Second language acquisition of telicity in L2 English by Slovak and Spanish speakers

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The paper presents an experimental study dealing with telicity judgments in L2 English with a particular emphasis on: (1) the role of syntactic cues (the [±quantized] feature of the object argument) and pragmatic cues (adverbial modifiers in aspectual coercion) in telicity interpretations (Slabakova & Montrul, 2008); (2) differences in L2ers' offline judgments vs. online processing of the same feature (Roberts & Liszka, 2013; Stockall et al., 2010); (3) the role of individual differences in telicity interpretations.

The data collected from Slovak L2ers of English (n = 50) and a control group of American English NSs (n = 15) in two AJTs were analyzed through linear mixed effects models with AJT ratings (6-point Likert scale) as a dependent variable and deviation-coded (-0.5, 0.5) fixed effects match (match, mismatch), group (NS, L2er), and match-group interaction. In AJT2, predicate type (activity, accomplishment, achievement) was added as an additional fixed effect. In both AJTs, proficiency (cloze test score), exposure (length of stay in English-speaking countries), and instruction type (EFL, bilingual) were included in the analysis.

The results indicate that predicate telicity is acquired at lower proficiency levels than aspectual coercion. Furthermore, the former improves with L2 proficiency, while the latter is positively affected by length of stay regardless of proficiency score.

To examine the role of L1-L2 differences in telicity encoding, we will also present preliminary analyses including data from the second experimental group of Spanish learners of L2 English (n = 50), and a pilot self-paced reading study conducted with speakers of both L1s.

References

Roberts, L. & Liszka, S. (2013). Processing tense/aspect agreement violations online in the second language: A self-paced reading study with French and German L2 learners of English. *Second Language Research, 29* (4), 413-439.

Slabakova, R., & Montrul, S. (2008). Aspectual shifts: Grammatical and pragmatic knowledge in L2 acquisition. In J. Liceras, H. Zobl, & H. Goodluck (Eds.), *The role of formal features in second language acquisition* (pp. 456–483). Routledge.

Stockall, L., Husband, M. E., & Beretta, A. (2010). The online composition of events. In *Occasional Papers Advancing Linguistics, 19*, 1–32. London: Queen Mary College.

Supplementary information: Sentence structures tested in AJTs and SPRTs.

AJT 1: telicity judgments based on syntactic cues (object argument):

(1)   John **ate a cake**, and he finished it. (telic_match)

(2)   *John **ate a cake**, and he is still eating it. (telic_mismatch)

(3)   John **ate cakes**, and now he eats ice cream. (atelic_match)

(4)   *John **ate cakes**, and he is still eating them. (atelic_mismatch)

AJT 2: telicity judgments based on pragmatic cues (adverbial modifiers):

(5)   John **wrote letters for half an hour** yesterday. (activity_match)

(6) * John **wrote letters in half an hour** yesterday. (activity_mismatch)

(7)   John **wrote the letter in half an hour** yesterday. (accomplishment_match)

(8) # John **wrote the letter for half an hour** yesterday. (accomplishment_mismatch, coercion)

(9) # The girl **spotted the plane for five minutes** yesterday. (achievement_mismatch, coercion)

(10)   The girl **spotted the plane in five minutes** yesterday. (achievement_match)