

A comparative study of the acquisition of Spanish aspectual past tenses by Mandarin Chinese learners using guided and semi-guided written productions

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the acquisition of the lexical and grammatical aspect in L2/L3 Spanish by Mandarin Chinese learners, based on the written data collected from a cloze test and three semi-guided stories used as stimuli. We analyze the contexts in which the preterit indefinite and preterit imperfect appear in the above mentioned tasks, taking into account Vendler's aspectual classes (1967). Our aim is to identify the differences in the acquisition process attributable to pragmatic and discursive constraints. The cloze test is the tool that allows us to gather evidence on the passive competence concerning grammatical aspect choice, whereas the semi-guided writing allows us to gather information on active competence concerning discourse production. The study aims to verify whether the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (LAH, Andersen and Shirai 1996) holds in the case of B1 and B2 learners. In addition, we intend to verify Montrul and Slabakava's (2002) claim that coercion cannot be acquired by L2 learners.

We carried out two types of tests for data collection. First, a cloze test with 15 blank spaces in which three aspectual classes were tested in context (Sun, Díaz and Taulé, 2017). Second, three scripts containing 43 verbal items in infinitive, which were designed to guide student's writing of the 3 stories. The subjects of the experiments were two groups of Spanish B1 and B2 Chinese learners (according to CEFR 2000) and a native control group. Participants were 33 students (11 from B1, 11 from B2 and 11 natives) who took the cloze test, whereas 18 subjects (6 from B1, 6 from B2 and 6 natives) did the writing tasks. The Chinese learners were Jinling College students and the natives in the control group were students from Pompeu Fabra University.

The results show that the B1 group does not show preference for prototypical aspectual tenses as stated by LAH. In fact, in the writing task, the B1 group preferred the perfective aspect for atelic verbs (states and activities) and showed no clear tendency in the case of telic verbs (accomplishments and achievements). Concerning the cloze test, the B1 group showed a preference for the perfective aspect when activities were involved and a preference for the imperfective aspect when accomplishments were involved. These results partially confirm LAH for the two pragmatic-discursive conditions studied. Our data also confirm Montrul and Slabakova's (2002) claim that coercion cannot be acquired at B1 or at B2 levels.

Key words: aspectual past tenses, aspectual classes, coercion, Spanish L2/L3 acquisition.

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