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# Germanic L1 Transfer in Aspectual Representations: The Spanish Interlanguage



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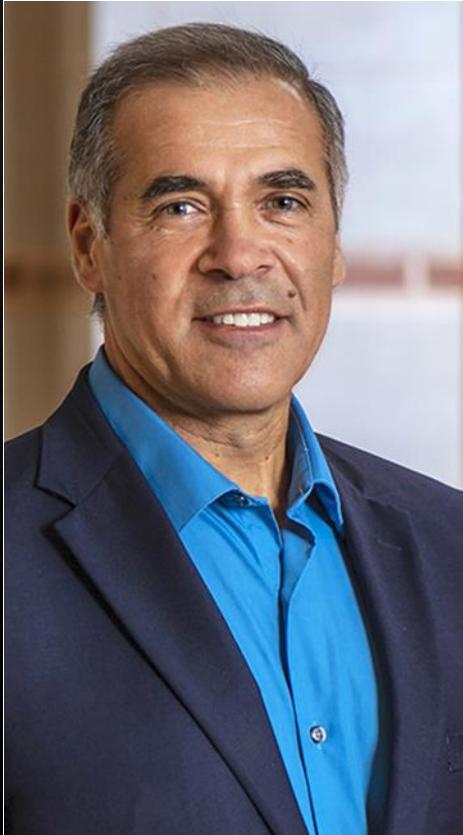
**GeRoSLA**

L2 acquisition of non-equivalent linguistic and cognitive categories in Romance and Germanic languages:  
Transfer revisited



# Roadmap

- Motivation and goal
- TA(M) → Tense and Aspect in Spanish
- SLA research on TA(M)
  - Theoretical/Empirical based hypotheses
  - L1 factor
- Germanic TA(M) systems (English, Dutch and German)
- 3 empirical studies
- Discussion/Conclusion/Food for thought



- *Rafael Salaberry*
- *Lucía Quintana Hernández*
- *Tim Diaubalick*

## **Contributors**





# General thoughts

- Especially when the L2 has a more complex/richer tense-aspect system than the L1, acquisition may be challenging
- Regarding Spanish as L2, the most investigated learner group has English as L1
- Inherent aspect seems to play a role in the acquisition, but how, and why?
- Research about the L1 effect is still finding its way



# Motivation

- Slabakova 2002 (review article *Recent research on the acquisition of aspect: An embarrassment of riches?*) future research ideas:
  - Effect of a learner's native language (L1 factor)
  - More goal-oriented hypothesis testing research

20 years later....Both suggestions for future research have been broadly studied. Still...

→ So much variation in aspectual interlanguage representations



# Main objective of this talk

- In this talk, I want to share insight about the **L1 effect** by comparing three closely related languages with little to no aspectual marking:
  - Dutch
  - English
  - German
- The target language is Spanish.

CONJUGACION DEL VERBO PARTIR

Formas simples		Formas compuestas	
Modo Infinitivo		Modo Infinitivo	
Infinitivo: Partir	Gerundio: Partiendo	Infinitivo: Haber partido	Gerundio: Habiendo partido
Modo Indicativo		Modo Indicativo	
Presente		Pretérito perfecto	
Yo part o	Tú part es	Yo he part ido	Tú has part ido
El part e	Nosotros part imos	El ha part ido	Nosotros hemos part ido
Vosotros part is	Elos part en	Vosotros habéis part ido	Elos han part ido
Pretérito imperfecto		Pretérito pluscuamperfecto	
Yo part ía	Tú part ías	Yo habías part ido	Tú habías part ido
El part ía	Nosotros part íamos	El había part ido	Nosotros habíamos part ido
Vosotros part íais	Elos part ían	Vosotros habíais part ido	Elos habían part ido
Pretérito indefinido		Pretérito anterior	
Yo part í	Tú part íste	Yo hube part ido	Tú hubiste part ido
El part ío	Nosotros part ímos	El hubo part ido	Nosotros hubimos part ido
Vosotros part ísteis	Elos part íeron	Vosotros hubisteis part ido	Elos hubieron part ido
Futuro imperfecto		Futuro perfecto	
Yo part iré	Tú part irás	Yo habré part ido	Tú habrás part ido
El part irá	Nosotros part iremos	El habrá part ido	Nosotros habremos part ido
Vosotros part iréis	Elos part irán	Vosotros habréis part ido	Elos habrán part ido
Modo Potencial		Modo Potencial	
Simple o imperfecto		Compuesto o perfecto	
Yo part iría	Tú part irías	Yo habría part ido	Tú habría part ido
El part iría	Nosotros part iríamos	El habría part ido	Nosotros habríamos part ido
Vosotros part iríais	Elos part irían	Vosotros habríais part ido	Elos habrían part ido



## But before doing that...

- Grammatical Aspect and Past tense in Spanish
- Inherent aspect
- What do we know so far in SLA and theoretical and empirically based hypotheses and L1 transfer
- How do the three L1s represent past tense (and aspect?)





# Grammatical aspect (Spanish)

The Spanish grammar requires marking of the grammatical aspect when the verbal form appears in past tense:

- Preterit: *Nuria llamó.*
  - Action presented in a closed past temporal domain
- Imperfect: *Laura llamaba.*
  - Focusses on the internal temporal structure, and the past temporal domain is not necessarily closed
  - 3 readings: episodical, progressive and habitual



# The Perfect

Perfect: *Rosa ha llamado.*

- Action takes place in the past in a temporal domain still valid
- Some prototypical PP contexts:
  - Resultative ‘they have finished cleaning’
  - Hodiernal ‘this morning I have woken up very soon’
  - Life experience ‘lately I have thought about moving out’
  - Prehodiernal ‘I have finished the powerpoint last Sunday’
  - ...
- According to the RAE, it is the verbal form with the most variation in Spanish





# 3 past tenses



CONJUGACION DEL VERBO PARTIR	
<b>Formas simples</b>	<b>Formas compuestas</b>
Infinitivo: Partir	Definitivo: Haber partido
Gerundio: Partiendo	Gerundio: Habiendo partido
Participio: Partido	
<b>Modo Indicativo</b>	<b>Modo Indicativo</b>
<b>Presente</b>	<b>Preterito perfecto</b>
Yo part o	Yo he partido
Tu part es	Tu has partido
El part e	El ha partido
Nosotros part imos	Nosotros hemos partido
Vosotros part is	Vosotros habéis partido
Ellos part en	Ellos han partido
<b>Preterito imperfecto</b>	<b>Preterito pluscuamperfecto</b>
Yo part ia	Yo había partido
Tu part ias	Tu habías partido
El part ía	El había partido
Nosotros part íamos	Nosotros habíamos partido
Vosotros part íais	Vosotros habíais partido
Ellos part ían	Ellos habían partido
<b>Preterito indefinido</b>	<b>Preterito anterior</b>
Yo part í	Yo hubie partido
Tu part íste	Tu hubiste partido
El part ío	El hubo partido
Nosotros part ímos	Nosotros hubimos partido
Vosotros part ísteis	Vosotros hubisteis partido
Ellos part íeron	Ellos hubieron partido
<b>Futuro imperfecto</b>	<b>Futuro perfecto</b>
Yo part iré	Yo habé partido
Tu part irás	Tu habrás partido
El part irá	El habrá partido
Nosotros part iremos	Nosotros habémos partido
Vosotros part ireis	Vosotros habréis partido
Ellos part irán	Ellos habrán partido
<b>Modo Potencial</b>	<b>Modo Potencial</b>
<b>Simple o imperfecto</b>	<b>Compuesto o perfecto</b>
Yo part iría	Yo habría partido
Tu part irías	Tu habrías partido
El part iría	El habría partido
Nosotros part iríamos	Nosotros habríamos partido
Vosotros part iríais	Vosotros habríais partido
Ellos part irían	Ellos habrían partido

## 1) Perfect:

- Used in perfect contexts (*in European Spanish*)  
He comprado pan hoy (*I have bought bread today*)

## 2) Preterit:

- Used in perfective contexts  
Compré pan anoche (*I bought bread last night*)  
\*Compré pan hoy (*I bought bread today*) → fully accepted in LA Spanish

## 3) Imperfective:

- Used in imperfective contexts (*episodic, progressive and habitual readings*)  
Compraba pan cada mañana (*I bought bread every morning*)



# Inherent aspect

- Inherent property of the verb (predication) and universal to all languages. Many theoretical frameworks, among others:
  - Vendler (1957): states, activities, accomplishments, achievements
  - Moens and Steedman (1988): dynamic, non dynamic
  - Krifka (1989): telic, atelic
  - Verkuyl (1993): terminative, durative



# SLA TA(M)L2 oriented

- Aspect in L2 has been studied extensively (Bardovi Harlig, Salaberry, Comajoan, Domínguez et al, Slabakova, Quintana Hernández, Diaubalick, to name only a few)
- For speakers of Germanic languages, it has been shown that acquiring the past in Spanish represents a challenge (Comajoan 2014)
- Among a number of **theoretical based hypotheses**, these studies have revealed several salient factors:
  - **L1** ←
  - The level of proficiency
  - The type of task



## 2 hypotheses & 1 factor

- Lexical Aspect Hypothesis
  - 2 refinements: Predicational Effect Hypothesis & Dynamicity Effects
- Default Past Tense Hypothesis
  - Reassessment
- L1 transfer effects



# Lexical Aspect Hypothesis

(Andersen 1986, 1991, Bardovi Harlig 2000)

- The verb form is selected according to the lexical aspect (states, activities, accomplishments and achievements)
  - Achievement verbs prefer perfective morphology,
  - states will be combined only with imperfective forms
- Non-prototypical contexts are acquired in later stages
- Refinements of the LAH:
  - González (2003, 2013): Predicational Aspect Hypothesis.
  - Domínguez, Tracy-Ventura, Arche, Mitchell & Miles (2013): Dynamicity effects.



# Predicational Aspect Hypothesis (González, 2003, 2013)

- The whole verb phrase is needed to classify inherent aspect (not only *comprar* but *comprar* and its argument)
- Verbs are classified into two categories: terminative (*comprar un libro*) and durative (*comprar libros*)
- Learners associate the Preterit with terminative predications, and the Imperfect with durative ones
  - *compré un libro/compraba libros*



# Dynamicity Effects

## (Domínguez et al, 2013)

- Dynamicity contrasts influence the choice of past morphology in early stages of acquisition
  - events = dynamic predicates
  - states = non-dynamic predicates
- Beginner and intermediate learners of Spanish use first perfective with events: *salió por la mañana*
- ... and later imperfective with states: *estaba cansado*

**Could the difference between the two refinements have to do with the L1?**





# Default Past Tense Hypothesis

## (Salaberry, 1999)

- Aspectual values are not considered at all in the beginning stages of acquisition
- The Preterit is used as a Default Form for all past events

**Could this preference have to do with the L1?**

- González and Salaberry (2022): DPTH revisited considering current research
  - the role of the L1
  - type of task
  - Level of proficiency

# Pieces of the puzzle (González & Salaberry 2022)





# L1 factor in TA empirical research

The *semantic differences* between L1 and L2 can influence the way in that grammatical contrasts are acquired

- Izquierdo and Collins (2008) L1 Spanish and English, L2 French
- McManus (2015) L1 English and German, L2 French
- González and Hernández Quintana (2018) L1 Dutch and English, L2 Spanish
- González and Diaubalick (2019) L1 Dutch and German, L2 Spanish



# L1 transfer effects

- Izquierdo and Collins (2008), and McManus (2015) studied the effect of the L1 in the acquisition of past tense forms.
- When comparing the L1 of the learners there are significant differences in their interlanguages:
  - The choice of past tense forms is different according to the learners' L1
  - Their accuracy in high levels of proficiency can be explained by comparing the L1 of the learners.



# The L1 effect

- McManus (2015) studied L1 English and L1 German learners of French to show that differences in the *semantic nature* between L1 and L2 can influence the way in that grammatical contrasts are acquired and processed.
- Results:
  - Only in progressive contexts, English learners outperformed the Germans.
  - In habitual contexts, conversely, both groups were strongly target-deviate



# Germanic Systems (L1s)

At first sight, Dutch, German and English tense systems seem rather similar (Borik, González & Verkuyl 2003, ten Cate 2004, already described in González and Diaubalick 2016)

present	past
<b>PRES</b> Ik schrijf een brief Ich schreibe einen Brief I write a letter	<b>PAST</b> ik schreef een brief Ich schrieb einen Brief I wrote a letter
<b>PRES(POST)</b> Ik zal een brief schrijven Ich werde einen Brief schreiben I will write a letter	<b>PAST(POST)</b> Ik zou een brief schrijven ./. I would write a letter
<b>PRES(PERF)</b> Ik heb een brief geschreven Ich habe einen Brief geschrieben I have written a letter	<b>PAST(PERF)</b> ik had een brief geschreven Ich hatte einen Brief geschrieben I had written a letter
<b>PRES(POST)(PERF)</b> ik zal een brief geschreven hebben Ich werde einen Brief geschrieben haben. I will have written a letter	<b>PAST(POST)(PERF)</b> ik zou een brief geschreven hebben ./. <i>I would have written a letter</i>

**Relevant tenses  
encircled**



# Germanic Systems

- In contrast to Romance languages, Germanic languages:
  - share inherent aspect values
  - contain fewer (none?) formal instances of grammatical aspect
- Some of the similarities turn out to be only superficial (similar forms) and do not include the use (different meaning)





# Past tenses in English

## 1) Perfect: present perfect

- Used in perfect and perfective contexts
  - *I have had breakfast today*
  - *I have had some chocolate*

## 2) Perfective: simple past

- Used in perfective and imperfective contexts
  - *I had breakfast yesterday*
  - *I had breakfast every morning*

## 3) Imperfective: simple past, progressive, used to+inf

- Used in imperfective contexts (progressive, episodic, habitual)
  - *I was having breakfast when you came in*
  - *I used to have breakfast every day*
  - *I went to the beach every summer*

# Past tenses in Dutch



## 1) Perfect: voltooid tegenwoordige tijd

- Used in perfect and perfective contexts *Ik heb vandaag gegeten* (I have eaten today)
  - *Ik heb gisteren gegeten* (I have eaten yesterday)

## 2) Imperfect: onvoltooid verleden tijd

- Used mostly in imperfective contexts
  - *Ik at churros elke ochtend* (I ate churros every morning)
  - *Ik at bij mijn moeder gisteren* (I ate at my mother's yesterday) ← also possible but odd (van Hout 2005)
- **Progressive: aan het +inf**
  - *Ik ben/was aan het lezen* ('I am/was reading')  
(The present tense functions as progressive too: (compare: *Ik lees op dit moment* vs *\*I read at this moment*))



# Past tenses in German

While in Dutch and English, the contrast between the Simple Past and the Present Perfect involves an aspectual distinction, the corresponding German forms are **entirely interchangeable in colloquial language** (Heinold 2015):

*Du hast geschlafen, als ich nach Hause kam.*

*(You have slept, when I came home)*

*Du schiefst, als ich nach Hause gekommen bin.*

*(You slept, when I have come home)*

*Du hast geschlafen als ich nach Hause gekommen bin.*

*(You have slept, when I have come home)*

*Du schiefst, als ich nach Hause kam.*

*(You slept, when I came home)*

**'You were sleeping, when I came home.'**

(German lacks a standardized Progressive (like *Ik ben aan het lezen*, or *I am reading*). A similar form in German is restricted to a few regional zones and is highly stigmatized (*Ich bin am Lesen*)).



# Germanic Systems in short



- All Germanic systems have a poorer aspect system in comparison to Romance languages
- Dutch and English contain a *basic aspectual notion* in its tense system
- Dutch has a wider use of the perfect
- English has a wider use of the progressive
- German does not have any grammatical aspect

# Three recent empirical studies



## Comparing Dutch, English and German L1 learning Spanish L2:

### 1) Dutch and English L1

González P. & Quintana Hernández L. (2018), Inherent aspect and L1 transfer in the L2 acquisition of Spanish grammatical aspect, *Modern Language Journal* 102(4): 611-625.

### 2) Dutch and German L1

González P. & Diaubalick T. (2020), Subtle differences, rigorous implications: German and Dutch representation of tense-aspect features in SLA research of Spanish. In: Vogelaer G., Koster D. & Leuschner T. (Eds.) *German and Dutch in Contrast: Synchronic, Diachronic and Psycholinguistic Perspectives. Konvergenz und Divergenz: Sprachvergleichende Studien zum Deutschen* no. 11 Berlin: De Gruyter . 299–328.

### 3) Dutch L1

González P. & Diaubalick T. (2019), Task and L1 effects: Dutch students acquiring the Spanish past tenses, *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics* 8(1): 24-40.



# Methodologies

All participants were low-intermediate level

- Study 1:
  - A written production task based on a mute short movie
  - 22 English, 31 Dutch, 16 control
- Studies 2 and 3:
  - Grammatical judgment tasks
  - Production tasks: Completion tasks and free production
- Study 2
  - 61 German (15 low intermediate), 11 Dutch, 20 control
- Study 3
  - 7 Dutch, 20 control



# Conclusions 1st study: (English/Dutch)

- Dutch learners
  - use perfects in perfective contexts, which strongly suggests L1 transfer
  - transfer L1 aspectual differentiations (terminative vs durative inherent aspect) to L2 grammatical aspect verbal forms
- English learners
  - use preterit in both perfective and imperfective contexts, which implies L1 transfer
  - they do not use the progressive in imperfective contexts (which was expected)
  - transfer L1 aspectual differentiations (dynamicity) to L2 grammatical aspect verbal forms



# Conclusions 2nd study: (German/Dutch)

- Both groups overuse the perfect forms
- German learners
  - adhered to temporal adverbials. In many cases, these caused a clear deviation from the target system
- Dutch learners
  - transfer L1 aspectual differentiations (terminative vs durative inherent aspect) to L2 grammatical aspect verbal forms



## Conclusions 3rd study: (Dutch)

- Both in fill-in task and the free production task, there was a tendency towards the use of the imperfect rather than the preterit. This did not happen in the verb election task.
- (remember: the single simple past in Dutch has a value closer to the imperfective aspect)
- This seems to indicate that it is the simple past of the first language Dutch functions as a type of default in Spanish L2.



# L1 properties influencing L2 representation

- The English language makes more use of progressive forms (L1 transfer)
- The Dutch and German languages make more use of perfect forms (L1 transfer)
- Dutch simple past is imperfective default (reassessing de DPTH)
- English simple past is perfective default
- German does not have clear grammatical clues



# Discussion and conclusions

- In general, speakers of Germanic language experience many difficulties in acquiring the Spanish Past tenses
  - None of our tested groups performed on native-like level
  - Trigger words such as temporal markers drove all learner groups into the same direction, regardless of whether they were performing well or not in the judgement tasks
- Such temporal markers are often taught as pedagogical rule, and may 'overwrite' subconscious knowledge (cf. Baker & Quesada 2011, Rothman 2008)
- Nonetheless, our findings strongly indicate that the L1 definitely matters
  - Three separate studies and because of different methodology not yet comparable ☹️ (but working on it!)



# Discussion and conclusions

- In addition to McManus's (2015) findings, we have shown that not only the *nature of aspectual contrasts* grammaticalized in the L1 matter, but also the fact if and how aspect is grammaticalized at all
- One important limitation of our data is the sample size, especially for the Dutch group. Future research has to pursue verifying our conclusions.
- Nonetheless, our findings strongly indicate that the L1 definitely matters; the reassessing of the DPTH is highly needed !!

(and working on it )



# Putting together the pieces of the puzzle

## DUTCH AND ENGLISH L1

1st stage: DPTH. Learners mark past tense and use the L1 information

Dutch: imperfecto

English: indefinido

2nd stage: refinements of the AH: when the learners decide to choose, they resort to their L1

Dutch: terminativity

English: dynamicity

## 1<sup>st</sup> TENSE, 2<sup>nd</sup> ASPECT

## And we know this thanks to the L1 effect





¡Muchas gracias!  
Dank jullie wel!  
Thank you!  
Danke schön!

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