Marking Temporal Expressions: Acquisition of the Lexical Aspect by Adult Korean Learners of English

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The present study provides the results of a cross-sectional study of 60 Korean learners of English. In particular, the study reports the acquisition process in order to provide the relative influence of lexical aspect on the second language (L2) acquisition of English simple past. The analysis examines the degree to which the learners' appropriate and inappropriate use of verbal morphology in English simple past contexts. The findings showed that learners, except for the advanced, were significantly more successful in using English simple past morphology with telics (accomplishments and achievements) than with atelics (states and activities). These findings are consistent with the predictions of the Aspect Hypothesis, and partially consistent with previous research with L2 learners of English from other L1 backgrounds. Lexical aspect, however, does not always influence the forms that competed for simple past. The base categories were favored as alternative response categories for low and intermediate learners across all lexical aspectual categories. For high-intermediate learners, the base categories were favored as alternative response categories for both states and activities. The paper also includes some discussion of the future pedagogical implications in classroom settings.

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of tense and aspect has been the focus of many pedagogical accounts of language. In fact, tense-aspect morphology occupies a central place in the curricula of many language programs (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000). Language teaching programs usually include mastery of certain tense-aspect forms in their criteria for advancement from one course level to another, and tense and aspect clearly play an important role in grammatically focused pedagogical materials. Despite this pedagogical attention, research in L2 acquisition focused on the acquisition of tense
and aspect system.

In contrast, the research available on the L2 acquisition of tense and aspect systems to date exhibits many unresolved problems. First, despite a recent increase in experimental studies, most of them have focused on comparing the learners on the basis of their use of the temporal systems rather than on the basis of the proficiency level of the learners. For example, in a study of ESL learners’ acquisition of tense and grammatical aspect, Collins (2000) divided learners into nine groups according to their appropriate use of past tense morphology. As Bardovi-Harlig (1994) pointed out, this is because learners exhibit a considerable range of appropriate use of tense-aspect when considered individually. For example, a study of the narratives produced by 16 intermediate-level learners found that appropriate use of past tense ranged from 15% to 90% in oral production and from 32% to 98% in written production (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992).

Second, a large number of longitudinal studies tend to focus either on the emergence of or documenting the distribution of the verb morphology. Not much focus has been given to reporting on the degree to which the forms are used in a native-like way. For example, Bardovi-Harlig and Bergström (1996) reported that L2 learners of French in advanced levels use *imparfait* more often than *passé composé* in their written narratives, reflecting a “more targetlike use of grammatical aspect” (p. 319), but their actual distribution of appropriate and inappropriate uses was not reported.

In the present study, the acquisition of the English simple past by adult Korean learners was examined in order to provide an understanding of the process of second language acquisition of temporal systems as well as second language acquisition in general. To this end, 60 Korean L2 learners of English in four different proficiency levels participated in the study. They were tested on their acquisitional process of English simple past, and also for the effect of the lexical aspect. Eleven native speakers of English participated in the study as well.

The organization of this paper is as follows: First, this study reviews the theoretical background on tense and aspect studies. Then, significant previous works on temporal expression in L2 acquisition research are examined. The paper then describes the research methods of the experiment, reports the results, and provides summaries of the study and future pedagogical implications.

II. BACKGROUND

1. Tense and Aspect

The notion of temporality is subdivided into the grammatical categories of tense and aspect.
Both tense and aspect are concerned with time, but in ways quite different from each other. Tense, according to Comrie (1976), locates a situation with respect to some reference point and looks at relative sequential ordering between the two time points. For example, past tense is a situation described as located prior to the moment of speaking (e.g., *John read, John was reading*). Aspect, on the other hand, involves “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation.” Thus, it is not relational like tense but focuses on the internal temporal structure of events (Chung & Timberlake, 1985).

A single verb may show contrasts in the grammatical aspect without undergoing change in its inherent lexical aspect. Inherent lexical aspect, also known as situation aspect and semantic aspect, refers to what is inherent in the lexical items that describe the situation. In “*John read*,” the verb has intrinsic duration whether in simple past or past progressive. These distinctions are noted by Vendler’s (1967) framework of lexical aspect, which consists of states, activities, accomplishments, and achievements. These four lexical classes can be distinguished by three features: dynamicity, telicity, and punctuality.

According to Vendler, states encode situations that have no dynamics and continue states, activities, accomplishments, and achievements. States continue over time without additional effort or energy being applied (e.g., *see, love, hate, want*, etc). Activities have inherent duration in that they involve a span of time, as in *sleep, run, walk, play and snow*. They have no specific endpoint. Accomplishments are durative like activities, but have a clear inherent endpoint (e.g., *I studied all week, run a mile, build a house*, etc). Achievements are like accomplishments in that they encode a natural endpoint, but differ from accomplishments and activities in that they take place instantaneously, and are reducible to a single point in time (e.g., *recognize, die, reach the summit*, etc).

2. Aspect Hypothesis

A number of researchers in both L1 and L2 acquisition have found that a direct relationship exists between the inherent lexical value of the verb (rather than tense or grammatical aspect) and the development of past tense verbal morphology (e.g., Andersen & Shirai, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig & Bergstrom, 1996; Li & Shirai, 2000, among many others).

The Aspect Hypothesis makes two important claims on distribution and development of interlanguage (IL): inherent lexical aspect influences the distribution of emergent verbal morphology in both L1 and L2 learning and the direction of the subsequent development of the learners’ tense and aspect system (Andersen, 1991; Andersen & Shirai, 1996). Andersen and Shirai summarize the claims as the following four predictions (Andersen, 1991; Andersen &
Shirai, 1996, p. 533; Shirai, 1991, pp. 9-10): (1) learners first use past or perfective marking (depending on the target language) on achievements and accomplishments, eventually extending later to activity and state verbs; (2) learners first start with perfective past rather than imperfective, and begin marking the past with states and activity verbs, then extend to telics, and finally to punctuals; (3) in languages with progressive aspect, progressive marking is initially restricted to activity verbs, then extended to telics and punctuals; and (4) progressive markings are not incorrectly overextended to states.

The predicted direction of development is for perfective/past forms to emerge with achievements (punctual telics), and then proceed to accomplishments (non-punctual telics) and states and activities (atelics) (Andersen, 1991; Andersen & Shirai, 1994, p. 143), although there are statements of the Aspect Hypothesis that do not differentiate between accomplishment and achievement verbs (Andersen & Shirai, 1996; Dardovi-Iarlig & Bergstrom, 1996).

3. Research Questions

The specific research questions addressed in the present study are:

1. Do the accuracy rates on the simple past increase as learners’ overall proficiency levels improve?
2. What are the distributional characteristics of verbal morphology of the simple past related to inherent lexical aspect?

2-a. Do learners, especially those with lower proficiency, use the simple past more appropriately with achievements and accomplishments?
2-b. Does this initial association extend to activities and states? In other words, do learners become more accurate in producing simple past with activities and states as their proficiency level increases?
2-c. Do these associations become weaker as the learners’ overall proficiency level increases?

3. What are the distributional characteristics of verbal morphology of alternative responses related to inherent lexical aspect?

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Participants

The participants in the present study were 60 native Korean speakers who learned English as
their L2. They all satisfied the requirement of being adult ESL learners, i.e., they all started using English in a L2 environment after the age of 18. All of them began formal English instruction in their native country, mostly starting around the age of 12; 0 to 13; 0. The participants included university students enrolled in ESL, undergraduate or graduate programs from two different universities in the U.S. Thus, there is a range of age, educational background, prior exposure to English, and length of residence (LOR) in English-speaking countries among the participants.

A majority of the participants enrolled in the ESL program were university students prior to their coming to the United States, and had been learning English as a foreign language in their classrooms. Additionally, there were some students (N = 3) in the ESL program who have already graduated from universities in Korea, working or on leave from their jobs, and some unemployed, who need to improve their English for employment or travel reasons. Therefore, participants in the low group were not true beginners. The remainder of the participants was enrolled in the undergraduate or graduate programs. All of the participants were recruited either verbally in person or through written recruitment announcement. They were all volunteers. In addition, 11 native speakers of English served as a control group. These participants were all undergraduate students at a U.S. university recruited from introductory linguistic classes and were between the ages of 19 and 32.

For the purpose of this experiment, proficiency levels of the participants were measured using two standardized tests: Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) and structure and reading sections of the TOEFL test. The CELT is multiple-choice grammar test used at the U.S. universities for determiningproficiencies of non-native speakers. The test was designed to cover a range of grammatical structures and lexical items. The structure section of the TOEFL test was composed of 40 sentences of either supplying a missing word in incomplete sentences, or identifying an error of grammar or usage. The items test the ability of learners to recognize standard grammar as seen in writing. The reading section of the TOEFL test has six-passages and contains eight-to-twelve comprehension questions per passage for a total of 50 questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants' Background Information</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Proficiency</th>
<th>LOR in the US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>23:1</td>
<td>85.32</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-intermediate</td>
<td>22:5</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>4:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-intermediate</td>
<td>26:3</td>
<td>135.17</td>
<td>5:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>27:3</td>
<td>156.71</td>
<td>4:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native speakers</td>
<td>25:4</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Proficiency scores out of 165 possible points)
Based on the results of these two tests, the participants were divided into four groups according to their proficiency: (1) Low, (2) Intermediate, (3) High-Intermediate and (4) Advanced groups. Following Johnson and Newport (1989), who reported that there was no correlation between English proficiency and LOR in target language environment after puberty, other variables such as LOR in the US were not considered at this point. Table 1 presents participants' background information. It illustrates that the participants differ in terms of age, prior exposure to English, and LOR in English-speaking countries.

2. Instruments and Procedure

In this experiment, a controlled elicitation task was chosen for the following reasons: As pointed out by Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds (1995), the controlled elicitation type of task is useful in providing a context in which expressions with target temporal reference can be elicited. Additionally, this task is useful in designing tests exhibiting four types or meanings of verbs.

Thus, the four-way division found in the work of Vendler (1967) and Dowty (1979) was employed in choosing verbs. This analysis is typically used to distinguish the lexical aspectual categories of states, activities, accomplishments, and achievements. The lexical aspect of each verb was determined by means of operational tests. In the present study, the operational tests developed by Shirai and Andersen (1995, p. 749) were employed.

The test materials of the controlled elicitation task were composed of two parts: (1) a single passage cloze task and (2) a series of short passage cloze tasks. Both single passage cloze tasks and a series of short passage cloze tasks have been used in previous L2 acquisition studies. Single passage cloze tasks have been used by studies such as those conducted by Bardovi-Harlig (1992), Bergström (1995) and Salaberry (1998), while a series of short passages were the ones carried out by Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds (1995) and Collins (2000). Single passage cloze tasks and a series short passage tasks both have advantages and disadvantages. Single passage cloze tasks, which usually have their own topics, enable learners to engage in a discourse context. The drawback is that they typically do not elicit sufficient numbers and types of verbs from the four lexical aspectual categories. For these reasons, a series of short passages can complement single connected texts, allowing for a much broader sampling of verb types within each aspectual category. Thus, this task utilizes both types of passages, which appear in random order.

The controlled elicitation task consisted of 56 passages which targeted the simple past and 25 distractor passages. There were 14 items from each of the four aspectual categories. Passages

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1 Two native speakers of English participated in this procedure.
were at least two sentences long and contained at least one blank and three at most (target and / or distractor items). Target items (but not necessarily the distractors) were either in a variety of contexts including 1st person singular/plural, 2nd person singular/plural and 3rd person singular contexts. A list of the fourteen verbs used in this task is listed in Appendix A, and a sample page of the elicitation task is presented in Appendix B.

IV. RESULT

1. Distribution of the Simple Past

The first analysis examined the distribution of the appropriate use of the simple past in the four lexical asp ectual classes. A usage score was calculated for each learner for each of the four asp ectual classes. Table 2 shows the number of participants per each proficiency group, and the range of appropriate use of simple past within each group. The results show that the acquisition of simple past is not a unitary phenomenon occurring simultaneously in all contexts. The results suggest that lexical asp ectual class influences the sequence of acquisition of simple past. They also suggest that the association of morphological marking and lexical aspect is apparent for the low, intermediate and high-intermediate group learners. The magnitude of that association, however, is most noticeable in the data from the low group. The association becomes less noticeable as the participants' level of proficiency increases from the high-intermediate to the advanced.

A mixed design multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) procedure (lexical aspect X group) with repeated measures on lexical aspect revealed a significant difference in the simple past acquisition across lexical aspect, $F(3, 30) = 30.589, p < 0.000$ and proficiency levels $F(4, 40) = 73.844, p < 0.000$. The interaction between lexical asp ectual class and proficiency level was also significant $F(12, 120) = 12.120, p < 0.000$. Thus, the effect of lexical asp ect was mediated by proficiency levels of learners. The finding is consistent with previous studies such as Collins (2000) and Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds (1995).

The results of planned comparisons (Tukey) of the four categories for states, activities, accomplishments, and achievements revealed that the differences in scores were statistically significant between the following pairwise comparisons of the groups ($p < 0.001$): For states, low vs. high-intermediate, advanced, and native speakers; intermediate vs. high-intermediate, advanced, and native speakers, high intermediate vs. advanced and native speakers. Overall, learners in the three experimental groups (low, intermediate, high-intermediate) differed significantly from native speakers, whereas advanced level learners did not differ significantly
from native speakers. For activities, significant pairwise comparisons were observed between all groups, except for the advanced level learners and native speakers. For accomplishments, the following groups exhibited significant pairwise comparisons: low level learners vs. intermediate, high-intermediate, advanced learners, and also native speakers; intermediate vs. native speakers; high-intermediate vs. native speakers; advanced vs. the native speakers. For achievements, significant pairwise comparisons were observed between the following: low vs. intermediate, high-intermediate, advanced, and native speakers; intermediate vs. native speakers; high-intermediate vs. native speakers.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STV</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>ACC</th>
<th>ACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L (N = 14)</td>
<td>33.64%</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>48.98%</td>
<td>51.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (N = 14)</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI (N = 18)</td>
<td>60.71%</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>73.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (N = 14)</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NS (N = 14)</td>
<td>85.71%</td>
<td>86.73%</td>
<td>77.57%</td>
<td>82.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 14)</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(L = low, I = intermediate, HI = high-intermediate, A = advanced, NS = native speaker groups, STV = states, ACT = activities, ACC = accomplishments, ACH = achievements)

In sum, the simple past marking of verbs is associated with the lexical aspectual class of the verb in L2 learners except for the advanced group. Learners in the low, intermediate, and high-intermediate groups exhibited higher accuracy in the simple past acquisition with accomplishments and achievements as opposed to states and activities. Learners in the advanced groups were different from the rest of the experimental group learners in that their response in the simple past was not influenced by lexical aspect, thus patterning like the native speakers.

2. Alternative Responses within Aspectual Categories

The second analysis looked at the distribution of the alternatives to the simple past that the learners supplied within each aspectual class. Whereas the previous analysis exhibited patterns of correct responses that learners were providing (higher accuracy with accomplishments and achievements and lower accuracy with states and activities except for the advanced group), the purpose of this analysis was to look for patterns in incorrect responses elicited by learners at
various proficiency levels.

The response categories that emerged from the data were as follows: base, a combined category because not all items targeted the 3rd person singular; present and past progressive; present perfect; past perfect; blank; and “other,” which included low-frequency alternatives such as passive, future and adjectival forms, as well as morphological innovations. These categories have also been reported by Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds (1995) and Collins (2000).

A majority of perfect responses were present perfect, but there were a few occurrences of past perfect. There were also some responses that included elements of both progressive and perfect categories (has been riding, has riding). Rather than arbitrarily assigning these forms to one or the other category, they were counted in both. There were relatively few of these types of responses (less than 2% of the total number of responses produced), and they tended to occur in the activity category at the lower levels.

1) Results: Alternative Responses within Aspectual Categories

The following Tables 3-6 illustrate the distribution of the base, present perfect, past perfect and progressive responses within the state, activity, accomplishment, and achievement categories across all proficiency groups. The simple past responses have been omitted from the figures in order to highlight the use of non-past forms. In addition, alternative responses by native speakers were not included since it was relatively rare for native speakers to produce forms other than simple past when required: They did so approximately 3.4% of the time (21 responses out of a possible 616).

(1) States

Different patterns are observed within the four lexical categories for the suppliance of forms other than the simple past. For states (see Table 3), the main competing form was the base across all proficiency level learners. As learners become more proficient with the simple past, the association of the base and states declined proportionally. Still, even advanced level learners continued to supply the base forms with states. For the low level learners, the next most commonly supplied alternative form was the progressive. The use of the progressive form declines proportionally to the proficiency levels as the proficiency level of the learners increases. For the advanced level learners, progressive form was the least supplied one. The use of the present perfect increases proportionally to the proficiency levels except for the advanced level learners. The overuse of the present perfect with state category is most prominent among high-intermediate level learners. The association of the present perfect with the state category was not noticeable among learners in other proficiency level groups, including advanced level
learners.

TABLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base/Prst</th>
<th>Prst Prft</th>
<th>Pst Prft</th>
<th>PrgsV</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>43.88%</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>40.31%</td>
<td>5.61%</td>
<td>4.59%</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
<td>7.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>20.24%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>3.17%</td>
<td>1.59%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
<td>4.08%</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Prst = present, Prst Prft = present perfect, Pst Prft = past perfect, PrgsV = progressive forms)

(2) Activities

For activities (see Table 4), learners mainly supplied the base forms instead of the simple past (as with states), except for those in the advanced level. The association of the base forms with activities was not noticeable among the advanced level learners. For the advanced level learners, the main competing form was the progressive, which is the least supplied alternative form for the low level learners. The association of the present perfects with activities, that is, the overuse of the present perfect with activities is most prominent among high-intermediate level learners. Learners in other proficiency level groups, including advanced level learners, did not exhibit noticeable association of activities with the present perfect.

TABLE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base/Prst</th>
<th>Prst Prft</th>
<th>Pst Prft</th>
<th>PrgsV</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>40.29%</td>
<td>5.83%</td>
<td>5.42%</td>
<td>2.53%</td>
<td>8.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>29.59%</td>
<td>4.59%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>9.13%</td>
<td>6.75%</td>
<td>1.98%</td>
<td>1.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
<td>3.06%</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) Accomplishments

As was reported in the previous section about the simple past, accuracy for both accomplishments and achievements was greater than for states and activities (see Table 5). Nevertheless, there was a pattern among the responses other than the simple past for both accomplishments and achievements. For accomplishments, different patterns were observed among different proficiency level learners. For low and intermediate level learners, the base was the most common alternative response as with states. For high-intermediate and advanced learners, the present perfect was the most common alternative response: it was supplied more frequently than the base. In addition, the use of base form decreased with proficiency when compared to other alternative response forms.
TABLE 5
Distribution of Non-past Responses for Accomplishments by Group (in mean percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base/Prst</th>
<th>Prst PrfT</th>
<th>Pst PrfT</th>
<th>Prgsy</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>6.12%</td>
<td>4.59%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>9.18%</td>
<td>4.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>9.18%</td>
<td>3.06%</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
<td>5.61%</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>3.97%</td>
<td>6.75%</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>1.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>3.06%</td>
<td>9.18%</td>
<td>6.12%</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) Achievements

For achievements (see Table 6), the use of base form was the most common alternative response among low, intermediate, and high-intermediate level learners. For the advanced level learners, the present perfect was the most common alternative choice over the simple past. The overuse of the present perfect is not as frequent as in the accomplishments. Other non-past forms such as past perfect and progressive forms are more frequent for achievements than for other lexical aspectual categories. When we add up the overuse of present perfect and past perfect and thus consider ‘perfect’, the suppliance of this form is notably higher: it exceeds the suppliance of base forms, the most frequently supplied alternative to the simple past except for the advanced learners.

TABLE 6
Distribution of Non-past Responses for Achievements by Group (in mean percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base/Prst</th>
<th>Prst PrfT</th>
<th>Pst PrfT</th>
<th>Prgsy</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>14.80%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9.69%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>7.65%</td>
<td>4.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.61%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
<td>3.06%</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>5.16%</td>
<td>4.37%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>1.98%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1.53%</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Summary of Within Category Response Findings

The main trends that emerged from these data can be summarized as follows: when learners were not supplying the simple past, they preferred forms depended on the proficiency levels of learners. For both low and intermediate level learners, the base categories were the most common alternative response choice for all lexical aspectual categories. For high-intermediate learners, the base categories were the most common alternative responses for states and activities. For advanced learners, the following characteristics were observed: the base form was favored with states, but not with other lexical aspectual categories; the progressive was favored for activities, followed by the present perfect; for accomplishments and achievements, the present perfect was the most common alternative choice followed by the past perfect.
3. Alternative Responses across Categories

1) Results: Alternative Responses across Categories

In order to determine that the previous analysis of alternative responses within aspectual categories reflects associations with lexical aspectual categories in general, and not just a number of specific verbs within each of the categories, alternative response patterns across aspectual categories were examined. For that purpose, an item analysis of all present/base verbs attracting more than 10% of the present perfect, past perfect, or progressive responses was undertaken. Figures 1 through 3 illustrate the results.

(1) Present/base

Figure 1 illustrates the results for the 16 verbs attracting more than 10% of the present/base responses: 6 states, 4 activities, and 3 each from the accomplishments and achievements. The verbs are indicated along the x axis, and the percentage of the present/base, present perfect, past perfect or progressive responses are indicated along the y axis. Of the states, 3 verbs (like, want, and belong) attracted somewhat more of the present responses than other states. Although the differences are not conspicuous, the strength of the prototypical association between present and states is somewhat less robust than the associations between perfect and telics or between progressive and activities. In addition, 3 of the 4 activities (seem, stay, and earn) elicited present/base responses with comparable frequency to the highest 3 states.

FIGURE 1
Distribution of Present/base by Verb (percentage of responses > 10%)
(2) Present Perfect

11 verbs yielded 10% or more of the present perfect responses (displayed in Figure 2). Among these verbs, be yielded 23.5% of the present perfect responses. Other than be, none of the verbs were states. There were 2 activities (earn and see), 3 accomplishments (create and call) and 2 achievements (decide and break).

(3) Past Perfect

A total of 5 verbs yielded 10% or more of the past perfect responses. Among these verbs, none of the verbs were states, and only 1 was activity (study). The rest were comprised of 2 accomplishments (draw and write) and 2 achievements (finish and notice).

(4) Progressive

Progressive responses greater than 10% were found for 14 verbs (see Figure 3). Activities occupied the most (n = 6), and the differences among the verbs were not noticeable. There were 4 state verbs that also drew high percentages of progressive responses, and in 3 cases they were verbs that are commonly found in situations denoting activities: look, smell, and think. Accomplishments and achievements each attracted 2 verbs.

(5) Other Forms

An item analysis of the verbs in the blank and other verb forms was also performed, in order to see if any one verb attracted dramatically greater or fewer responses than other verbs. No unusual patterns were observed, with the possible exception of the state be, for which the blank
and passive responses were somewhat higher than for other items. The same item was among the states attracting the highest use of present perfect. Also, passive responses were higher for achievement drop than for other items.

2) Summary of across Category Response Findings

The associations found between the use of perfect forms with telics and the use of progressive forms with activities occurred across a variety of items within each aspectual category. Although the association between present and states also occurred with a number of verbs, the association was somewhat stronger for a few verbs within the category, and equally strong with 3 activity verbs. Finally, the state be was much more difficult for many of the learners than any other of the 56 verbs.

![FIGURE 3](image)

V. DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the acquisition and the use of English simple past by adult L2 learners at different proficiency levels. Overall, the study found that learners who demonstrated more proficiency in English exhibited relatively more success with their use of the simple past morphology. In addition, the study found support for the influence of lexical aspect in the L2 acquisition of simple past, except for the advanced learners. When confronted with obligatory
contexts for the simple past. Learners in the low, intermediate, and high-intermediate levels of proficiency supplied the simple past significantly more often with telics (achievements and accomplishments) than with atelics (states and activities). There was no significant difference within telics. Within the atelic category, learners struggled more with states than with activities.

These findings for Korean learners of English are consistent with the earlier findings for L2 learners of English from a variety of L1 backgrounds (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995), for francophone learners of English (Collins, 2000), and for Korean learners of English (Eun-joo Lee, 2001). The findings are consistent despite the fact that the learners in this study were grouped according to different criteria from Collins (2000). appeared to represent a different L1 background (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Shirai & Kurono, 1998), and were collected by different data-collection methods such as longitudinal (Eun-joo Lee, 2001). The tendency occurs not only in frequency counts of oral and written production data but also in paper-and-pencil tests (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995) in which learners have more difficulty in supplying appropriate forms in obligatory contexts and where the pattern of their response is consistent with the Aspect Hypothesis (e.g., more accurate use of the simple past forms with accomplishments and achievements than with states and activities).

Their choice for alternative response pattern, however, did not always exhibit the influence of lexical aspect: the present/base categories were favored as alternative response categories for low and intermediate learners across all lexical categories. For high-intermediate learners, the present/base categories were favored as alternative response choice for states and activities.

Learners in the advanced group did not exhibit the influence of lexical aspect in their distribution of the simple past. In doing so, they showed more target-like behavior (as defined by the native speaker responses) than learners in other experimental groups. Advanced learners’ alternative response pattern, however, did show the influence of lexical aspect: the present/base form was favored with states, and the progressive was favored with activities.

VI. CONCLUSION

The results of the acquisition of the simple past morphology by Korean learners of English are generally analogous to previous findings in that they at least partially support the claims of the Aspect Hypothesis. The results of the elicitation task revealed that learners showed higher accuracy with the simple past morphology on accomplishments and achievements. The predicted extension of the simple past morphology, i.e., from accomplishments and achievements to activities and states, was also observed in that advanced learners exhibited accuracy equal in all four lexical aspectual categories. In summation, the claims of the Aspect
Hypothesis are confirmed in the analysis of lexical aspect in learners' acquisition of the simple past.

Based on these findings, the results from the present study provide an important implication for L2 instruction. Yet, the main objective of the research reported here did not include the examination of how tense and aspect are actually taught in L2 classrooms, or the differential effects on acquisition of different instructional approaches. That is, the effect of instruction was not treated as a separate variable. However, researchers such as Gass (1989) claimed that the L2 acquisition process is essentially the same psycholinguistic process regardless of environments. In fact, studies that have tested the Aspect Hypothesis have been conducted in three different contexts: uninstructed L2 acquisition (Andersen & Shirai, 1994), instructed L2 acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Shirai & Kuroko, 1998), and instructed EFL learning (Bergström, 1995; Häsby, 1995). The results of these studies have proven that the patterns in learners' interlanguage are generally the same across contexts. Thus, the results from this study may provide insights into L2 classroom research.

VII. IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To date, very little research has investigated the ways tense and aspect are actually taught in classrooms or the degree to which current practices are consistent with existing knowledge of second language acquisition in general, and tense and aspect acquisition in particular. There has actually been very little work conducted in this area. Thus, we need more research focused on pedagogical practices relevant to the teaching and learning of tense and aspect in L2, research that is informed by the findings of descriptive studies of developmental processes within and across different learner populations.

In many respects, we know less about how language teachers approach the teaching of tense and aspect in today's communicative classrooms than we did about the highly-structured, drill-oriented grammar-translation classes that preceded them. Ever since the introduction of the communicative language teaching methods, more emphasis has been placed on encouraging students to engage in meaningful communication than on teaching language structures. However, in recent years, grammar instruction within the context of communicative teaching methods has begun to be re-emphasized in a variety of forms such as focus-on-form, or input enhancement (cf. Doughty & Williams, 1998).

Specifically, possibilities of future research may include the following: (a) creating a taxonomy of existing pedagogical approaches to the teaching of tense and aspect in communicatively oriented L2 classrooms, (b) evaluating the degree to which the identified
practices are consistent with existing knowledge of both tense and aspect acquisition and instructed second language acquisition in general, and (c) understanding of the ways in which grammar instruction can be integrated into communicative-oriented language pedagogy.

The investigation of these research issues in the context of L2 classrooms will provide a valuable and novel perspective on the pedagogical implications of SLA research. Along with additional observation of developmental orders which may positively influence future pedagogical studies, such future L2 classroom research may provide valuable information for researchers, teachers, and learners.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
List of Target Verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Accomplishments</th>
<th>Achievements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Draw a picture</td>
<td>Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Send a letter</td>
<td>Win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want</td>
<td>Tell</td>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>Discover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy</td>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Wear</td>
<td>Begin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Grow up</td>
<td>Notice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel</td>
<td>See</td>
<td>Lose weight</td>
<td>Drop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Attend</td>
<td>Create</td>
<td>Finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>Take an exam</td>
<td>Miss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Stay</td>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>Find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seem</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Write</td>
<td>Forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think</td>
<td>Appear</td>
<td>Call someone</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look</td>
<td>Eat</td>
<td>Become</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need</td>
<td>Visit</td>
<td>Move to</td>
<td>Decide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX B
Sample Page of Elicitation Task

1. Martina Hingis is a tennis star. Many people __________ (criticize) the lifestyles of very young tennis stars like Martina. She _______________ (not attend) school since 1994, the year she turned professional. Since then, she _______________ (play) tennis all over the world. So far, she _______________ (earn) millions of dollars. Martina considers her lifestyle to be normal. That is because she _______________ (enjoy) playing tennis since she was a child.

2. A: Did you know Josh when you lived in the dorm?
   B: Not really. He usually ___________ (stay) in his room and ___________ (study) a lot.

3. Annie was a runner-up in a beauty pageant last summer. She didn’t win but ___________ (seem) happy at the end of the contest.

4. Do you want to go meet my good friend Tommy? I ___________ (know) her since I ___________ (be) a little kid.

5. The play has ended. It ___________ (be) time to go home now.

6. Michelle ___________ (be) an excellent tennis player. Last year her team ___________ (win) the tennis championship at the Washington State.
7. Lynn ____________ (be) an author. So far, she ____________ (write) two novels and ten short stories. I am sure she ____________ (write) many more in the future.

8. Thirteen-year old Ronnie ____________ (love) math since he was a little boy.

9. Let me ____________ (introduce) you to my good friend Brad. He is a student majoring in Physics. I first ____________ (know) him when I was in middle school.

Applicable levels: secondary, college and higher
Key words: English simple past, lexical aspect, and second language acquisition

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