post hoc testing

  Step 3 Mann-Whitney U post hoc testing

- **Analysis of differences in lexical-aspectual differences**

  – When testing differences in telicity (2 groups):

  Step 1 Wilcoxon signed rank test

  – When testing differences between the Vendlerian classes (4 groups):

  Step 1 Friedman test

  Step 2 Wilcoxon signed rank post hoc testing with Bonferroni adjustment

- **Both effect sizes and p-values considered**

Results for the analysis of *L1 influence*

- Transfer effects are detected and emergent in distinct patterns of use/non-use at rather specific areas in the grammatical encoding of time.

- The transfer effects take primarily form as tense errors:
  - Vietnamese-speaking learners of Norwegian have more problems encoding the present-past distinction in Norwegian than Somali-speaking learners do.
  - Somali-speaking learners have more problems encoding the preterite-present perfect distinction in Norwegian than Vietnamese-speaking learners do.
  - The prototypical perfect is more difficult for the Somali-speaking learners than the Vietnamese-speaking learners.

Results for the analysis of *lexical-aspectual influence*

- Lexical-aspectual influence is not detected in the analysis. The current study does not indicate that telicity is a factor which comes into play when the learners at this stage in the acquisitional process write texts in Norwegian.

- The analysis of lexical-aspectual properties of verb phrases shows first and foremost that the verb *være* ('be') is frequently used by all learners regardless of L1 background and proficiency level.

Results for the analysis of *interaction of influences*

- The analyses of L1 influence and lexical-aspectual influence do indicate that there is some interaction of influences.

- However, it is not clear from the analyses that learners' L1s affect the sequence of development of past morphology as described in the Aspect Hypothesis.

Key findings

1. *The lack of support for the Aspect hypothesis:* lexical-aspectual influence is not always/necessarily *the factor* in the acquisition of temporal morphology.

2. *L1 influence:* learners' L1 can influence the acquisition of an L2 in the domains of temporality and morphology.

3. The importance of *L1-L2 differences*
   – "Similarity is basic, difference is secondary (Ringbom 2007:5)
   – "there can be transfer which is not licensed by similarity to the L2, and where the way L2 works may very largely go unheeded" (Kellerman 1995: 137).

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