The Acquisition of Progressive Morphology by Korean Learners of English: L1 Transfer and Learnability

Hye-ryeong Hahn
(Seowon University)


The present study addresses a learnability problem in the acquisition of English progressive aspect by Korean learners of English. As Korean and English differ in the way that the lexical aspect of verbs interacts with progressive morphology, we predicted that Korean learners of English would be affected by their L1 aspectual system, accepting non-targetlike combinations of lexical aspect and aspectual morphology. Sixty Korean university students were presented with sentences containing different aspectual classes of verbs in two conditions—the progressive and the simple present—and were asked to judge the naturalness of the sentences. The results showed that the majority of the learners erroneously accepted progressive sentences containing stative verbs. It also showed that the learners accepted simple present constructions containing eventive verbs for an ongoing interpretation, indicating the pervasiveness of L1 transfer. The findings strongly suggest that Korean EFL learners have difficulty ruling out erroneous form-meaning associations based on their L1 progressive morphology.

Key words: progressive aspect, simple present, lexical aspect, learnability, transfer

1. INTRODUCTION

Acquiring L2 morpho-syntactic features is one of the lasting problems in L2 acquisition. English verbal morphology such as third person singular and present perfect poses difficulties even for highly proficient learners (Birdsong & Molis, 2001; DeKeyser, 2000; Johnson & Newport, 1989; Lardiere, 1998). On the other hand, the marker of English progressive aspect has been known to be one of the early-acquired morphemes in L2 acquisition (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982) as well as in L1 acquisition (Bloom, Lifter, & Hafitz, 1980; Brown, 1973). Studies on L2 morpho-syntactic acquisition have shown that L2 learners’ English progressive morphology emerges early on
in learner language (Pienemann & Johnston, 1987; Pienemann, Johnston, & Brindley, 1988). Studies have also shown that learners tend to be more accurate in providing the English progressive morpheme in the obligatory context, compared with other morphemes such as the past morpheme -ed, third person singular -s, and possive 's (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 1981). L2 learners thus seem to find it relatively easy to learn how to construct the progressive pattern and when to use it. This rule of "when to use," however, accounts for only half of the truth: the other half concerns "when not to use."

In English, the use of the progressive and the simple present is mutually exclusive: whenever it is appropriate to use the progressive, it is inappropriate to use the simple present. English simple present morphology is exclusively devoted to a "habitual" interpretation when it is marked on eventitive verbs. Compare the progressive in (1) with the simple present in (2).

(1) He is running right now. (ongoing interpretation)
(2) He runs every morning. (habitual interpretation)

On the other hand, in Korean—and many other European languages (Ionin, 2008)—simple present verb forms can denote both ongoing and habitual events. For this reason, a learnability problem can arise for English L2 learners whose L1 simple present allows both ongoing and habitual interpretations.

Furthermore, the use of the English progressive is sensitive to the internal aspectual semantics of the predicate. To be specific, English disallows the progressive in combination with stative verbs such as have, own, and see.

(3) *John is having a car.

This distributional restriction is not shared by all languages. In languages such as Korean, the progressive morpheme -go iss-, which is a rough equivalent of English -ing, can be extended to stative verbs as well.¹

(4) Mina-neun cha-reul gaji-go iss-da.
    Mina-NOM a car-ACC have-PROGRESS-DEC
    "Mina has a car"

¹ While -go iss- might be better described as an imperfective marker, Korean school grammars use "progressive" as a cover term. We will use "progressive" to refer to the -go iss- marker in this paper.
Such cross-linguistic differences in form-meaning combination can be expected to cause further learning problems.

Despite the predictable difficulty of learning the correct use of these forms, not much attention has been given to the acquisition of English progressive aspect by Korean learners of English. In the present study, we will attempt to show that English progressive aspect poses serious learning problems even for upper intermediate Korean learners of English. In doing so, we will explore how cross-linguistic differences in form-meaning mapping affect the learners’ knowledge of the progressive aspect.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Lexical Aspect vs. Grammatical Aspect

Studies in L1 English children’s language acquisition have provided ample evidence that L1 children use progressive and perfect markers early on, even at the stage where tense markers are missing (Brown, 1973; Deen, 1997; Hyams, 2006). Progressive morphology, however, does not develop all at once. Instead, children’s development of progressive morphology in English is a gradual process. One of the major constraints that are known to guide children’s acquisition of progressive morphology is the lexical aspect of the verb (Shirai & Anderson, 1995; Vendler, 1967).

Lexical aspect refers to the temporal meaning internal to the verb/predicate that characterizes an event (Shirai, 1998; Shirai & Anderson, 1995; Vendler, 1967). According to Vendler (1967), verbs can be classified as state, activity, accomplishment and achievement, based on their inherent aspectual meaning. State verbs describe a situation that continues to exist unless some outside situation makes it change (e.g., like, have). Activity verbs describe a dynamic and durative situation that does not have an inherent endpoint (e.g., run, swim). Accomplishment verbs concern a situation that is dynamic and durative but has a natural endpoint (e.g., build a house, read the book). Finally, achievement verbs describe a situation that is punctual or can be reduced to a point in time (e.g., break, fall, find).

The four aspectual classes also can be defined by means of punctuality, telicity, and dynamicity, as shown in Table 1.
TABLE 1
Semantic Features of Aspectual Classes (Vendler, 1967)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Punctual</th>
<th>Telic</th>
<th>Dynamic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A line is often drawn between states and the other three categories, the former labeled "statives" and the latter "eventitives." This two-way distinction can be useful to learners of English because eventitives tend to behave alike in terms of their distribution.

Grammatical aspect, on the other hand, refers to a particular viewpoint of the described situation, and is overtly encoded in English in the form of verbal morphology, as in the perfect (e.g., *The tree has fallen*) and the progressive (e.g., *The man is reading*). While lexical aspect and grammatical aspect represent separate aspectual systems, linguists have found a strong association between the two: verbs that belong to a certain lexical aspectual class tend to occur with a certain grammatical aspectual marker (Comrie, 1976; Dowty, 1979; Vendler, 1967). Activity and accomplishment verbs, for example, occur naturally in the progressive (e.g., *John is running/ John is building a house*), whereas achievements occur less frequently in the progressive (e.g., *The ice is breaking/ *John is finding his wallet*). States are disallowed in the progressive form in many languages including English (e.g., *John is knowing French*), because the progressive in these languages entails process (Dowty, 1979), which is not a part of the semantics of state.3

This association between morphological form and lexical meaning has been found to be manifested in a distributional bias in native English speakers’ speech directed to children (e.g., motherese) and to L2 learners (e.g., foreigner talk), as well as in discourse between adult native speakers (Anderson & Shirai, 1996; Brown, 1973; Shirai & Anderson, 1995).

2.2. The Aspect Hypothesis

Child and L2 language acquisition studies have long documented evidence that the development of grammatical aspect by children is constrained by the lexical aspect of the verb. Researchers have claimed that young children initially tend to restrict tense-aspect morphology to specific categories of lexical aspect (Bloom, Lifter, & Haftiz, 1980; Brown, 1973; Li & Shirai, 2000). Brown (1973) found that English children initially attached the

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2 School grammars often use the term “dynamic” instead of “eventitive.”
3 Some commercials take advantage of this restriction to create catch phrases like “I’m loving it,” which are intentional violations of the English norm.
progressive marker *-ing* to activity verbs. Similarly, researchers found that English children’s early progressive marker is attached exclusively to action verbs and that their early past tense marker is restricted to accomplishment and achievement verbs (Anderson, 1989; Anderson & Shirai, 1996; Bloom, Lifter, & Hafitz, 1980).

Notably, L1 children were found not to overgenerate tense-aspect morphology in the wrong context. Brown (1973) found that states such as *love* and *know* never occurred with the progressive marker. Similarly, L1 children were found to resist using the *-ed* morpheme with atelic verbs such as *hug, paint,* or *walk.* The correlation between the early use of tense/aspect morphology and lexical aspects of verbs has been attested in numerous studies on children acquiring different L1s—Italian (Antinucci & Miller, 1976), Turkish (Aksu, 1978; Aksu-Koç, 1988), French (Bronckart & Sinclair, 1973), and Japanese (Shirai, 1993), among others. An important outcome of these observations is the Aspect Hypothesis, or the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis (Anderson & Shirai, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1995), which proposes that early tense-aspect markers are the manifestation of the lexical aspect of the verb. In view of this course of development of past/perfect morphology and progressive morphology, the Aspect Hypothesis makes predictions that can be summarized as follows (Anderson & Shirai, 1996; Shirai & Kurono, 1998):

1) Past/perfective marking begins with achievement and accomplishment verbs, and then extends to activity and state verbs.

2) In languages that have progressive aspect, progressive marking begins with activity verbs, and then extends to accomplishment/achievement verbs.

3) Progressive markings are not incorrectly overextended to stative verbs.

The Aspect Hypothesis has been tested in L2 acquisition contexts as well. Studies that have investigated the acquisition of L2 progressive morphology have reported an association between progressive marking and activity verbs in oral production data (Robison, 1995; Shirai & Kurono, 1998), in cloze passages (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995), and in acceptability judgment (Shirai & Kurono, 1998). Bardovi-Harlig (1998) found that L2 learners’ early progressive marker was largely restricted to activity verbs, with little use of the progressive with either accomplishment verbs or achievement verbs. In a comparison of learners at different proficiency levels, Robison (1995) found that lower-level learners linked *-ing* with activities while higher-level learners applied it to other eventitives as well.

In the Korean EFL context, studies have been largely confined to investigating the acquisition of past-tense morphology (Hahn, 2005; Hong, 2006; Kim, 1998; Lee, 2006; Lim, 2004). Lim (2004), in a cross-sectional study, found that learners were more successful in past morpheme use with telic verbs than with atelics verbs. Similarly, Hong
(2006) found that her adult Korean subjects' past morphology was influenced by lexical aspect, and she claimed that past tense morphology is acquired in stages as predicted by the Aspect Hypothesis. Lee (2006), in her analysis of longitudinal data from two Korean ESL learners, found that the learners initially marked past tense on achievements and accomplishments, present tense on states, and progressive on activities. Hahn (2005), on the other hand, found that lower-level learners' past morphology development did not follow the stages dictated by the Aspect Hypothesis, suggesting that at least some learner populations are not sensitive to lexical aspects in developing their tense-aspect system. While the findings are not completely unequivocal, most of the studies on the English past marker in the Korean EFL context also seem to support the Aspect Hypothesis.

To summarize, studies have provided ample evidence that L2 learners' early use of tense-aspect markers is in conformity with the Aspect Hypothesis. Meanwhile, there has been little discussion on the acquisition of English progressive aspect by Korean EFL learners. Furthermore, the main focus of the studies in the Korean context so far has been on whether learners correctly supply the markers in a felicitous context; but whether they also supply them in an infelicitous context has not been much discussed. In fact, there is some indication in the L2 literature that learners overgenerate tense-aspect morphology in infelicitous contexts (Gavruseva, 2008; Ionin, 2008; Robison, 1995; Rocca, 2002). We will discuss this issue in detail in the next section, focusing on the difference in aspectual system between English and Korean.

2.3. Cross-Linguistic Differences and Learnability

2.3.1. English progressive and simple present

As mentioned, English eventitive verbs (activity, accomplishment, and achievement) in the simple present do not denote activities/events that are going on at the present moment. Instead, these verbs in the present tense are used to refer to habituality.

(5) The woman visits her mother twice a week (habitually).

In order to denote an action/event that is in progress at the moment of speaking, the verb must occur in the progressive aspect. The label "simple present" is thus quite misleading in that learners may incorrectly associate the term with an event/action taking place at the present time.

Meanwhile, states are not compatible with English progressive aspect. States are inherently durative but not dynamic, whereas progressive aspect in English has a [+dynamic] property (Shirai, 1998)—or a [+processual] property (Dowty, 1979; Ionin,
2008). In other words, the ongoing interpretation attached to the English progressive is only available with eventitives.

2.3.2. Korean progressive and simple present

In Korean, the present tense of a verb is marked by the present tense marker -n- (or -neun- when the immediately preceding sound is a consonant). However, -n- is ambiguous between the habitual interpretation as in (6a) and the ongoing/progressive interpretation as in (6b).

(6) Mina-neun jagi bang-eseo gongbuha-n-da.
Mina-NOM her room-LOC study-PRES-DEC
(a) “Mina studies in her room (as her habitual behavior)”
(b) “Mina is studying in her room (as an ongoing action at the present moment)”

In addition to -n-, Korean has an explicit progressive marker -go iss- in its inventory, which is only compatible with a currently continuous situation. This morpheme can refer to either an ongoing process or the duration of a state (Kim, 2011; Ko & Ku, 2008; Lee, 2005). In other words, -go iss- can be combined with both eventitives and statives. When eventitives are marked with -go iss-, they denote ongoing events as in (7).

(7) Mina-neun jagi bang-eseo gongbuha-go iss-da.
Mina-NOM her room-LOC study-PROGRESS-DECL
“Mina is studying in her room”

When combined with statives, on the other hand, -go iss- expresses durative state. Many state verbs in Korean are compatible with both progressive and simple present markers as exemplified in (8).

(8) Mina-neun dap-eul a-n-da/al-go iss-da.
Mina-NOM answer-ACC know-PRES-DEC/know-PROGRESS-DECL
“Mina knows the answer”

Some Korean states even “require” -go iss- in order to denote a current durative state.

(9) Mina-neun nae chaek-eul gaji-go iss-da/*gaji-n-da.
Mina-NOM my book-ACC have- PROGRESS-DECL/*have-PRES-DEC
“Mina has my book”
To summarize, a Korean verb in the simple present is compatible with both habitual and ongoing interpretations. Moreover, unlike English state verbs, the vast majority of Korean state verbs can be realized in the progressive.

2.3.3. L1 transfer in the acquisition of progressive morphology

Considering the differences between English and Korean tense/aspect systems, learning English progressive aspect is not a simple matter for Korean speakers. To acquire English progressive aspect, Korean learners of English need to learn to always use the progressive morpheme -ing in order to denote ongoing actions/events. Suppose that the L1 aspectual system is transferred, the learners must "unlearn" the L1 rule that the simple present morpheme can be used to denote an ongoing event. In addition, they must also unlearn the L1 rule that state verbs are compatible with progressive morphology. On the other hand, if the learners develop their L2 aspectual system independent of their L1, following the paths predicted by the Aspect Hypothesis, no such difficulties will arise.

The evidence for L1 transfer comes from studies on learners whose L1 tense-aspect morphology is different from that of the L2. Rocca (2002), for example, reported that Italian child learners of English overextended the progressive morpheme to stative verbs. In a comprehensive overview of L2 studies, Anderson and Shirai (1996) also noted some cases where the progressive was overextended to stative verbs. These researchers attributed the L2 learners' overuse of progressive markers to their L1 morphology. To be specific, it was suggested that the -ing marker is likely to be overextended to states when the learners' L1 inventory has an overt marker that is a rough equivalent of the English progressive marker but is also compatible with states.

Meanwhile, L2 learners' overuse of the simple present for an ongoing interpretation has been less explored. Ionin (2008) reports on Russian-speaking child learners of English who initially used simple present verb forms for the ongoing interpretation. Crucially, Russian does not have an overt progressive marker: Russian simple present verbs can refer to both ongoing events and habituality. Ionin reports that the children's overuse of the simple present in the progressive context rapidly declined—within less than a year—as they began to use the progressive productively. Note, however, that the learners in Ionin's study were children. There has been little discussion of whether adult L2 learners also retreat from the overextended use of the simple present.

In sum, the studies reviewed above show that cross-linguistic differences in categorizing and encoding temporal meanings can cause form-meaning mapping problems in L2 learning. Korean is similar to Italian in that it has a progressive marker that can apply to states. On the other hand, it is similar to Russian in that the simple present is used for both habitual and ongoing interpretations. With the availability of (i) state verbs in the
progressive/imperfective construction as well as (ii) the simple present with an ongoing interpretation, Korean learners of English are predicted to experience even more severe difficulties than Russian or Italian learners of English. It is thus highly likely that an L1-transfer effect will distort the acquisition route predicted by the Aspect Hypothesis for Korean learners, allowing them to use statives in the progressive form to express durative states, and eventitives in the simple present form to express an ongoing event. Even if the lexical aspect of the predicate might exert some influence, the role might not be as predominant as that shown in L1 studies and some L2 studies. If the cross-linguistic differences and form-meaning mismatch mentioned above exert a lasting influence, the learners will experience difficulties even up to post-beginner stages. Based on these rationales, we formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Korean EFL learners will allow progressive forms marked on stative verbs.
Hypothesis 2: Korean EFL learners will allow simple present forms marked on eventitive verbs to have an ongoing interpretation.
Hypothesis 3: Lexical aspect will only weakly constrain Korean EFL learners’ acquisition of English progressive morphology.
Hypothesis 4: Korean EFL learners’ performance on the progressive will show divergence from that of native English speakers, even after a long period of exposure to English.

In order to test these hypotheses, the present study conducted an acceptability judgment test, which will be detailed in Chapter 3.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

A total of 60 adult Korean learners of English participated in the present study, all undergraduate students majoring in English in Korea. They had been exposed to English for at least 10 years in Korean instructional settings, beginning around age eight. The participants were intermediate to lower-advanced learners of English, with TOEIC scores in the 600s to 800s. In order to see whether learners perform differently depending on their proficiency, we collected the learners so as to ensure that the learners can be almost equally distributed across the score ranges. Table 2 presents the score range of the Korean participants.
Twenty adult native speakers of American English also participated in the study as a control group. They were either undergraduate or postgraduate students with various majors, studying at a university in the U.S.

3.2. Materials and Procedure

Twenty four verbs—six activities, six accomplishments, six achievements, and six states—were used to yield 24 test items. All the eventitives used in the test, including the achievements (e.g., fall, occur, arrive) were compatible with the progressive. Each item was composed of two sentences—a lead-in sentence followed by a test sentence—so that the second (test) sentence could be a natural continuation of what had been established by the first (lead-in) sentence. The lead-in sentence served as a context to ensure that an eventitive in the test sentence denoted an ongoing event as in (10).

(10) The woman finished feeding her baby. Now the baby is sleeping in the bed.

In order to see how the learners respond to the progressive and simple present patterns depending on the type of the verb class, the test sentence (the second sentence) of each item was presented in two conditions—the progressive condition as in (10) above, and the simple present condition as in (11).

(11) The woman finished feeding her baby. Now the baby sleeps in the bed.

In order to have each participant encounter each verb in only one of the two conditions, two presentation lists were constructed using a Latin-square design. The 24 test items were interspersed with 36 unrelated filler items. Each test item was followed by at least one filler items. Samples of the test items for the different lexical aspectual classes and fillers are presented below:

Activity: The woman finished feeding her baby. Now the baby sleeps/is sleeping in the bed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOEIC scores</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean TOEIC score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>600s</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>641.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700s</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>759.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800s</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>843.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accomplishment: The towns people brought bricks and stones. Now they build/are building a bridge.

Achievement: Lightning has just struck the tree. That’s why the tree falls/is falling to the ground.

State: Bill Grant worked very hard for 7 years. Now the man owns/is owning three houses.

Filler London Olympics was successful. The next Olympics is held in Rio de Janeiro.

The items were presented on a computer screen one at a time. For each item, the first (lead-in) sentence appeared first by itself, in order to ensure that the participants read the lead-in sentence, which is critical for the ongoing interpretation of the second sentence. Six seconds after the lead-in sentence was introduced, the second (test) sentence was added to the first sentence. Only the second sentence was underlined. The two sentences stayed on the screen for seven more seconds. Then the screen became blank for three seconds, after which a new item was introduced with a click sound. The participants were asked to rate the underlined sentence on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = very unnatural, 2 = somewhat unnatural, 3 = somewhat natural, 4 = very natural), before the next item appeared.4

3.3. Data Analyses

The learner performance in the progressive condition and the simple present condition was analyzed across different lexical aspectual classes to see if (i) they correctly accept eventitives and reject statives in the progressive condition, (ii) they correctly accept statives and reject eventitives the simple present condition, and (iii) they rate the constructions containing the various lexical aspectual verbs in line with the Aspect Hypothesis. The learners’ rating pattern was compared with that of the native speaker (NS) group. The ratings on the progressive condition were correlated with those on the simple present to see if the learner grammar represents the progressive and the simple present in complementary distribution. In addition, the L2 participants were further divided into three groups by level, which were then compared with one another in terms of their ratings in the progressive and simple present conditions across the four lexical classes, to see if a developmental pattern of progressive aspect acquisition emerges.

4 A forced-choice type of 4-point scale was adopted instead of a 5-point scale, where 3 is typically for “undecided,” because this “undecided” 3 is considered problematic for both coding and interpretation (White, 2003).
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Progressive Condition: L2 vs. NS

In the progressive condition, the Korean learners rated progressives positively across the board. The overall mean rating was 3.03 on the 4-point Likert scale (where maximum = 4, minimum = 1, median = 2.5). Table 3 demonstrates that the learners marked progressive constructions containing states as high as those containing accomplishments or achievements. The ratings were in the order of Activity > State > Accomplishment > Achievement.

| TABLE 3 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Ratings on Progressive Constructions: L2 vs. NS |                     |
| Learner (N = 60) | NS (N = 20)     |
| Mean (SD)        | Mean (SD)       |
| Activity         | 3.37 (.45)      | 3.53 (.44)      |
| Accomplishment   | 2.96 (.63)      | 3.28 (.78)      |
| Achievement      | 2.72 (.75)      | 3.06 (.70)      |
| State            | 2.98 (.79)      | 1.67 (.74)      |

While an ANOVA indicated that ratings varied across the four aspectual classes (F = 11.226, df = 3, p < .001), pairwise comparisons revealed that the difference was due to a rating discrepancy between the constructions containing activities on one hand and those containing accomplishments (p < .001), achievements (p < .001), and states (p < .01) on the other hand. No significant difference was found among the accomplishment, achievement, and state constructions.

The learners’ high rating on state verb constructions is in accordance with our first hypothesis: Korean EFL learners will allow progressive forms marked on stative verbs. The finding is highly suggestive of L1 involvement in the development of the knowledge of English progressive aspect. On the other hand, the learners’ preference for the progressives with activity verbs suggests that lexical aspect might also have a partial effect.

Unlike the L2 participants, the native speakers accepted eventitives and rejected statives in the progressive pattern. Their acceptance rate was in the order of Activity > Accomplishment > Achievement > State, in line with the distributional bias in the native speaker input reported in the literature (Anderson & Shirai, 1996; Shirai & Anderson, 1995). The rating varied across the four aspectual classes (F = 37.460, df = 3, p < .001). Pair-wise comparisons of the native speaker ratings revealed that statives received significantly lower rating than activities (p < .001), accomplishment (p < .001), and
achievement (p < .001). Among eventitives, activity verbs and accomplishment verbs were rated significantly higher than achievement verbs, confirming the semantic fit between progressive aspect and [-punctual] verbs.

4.2. The Simple Present Condition: L2 vs. NS

In spite of the fact that states are the only permissible English verb class in the simple present, the analysis of L2 learner performance showed that all verb classes received positive ratings. The high acceptance of the simple present eventitives strongly suggests that the learners have not yet fully acquired the aspectual meaning of the simple present. This supports our second hypothesis: Korean EFL learners will allow simple present forms of eventitive verbs to have an ongoing interpretation. Note that the learners’ errors observed here involve “not rejecting” what is unacceptable rather than “not accepting” what is acceptable. Given that the rating pattern reflects the learners’ internal grammar, we can construe that this grammar would allow them to overgenerate erroneous present verb forms to denote an ongoing interpretation.

On the other hand, as demonstrated in Table 4, the comparison of the ratings shows that the learners still rated states in the simple present pattern significantly higher than the other classes in the same pattern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ratings on Simple Present Constructions: L2 vs. NS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner (N = 60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ratings varied across the different lexical aspectual classes (F = 29.435, df = 3, p < .001), yielding the order of State > Activity ≥ Achievement > Accomplishment. A series of pairwise comparisons showed that the difference was significant between state and activity (p < .001), between state and achievement (p < .001), and between state and accomplishment (p < .001). No significant difference was found between activity and achievement (p = 1.000) or between achievement and accomplishment (p = .168).

As expected, the NS group correctly accepted statives but rejected eventitives in the simple present condition. The ratings for the four aspectual classes were significantly different (F = 51.464, df = 3, p < .001). The NS performance accords with the
distributional pattern found in the analysis of English native speaker corpora.

To sum up, while the learners showed a preference for activity verbs in the progressive constructions and for state verbs in the present constructions, they accepted verbs in all four categories in both conditions. This lends support to our third hypothesis: Lexical aspect will only weakly constrain Korean EFL learners’ acquisition of English progressive morphology.

4.3. The Progressive vs. the Simple Present: Rating Differences

While the learners were found to accept both the progressive and simple present constructions, comparisons of the ratings on the two conditions revealed that the learners generally preferred the patterns accepted as the native norm. Table 5 presents the learner ratings in the two conditions side by side.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Progressive</th>
<th>Simple Present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A series of t-tests revealed that the learners tended to prefer eventitives in the progressive pattern. The rating difference between the two conditions was significant in activities ($t = 3.35, p = .001$) and accomplishments ($t = 2.788, p < .01$). Only in achievements, the learners showed a marginal preference for the present form, although the difference between the two conditions did not approach significance ($t = -1.489, p = .142$). With statives, the learners showed a clear preference for the present pattern ($t = -5.213, p < .001$). In short, the learners’ general tendency was to rate grammatical patterns higher than ungrammatical patterns, although they accepted both patterns.

While the L2 learners accepted both progressive and simple present forms at a whole group level, it was not clear at this point whether the same learners who accepted eventitives in the progressive condition also accepted eventitives in the simple present condition. Therefore, we conducted correlation analyses to see if those who accepted progressive sentences containing a certain class of verbs also accepted simple present sentences containing the same class of verbs. If this is the case, ratings on the progressive and simple present conditions will be positively correlated. Ideally, however, the ratings in the two conditions should be negatively correlated because the progressive and the simple
present are in complementary distribution: Progressives cannot occur in the context where the simple present occurs, and vice versa.

Overall, the correlation analyses showed that the learners did not perform in a target-like way in any of the four lexical aspectual classes. With eventitives, the correlations between the ratings on the progressive and the simple present were non-significant. As for states, there was a significant correlation between the progressive and simple present conditions ($r = .301$, $p < .05$). However, the correlation found between the two conditions containing states was a positive correlation. Recall that the ratings of the progressive and simple present versions of the same aspectual class should be negatively correlated. The findings suggest that the two forms are not represented in complementary distribution in the learner grammar.

4.4. Rating Patterns of Different Level Groups

So far, we have seen that learners generally fail to unlearn wrong associations between aspectual morphology and lexical aspect, even after a long period of exposure in instructional settings. Still, we cannot exclude the possibility that our L2 participants represent a mixed group composed of learners at different levels or stages. This possibility led us to first seek correlations between the learners’ TOEIC scores and their rating patterns. However, as shown in Table 6, individual TOEIC scores were not correlated with individuals’ ratings for any of the aspectual classes at a significant level, either in the progressive or in the simple present form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6</th>
<th>Correlations Between Learner Ratings and TOEIC Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Progressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEIC</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 1: None of the correlations ($r$) were significant at the .05 level.
Note 2: ACT = Activity, ACC = Accomplishment, ACH = Achievement, STA = State

The lack of correlation suggests that the TOEIC as a standardized proficiency test of English is not a useful indicator of English learners’ aspectual knowledge. Therefore, we adopted new criteria that might better represent the developmental stages in the acquisition of progressive aspect: (i) whether the progressive forms of statives are erroneously

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5 As a reviewer pointed out, however, it is possible that TOIEC scores could have been more closely related to their performance if the grammar part of the TOEIC had been separately correlated with the learner performance.
accepted, and (ii) whether the simple present forms of eventitives are erroneously accepted to have an ongoing interpretation. The criterion for acceptance or rejection was set at 2.5. Below are the level groups divided based on the two criteria.

Level 1 (N = 40): Those who erroneously accepted BOTH statives in the progressive condition AND eventitives in the present condition
Level 2 (N = 14): Those who erroneously accepted EITHER statives in the progressive condition OR eventitives in the present condition, but NOT both
Level 3 (N = 6): Those who correctly rejected BOTH statives in the progressive condition AND eventitives in the present condition

As seen above, 54 out of a total of 60 L2 learners (90%) had problems with correctly rejecting both of the unacceptable form-meaning combinations. Only six participants (10%) correctly rejected both statives in progressive constructions and eventitives in simple present constructions. Considering that the participants were university students with TOEIC scores in the 600s to 800s, the sheer number of those who accepted non-native form-meaning combinations is quite striking. The large number of learners in Levels 1 and 2 strongly suggests that English progressive aspect indeed poses a serious problem to Korean EFL learners, supporting Hypothesis 4. We will now present our findings from the three level groups.

4.4.1. Group comparison: Performance on the progressive condition

The rating patterns varied across the groups in the progressive condition. As shown in Table 7, the performance of the Level 1 group in the progressive context can be characterized as (i) acceptance of all four classes, and (ii) an exceptionally high acceptance of the incorrect state-progressive combination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7</th>
<th>Ratings on Progressive Constructions: Group Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1 (N = 40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Their ratings on the incorrect progressive constructions with states were as high as those with activities, and there was no real difference between activity and state verbs (p = 1).
The differences in means among the four lexical aspectual classes were significant \(F = 11.763, \text{df} = 3, p < .001\). Pairwise comparisons revealed that the difference was significant between states and accomplishments \(p < .05\) and between states and achievements \(p < .001\). On the other hand, among the eventitives, activities were rated higher than accomplishments \(p < .01\) and achievements \(p < .001\) in the progressive pattern. These findings indicate that activity verbs are preferred in the progressive construction even by the Level 1 learners, in spite of their high acceptance of erroneous progressive sentences with states. The rating pattern yielded the order of Activity = State > Accomplishment ≥ Achievement.

In the Level 2 group, the ratings for states in the progressive constructions slightly tilted toward rejection. The comparison of the ratings across the four verb classes yielded the order of Activity ≥ Accomplishment ≥ Achievement ≥ State. Pairwise comparisons revealed that the difference was significant only between activity and state verbs \(p < .01\).

The Level 3 group demonstrated a near-native pattern in their ratings in the progressive condition. They correctly accepted activity and accomplishment verbs in the progressive construction, and correctly rejected the stative-progressive combination. The difference in the ratings across the aspectual classes was highly significant \(F = 30.657, \text{df} = 3, p < .001\). Pairwise comparisons revealed that constructions containing statives were rated significantly lower than the other constructions, which indicates that the learners at Level 3 successfully separated statives and eventitives. Also noteworthy is that accomplishment verbs in the progressive condition were rated almost as high as activity verbs \(p = 1\). On the other hand, even this highest-level performer group showed a slight reluctance to accept achievement verbs in the progressive condition.

4.4.2. Group comparison: Performance on the simple present condition

As in the progressive condition, the rating patterns in the simple present condition varied across the groups. As can be seen in Table 8, the ratings by the Level 1 group in the simple present condition were all high, with the highest rating on the state verbs, followed by activity, achievement, and accomplishment verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 8</th>
<th>Ratings on Simple Present Constructions: Group Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1 (\text{N} = 40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While accepting all lexical categories in the simple present, the Level 1 learners rated states significantly higher than activities \((p < .01)\), accomplishments \((p < .001)\), and achievements \((p < .001)\), suggesting that even this group of learners preferred states to eventitives in the present context. The rating pattern of the Level 2 group in the simple present condition approached a bit further toward the native pattern. Still, they tended to accept simple present forms with activities and achievements. Only the simple present patterns containing accomplishment verbs were marginally rejected. The ratings by the learners at Level 2 varied across different aspectual classes \((F = 8.373, \text{df} = 3, p < .001)\).

The Level 3 group, by contrast, showed a tendency to correctly accept statives and to reject all the eventitives. The rating difference was significant among lexical aspectual classes \((F = 9.498, p < .001)\), and pair-wise comparisons revealed that the difference was significant between states and activities \((p < .01)\).

The rating patterns of the three groups in the progressive and simple present conditions are summarized in Figures 1 and 2, respectively, alongside the NS group’s rating patterns. As demonstrated in the figures, the rating patterns come closer to approximating the native norm with the increase in level in both the progressive condition and the simple present condition. Still, the sharp contrast between the eventitives and statives observed in the native speakers’ ratings cannot be found in the learner groups’ ratings.

**FIGURE 1**

*Ratings on Progressive Constructions: Group Comparison*

Note: ACT = Activity, ACC = Accomplishment, ACH = Achievement, STA = State
So far, we have demonstrated that Korean EFL learners accept the erroneous progressive forms of states. We have also shown that they accept the erroneous simple present verb forms in the ongoing context. These types of incorrect judgment were made by an overwhelming majority of the L2 participants, and those who successfully ruled out both the incorrect progressive form of state verbs and the incorrect simple present form of eventive verbs accounted for only 10% of the participants. By dividing the learners into three groups according to their degree of errors, we found that the Level 1 learners, who were inaccurate in discerning the distributional restrictions for both progressive and present markers, accepted all four classes of verbs in both progressive and present constructions, which suggests that the use of both progressive and present forms is overgeneralized. While they showed a preference for the prototypical member of both the progressive and the simple present, this preference was not strong enough to rule out unacceptable patterns.

If the difference between the groups represents the developmental stages for the acquisition of the aspectual system, we might be able to propose the following stages.

1) Learners initially allow -ing to be marked on all four lexical aspectual classes including states. Slowly, use of the progressive marker with states decreases. Finally, learners reach the stage where the progressive morphology is restricted to
eventitives.

2) Learners initially allow the simple present form to have an ongoing interpretation. Slowly, use of the simple present marker with eventitives decreases. Finally, learners reach the stage where the simple present form of eventitives is restricted to habitual meaning.

Two questions arise at this point in the discussion. The first question concerns the nature of the mental mechanism behind Korean learners’ overextension of progressive and simple present forms. The second question concerns the way learners eventually unlearn the incorrect use of these forms. As for the first question, there are at least two mechanisms that can explain the learners’ overextension of the progressive and the simple present—(i) overgeneralization as a general cognitive process and (ii) Ll transfer. If the learners simply overextended the progressive marker to states regardless of their L1, the overuse of progressives should be also found in learners whose L1 disallows progressive marking on states. Research findings show otherwise, however. In child L1 and L2 acquisition, progressive/imperfective morphology does not extend to states, as mentioned above (Brown, 1973; Gavruseva, 2008; Ionin, 2008; Olsen, Weinberg, Lilly, & Drury, 1998). This suggests that mere overgeneralization does not lead learners to accept progressive marking across the board. Rather, the acceptance of states with a progressive marker is characteristic of learners whose L1 has a progressive/imperfective marker that can be associated with states, as noted by Anderson and Shirai (1996) and Rocca (2002). In view of these findings, it is highly likely that the Korean learners transferred their L1 aspectual knowledge to L2 learning.

The next question then is how the learners unlearn the erroneous meaning-form mapping. It is widely known that children allow bare verbs or simple present verbs to have a progressive interpretation both in L1 and L2 (Hyams, 2006; Gavruseva, 2008; Ionin, 2008; Suppes, 1973), before they begin to actively use progressive morphology. Once -ing is productively marked on the verb, however, the progressive interpretation of the bare form or the present form is known to decrease gradually. Ionin (2008) proposes that children’s ability to assign bare verbs and V + -ing forms to separate contexts is guided by the Uniqueness Principle (Pinker, 1984; Wexler & Culicover, 1980). According to the Uniqueness Principle, language acquisition is facilitated by a strong bias for one-to-one mapping from form to meaning. This principle is to ensure that distinct morphological forms cannot be associated with identical meaning. Therefore, in children’s acquisition of the progressive morphology, the use of bare verbs in the progressive context declines as the V + -ing form increases in use.

Does the Uniqueness Principle account for Korean learners’ acquisition of progressive aspect as well? Our data seem to challenge the principle in that for a majority of the
learners, more than one form is associated with an identical meaning. It is noteworthy that that Korean has two forms -n- and -go iss- for an ongoing interpretation, violating the Uniqueness Principle. It is also noteworthy that the Korean -n- marker can denote ongoing meaning as well as habitual meaning, again violating the Uniqueness Principle. Recall that most of the learners in our study were first exposed to English around age eight, by which time, their L1 system is stabilized to a large extent (Schwartz, 2003). Given that the learners’ L1 does not instantiate the Uniqueness Principle, it hardly seems conceivable that the learners would apply the principle to their L2. This may provide a partial explanation of why only a small portion of the learners are successful in restricting English progressive and simple present forms to their respective meanings.

5. CONCLUSION

Our findings so far can be summarized as follows. First, the majority of the Korean participants failed to correctly reject the progressive marked on states and/or the simple present with an ongoing interpretation. Our learner participants were all university students majoring in English. Most of them had been exposed to English for at least 10 years. The participants’ lack of knowledge on the distributional restriction can hardly be attributed to lack of input because the present and progressive verb forms are highly frequent in the input. We argue that L1 aspectual morphology exerts a pervasive influence on the acquisition of L2 aspectual morphology. The Korean language differs from many other languages discussed in the L2 acquisition literature in that it has a marker used for both ongoing and habitual interpretations and in that the overt progressive marker -go iss- can be extended to stative verbs. As the progressive and simple present markers are not mutually exclusive in Korean, the Uniqueness Principle can hardly guide Korean speakers in an unlearning process, in the absence of negative feedback.

Despite the complicated nature of learning the English progressive aspect, not much pedagogical attention has been paid to facilitating the unlearning process. As the learner problem involves using a form in the wrong context rather than not using it in the obligatory context, mere positive input is not sufficient to rule out progressive patterns containing statives or simple present patterns containing eventitives in the progressive context.

Considering the pervasiveness of the L1 aspectual system, more pedagogical intervention seems to be required. One of the least intrusive forms of instruction might include corrective feedback such as recast provided by the teacher while in communication, which can facilitate the acquisition process by juxtaposing a correct form with an error made by the learner (Long, 1996). The correction provided through recast can go unnoticed,
however, due to the implicit nature of the feedback. In such cases, a bit more explicit, grammar-focused technique might be called for. One of the promising awareness-raising techniques in this particular context seems to be processing instruction (VanPatten, 1996), where learners are “pushed to attend to particular features of language” (p. 6) in relation to meaning, while processing input. To be specific, the learners might be asked to choose between the progressive and the simple present in a given context. As the instruction is designed to “encourage a better form-meaning mapping” (VanPatten, p. 8), it might help the learners to unlearn the incorrect mapping caused by L1 transfer.

The present study has some limitations. In order to quantify the learners’ acceptance of correct and incorrect use of progressive morphology, the study adopted naturalness judgment instead of grammaticality judgment because sentences in isolation such as “He reads in his room” are grammatical as long as they refer to habituality. In order to rule out the habitual interpretation, we presented each test sentence together with a context sentence and then asked the participants to rate the naturalness of the sentences in a context where an ongoing interpretation is obligatory. As such, the participants in our experiment could have been partially affected by the naturalness of the propositional link between the context sentence and the test sentence. To that extent, caution is required in interpreting the generalizability of our findings.

As a study of receptive judgment, the present study does not provide evidence that learners actually produce progressive sentences containing state verbs or simple present sentences containing eventive verbs. Studies on L2 production are required to further confirm the results of the present study. In addition, the question regarding the learnability problem can be further addressed through bi-directional studies that compare Korean learners acquiring English progressive with English learners acquiring Korean progressive. Such bidirectional studies will enable us to gain deeper insights into the question of whether and how cross-linguistic differences affect the two learner groups’ learning process differently, depending on their L1 as a starting point and their L2 as an endpoint.

REFERENCES


The Acquisition of Progressive Morphology by Korean Learners of English


Applicable levels: All levels
Hye-ryeong Hahn
Dept. of English Education
Seowon University
377-3, Musimseo-ro, Heungdeok-gu
Cheongju, 361-742, Korea
Tel: (043) 299-8325 / H.P.: 010-9492-3022
Fax: (043) 299-9320
Email: hyerhahn@seowon.ac.kr

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