

ABSTRACT

In existing second language (L2) tense-aspect acquisition research, the L2 tense-aspect morphology is constrained by the inherent lexical features of the predicate verb (lexical aspect), which is formulated as the Aspect Hypothesis. It is predicated by the Aspect Hypothesis that progressive marking is initially associated with activity verbs, gradually extended to accomplishment and achievement verbs, and not be incorrectly overextended to stative verbs. However such predictions are not fully supported by empirical findings and the existing controversies are seen to rise from the theoretical and methodological inadequacies of the Aspect Hypothesis.

The present study further promoted this line of research by adopting cognitive-functional linguistics as the theoretical framework in its investigation of the L2 acquisition of the English progressive aspect.

Empirical data collected through composition, cloze test, and acceptability judgment test from 75 EFL learners at three proficiency levels provided support to the theory derived hypothesis. This study found that the different levels' acquisition of the progressive morphology in L2 English was jointly constrained by Lexical aspect and meaning of the progressive marker. Progressive marking was

found to be most strongly associated with both the activity verbs and the in-progress meaning of the aspectual marker. It was extended to accomplishment verbs mainly when it was associated with the in-progress and preliminary stage meaning, the extension of progressive marking to achievement verbs to express the meaning of repetitiveness was very limited, and progressive marking was found to be overextended to stative verbs to evoke the temporariness meaning in a native-like fashion.

Due to its foundation in the cognitive-functional linguistic framework and improved methodology, the present research overcame the limitations of the Aspect Hypothesis and adds a new dimension to the account of the L2 acquisition of the English progressive aspect. Furthermore this study created a grammatical model on the language acquisition of the English progressive aspect for the native Chinese. A unified theoretical framework was seen to be effective measures to stimulate substantial progress in SLA theory and research.