Second Language Acquisition and Processing of VP Aspect by L1 Slovak Learners of L2 English

The poster presents the design and preliminary results of a thesis project dealing with the acquisition and processing of VP aspect in the past temporal domain by L1 Slovak learners of L2 English with three different L2 proficiency levels (intermediate, advanced and proficient). The research project was motivated both theoretically (by differences in selection and assembly of features in the syntax of aspect in Slovak and in English) and empirically (by differences in offline and online experimental results aimed at L2A of the temporal and aspectual domain (Roberts & Liszka 2013; Stockall et al. 2010; Renaud 2011)).

While in Slovak, telicity is conveyed by means of perfectivizing preverbs (Slabakova 2000), in English, cardinality of the DP object is crucial for aspectual interpretation: a [+cardinal] DP yields a [+telic] AspP as in (2),(4) while a [-telic] reading is generated in the context of a bare/mass noun as in (1),(3). This interaction between interpretable ([±telicity], [±cardinality]) and uninterpretable ([±accusative case], [±partitive case]) features was shown to cause difficulties in computing telicity in activities and accomplishments by L2ers whose L1 is a Slavic language where cardinality of Od is not relevant to the computation of telicity (Slabakova & Montrul 2002; Slabakova 2000).

The role of VP composition in aspectual interpretation by L2ers and a control group of native speakers has been examined by using a combination of an offline acceptability judgment task and an online self-paced reading task in order to trace differences in (i) the acquisition and processing of telicity conveyed by VP composition (1-4), (ii) differences in the processing costs associated with coercion related to adverbial modification with durative/neutral adverbials (5-8), (iii) semantic interpretation of telicity in a sentence conjunction task (9-10).

The poster presents the key differences in the syntax of aspect in English vs. in Slovak, research questions and hypotheses address the project, sets of experimental stimuli and some preliminary results from the offline AJs for tasks 1 and 3 pointing towards differences between NSs and L2ers in terms of their aspectual interpretations. Offline AJs in task 1 indicate an increase in acceptability ratings of sentences with aspectually matched predicates and adverbials in activities and accomplishments with increasing proficiency level in L2ers. On the other hand, the online SPRT revealed higher processing costs for atelic predicates for the group of native speakers and proficient L2ers vs. no difference in processing costs of telic/atelic predicates by intermediate and advanced L2ers.

A more detailed evaluation of the remaining tasks of the project might reveal further differences in judging telic vs. atelic sentences by NSs and L2ers stemming from their language-specific syntactic properties of telicity.

**Sentence structures tested in AJT and SPRT**

**TASK 1: VP composition**

(1) John drank beer # in ten minutes.
(2) John drank the beer in ten minutes.
(3) John built planes # in eight hours.
(4) John built the plane in eight hours.  

(example sentence structured based on Stockall et al. 2010)

**TASK 2: Adverbial modification:**

(5) For months, John wrote a letter for his daughter.  
(durative modifier+terminative event]. (coercion)
(6) Last month, John wrote a letter for his daughter.  
(modifier with neutral aspect+terminative event]
(7) For months, John wrote letters for his daughter.  
(durative modifier+unbounded event]
(8) Last month, John wrote letters for his daughter.  
(modifier with neutral aspect+unbounded event]  
(example sentence structured based on Stockall et al. 2010)

**TASK 3: Semantic interpretation in (mis)matched sentences.**

(9) John wrote a letter and he finished it.  
(example sentences based on Smith 1997)
(10) John wrote a letter but he did not finish it.
Abbreviations and symbols
# - an unavailable reading (i.e. a VP modified by ‘in X time’ cannot accept a terminative reading)
* - ungrammaticality
AJs – acceptability judgments
PROF – proficient L2 learners
INT – intermediate L2 learners
L2A - second language acquisition
L2ers – second language learners
NSs – native speakers
Od – direct object
RTs – reading times
SPRT – self-paced reading task

References