

Cross-linguistic Influence in the Second Language Acquisition of Aspect: a Compositional approach

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Aspect is a semantic phenomenon, which, according to Comrie (1976:1-3), describes 'the different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation'. Aspectual notions, separate from tense, are captured under the label of ASPECTUALITY (Verkuyl, 1972, Verkuyl, 1993). In order to understand the notions which make up the semantics of aspectuality it is necessary to distinguish between two types of aspectual information, namely INNER ASPECT and OUTER ASPECT (Verkuyl 1989, 1993) or SITUATION ASPECT and VIEWPOINT ASPECT (Smith, 1997). Inner aspect refers to the internal temporal properties of events and deals with properties of duration, culmination and delimitation. Outer aspect refers to the perspective from which an event is given, for example ongoing or complete. Research on aspectuality and the interaction between inner aspect and outer aspect takes two forms: on the one hand, inner aspect and outer aspect are independent notions (e.g. Verkuyl, 1993, 1972, Smith, 1997, de Swart, 1998). And on the other hand, there is no such boundary (e.g. Kamp and Rohrer, 1983, Hinrichs, 1986). The perspective that I take in this paper is that inner aspect and outer aspect are independent yet related phenomena. Furthermore, they are the semantic constituents of aspectuality. I argue that aspectuality is a compositional semantic phenomenon with inner aspect and outer aspect as its constituent properties.

Pertinent questions on the universality and cross-linguistic variations of aspectuality with reference to acquisition are treated in this PhD project. Previous research (e.g. Housen, 2000, Slabakova, 2002, Comajoan, 2005) has noted that despite the presence of aspect in a learner's first language (L1), its expression in second language (L2) acquisition is problematic. This paper puts forward an account of compositional aspectuality to account for differences in cross-linguistic variation: the semantics of aspect are arguably universal, yet its formal expressions are diverse: for example, derivational morphology (e.g. Russian), inflectional morphology (e.g. French) or syntax (e.g. German).

Research questions:

Are learners influenced by aspectuality's formal expressions in their L1?

Do learners re-map the semantics of aspectuality when form in the L2 differs?

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