SPANISH SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ITS IMPACT ON GENERAL SLA THEORY

Jorge Aguilar Sánchez
Universidad Nacional,
Costa Rica

Introduction

Even though in the course of the past half century the primary actors in the development of second language acquisition theories have been researchers working on the second language acquisition of English, Spanish applied linguists have contributed greatly to the body of knowledge that has accumulated during this period of time. Some of these contributions come from studies that have been conducted relatively independently of general SLA theory and from studies that are direct contributors to such theories. As Ellis (1994: 1) stated, the scope of SLA is now wider than in the 1970s or even early 1980s and that the field has expanded its scope to include the pragmatics of learner language and has adopted a sociolinguistic perspective as well.

As a result of this expansion, we find a subfield of SLA research investigating classroom second language acquisition concerned with language pedagogy and studies that are concerned with theoretical issues related to second language acquisition. In addition, we find studies that have demonstrated to be innovative in adopting approaches, from other fields, that guide, form, validate and advance SLA studies which important challenge for SLA research (Bonch-Bruevich, Crawford, Hellermann, Higgins, & Nguyen, 2001). These studies are also important because of their inter-disciplinary nature which provides tools to a satisfactory inquiry in SLA. Furthermore, we find studies that have trigger important lines of research within the field of the second language acquisition of Spanish.

In order to evaluate the impact that Spanish SLA has had on the general theory of SLA, one has to take into account areas such as acquisition principles, learning processes, linguistic structure, language characteristics, instructed learning, and methodology in general. The goal of this paper is to introduce research in Spanish SLA in those areas which have had the most generalizability to theories of language learning. The overall effect that each study has had on the field of SLA in general is evaluated and an overview of areas where more work is needed is given.

Acquisition principles

In SLA, it has been discovered, as pointed out by Ellis (1994), that the language that learners produce provides evidence that they pass through a sequence of developmental stages in the acquisition of specific syntactic structures. Evidence for this came from studies of learners' errors and from cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. Ellis (1994) points out that the existence of developmental sequences is one of the most important findings of SLA research today and that there is general acceptance that the acquisition of a second language grammar occurs in stages.

These studies on acquisitional stages delivered some of the most important principles known to the acquisition of second languages. Two of these principles came from studies of Spanish or studies that include it as a second language.

One of these studies was Andersen (1983) in which he set forth the transfer to somewhere principle which states that language learners will transfer L1 structures into their L2 if the structure renders itself to similar contexts in the L2 and it already exists in their L1. Andersen (1983) tested this principle on data from the acquisition of several languages including Spanish. The author tested the principle on the acquisition of clitic pronouns and the SVO word order of Spanish as a second language by L1 speakers of English. The data were gathered from a larger study of 16 children and 2 adult native speakers of English living in Puerto Rico. Andersen examined several transcribed conversations of 30 to 90 minutes. He looked for examples of post verbal placement of object pronouns, a pattern found in English. The transfer to somewhere principle predicts that because Spanish has both preverbal and post-verbal direct object placement, learners of English will use the post-verbal position first as a sign of transfer from their L1. The author also analyzed in detail the data from one of his subjects and found that his subject followed different strategies to cope with different sorts of preverbal clitic pronouns. The form of the clitic pronoun is a difficulty separate from its position, and that it is evident that post verbal position poses fewer problems. And, preverbal position is problematic mainly for third-person pronouns if form is separated from position. Andersen (1983) concludes that a probable cause of the strategies followed by his subject is the simplicity of first person pronouns vs. the complexity of third person pronouns, the preference of one word order (SVO) and the transfer from English SVO to this preferred order. The author also provided an account of the necessary conditions for the operation of transfer from a learner's native language to either promote or delay acquisition of a given form or construction in the target language although the transfer to somewhere principle still does not explain all data provided by the learner, it does provide a clearer basis for understanding when transfer occurs and how it operates (Andersen, 1983).

Andersen (1991) presents another piece of seminal work on general SLA theory. Andersen's (1991) work dealt with variation present in interlanguage data and showed that this variation reveals some of the principles that guide the processes of second language acquisition. He worked within the tense and aspect line of research specifically on the Spanish preterit and imperfect morphemes. He analyzed the encoding of tense and aspect in the Spanish of two children native speakers of English living in Puerto Rico at two time periods. The author found that learners used a system of past tense where one form is mapped to one meaning. This finding has been widely known as the one-to-one principle in language acquisition. Not only did Andersen (1991; 1983) discovered that learners go through a stage of mapping one word to one meaning, but also he set the basis for the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis. A hypothesis that states that

irregular past is initially interpreted by learners as marking inherent aspect and not past per se, that the past marking gradually spreads from punctual events to telic events and then to dynamic verbs and finally to all verbs, and that the gradual and later development of the use of Preterit and Imperfect morphology as grammatical aspect marking follows from the fact that such marking is less relevant to the meaning of the individual verbs. This study is important because it shed light on the fact that learners learn aspect before tense and that verbs are not learned as lexical items. It is also important because it showed evidence that learners acquire sentence structure (i.e., verb phrases) and inherent aspect in stages. Andersen's (1991) findings marked the onset of an entire area of research during the last decade. This line of work has shed light on the universality of the processes of second language acquisition for the Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis has been proven to be true in the second language learning of a variety of languages. These languages include languages with poor morphological verb marking such as English (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000), languages that has morphological rich verb marking such as Spanish (Cadierno, 2000; Camps, 2000; Camps, 2003; Comajoan & Pérez Saldanya, 2005; Liskin-Gasparro, 2000; Lopez-Ortega, 2000; Montrul, 2004; Salaberry, 2003), among other languages.

Learning processes

Hulstijn (2003) declares that there are two popular views on what it means to learn a second language. One of these views holds that it means months and even years of intentional study and the deliberate memorizing of thousands of words, their meanings, sounds, and spellings alongside dozens of grammar rules. The other view believes that much of this intentional learning is alleviated by processes of incidental learning that involves the picking up of words and structures by engaging in a variety of communicative activities (i.e., reading and listening). During this process the learner's attention is focused on the meaning rather than on the form of the language. This particular view of language learning has yielded several pedagogical as well as empirical studies on the focus on meaning theory in English. Most of these studies focus on the acquisition of lexical items and reading comprehension because of the belief that morphology (i.e., form) cannot be acquired incidentally or that it is acquired through rules. However, one study of Spanish SLA has demonstrated that learners also acquire the form incidentally by means of exposure.

Lee (2002) explores, empirically, the possibility that acquisition can occur without explicit instruction (i.e., incidentally). The author asked whether L2 learners are able to acquire unknown morphological forms, specifically 3rd person singular Spanish future marker -á, without being instructed directly about that form. He also asked whether the frequency of exposure and lexical cues had any influence on the acquisition of this marker. He studied data from 183 first and

second semester Spanish learners, all native speakers of English who had not received formal instruction of this form. The data were collected via a series of tasks that included a modified text with different amounts of the target structure (n= 6; 10; 16) with and without temporal adverbs, and recall tasks. Learners were able to recall more forms when lexical temporal expressions were present, but all learners showed gains after each exposure. The author concludes that incidental acquisition of morphology (i.e., form) does occur and that it is guided by different factors such as frequency of exposure and presence of temporal expressions. This study is evidence that exposure to the input is a crucial element of SLA and that learners process meaning before form, but that form is also noticed and acquired for comprehension. This finding is very important because it changes the view that grammar is only learned by the application of rules and not by the exposure to it.

Linguistic structure and Language characteristics

Another area in which Spanish SLA has influenced research in general SLA has been on the acquisition of complex structures. This area of research is important because it studies the acquisition of structures that are otherwise limited in communicative value and/or saliency. One such structure is the Spanish subjunctive. This area has been widely researched in Spanish. Collentine (1995) serves as the onset of a series of studies especially with regard to instructed language learning that resulted in another area of research with great generalizability to SLA theory because of insights regarding complex grammar structures.

Collentine (1995) was guided by the fact that foreign language learners of Spanish rarely select mood even after being exposed to it several times in class. Therefore, he set out to investigate the extent of the morphological and the syntactic development of intermediate level learners. He asked whether intermediate foreign language learners of Spanish operate closer to the pre-syntactic or the syntactic stage of the developmental continuum (i.e., from pre-syntactic to syntactic construction). He accomplished this by asking whether intermediate-level learners of Spanish were generally limited to producing simplistic grammar or whether they could produce complex syntax, what the ratio of nouns-to-verbs in the speech of these learners was, and whether learners use grammatical morphology elaborately. He collected data via two tasks. The first one was recorded conversations; the second was a controlled oral-production task constructed to induce utterances with noun phrase clauses. Collentine (1995) found that intermediate learners were still at the pre-syntactic-stage, but that learners use of verbal morphology suggests that they have the ability to operate somewhere between the pre-syntactic and the syntactic stages, and that learners can use syntactic-stage operations too. He also found that a substantial portion of his subjects used simplification (i.e., omission of que) in their speech. He explains that learners may

be using this strategy to avoid producing the subjunctive, or that learners depend on principles of English syntax to help them produce complex utterances. The author concludes that learners are not ready to produce complex syntax spontaneously and to make subtle morphological distinctions.

Motivated by findings from Lee (1987), Collentine (1995) findings are important because directed the field of second language acquisition towards the study of the acquisition of complex structures and has shed light on the fact that learners are not ready to produce complex syntax spontaneously and to make subtle morphological distinctions (i.e., mood selection) until they reach what the author calls the syntactic stage. This study not only has promoted an area of research on complex syntax represented by studies in areas of foreign language learning such as Collentine (1997; 2004) and Farley (2001), but also it has served as a starting point for studies related to the acquisition of complex structures in general second language acquisition such as Gudmestad (2006), Isabelli & Nishida (2005), and Lubbers Quesada (1998).

Instructed learning

An important issue for both theory building and for language pedagogy concerns the effect formal instruction has on the acquisition of grammatical features . Two ideas have guided the research on the effect of formal instruction or acquisition in general. One of these ideas is the interest in output and language production, the other is the role of input and interaction (2004). While approaches favoring the primacy of input are somewhat at odds with theories about the innateness of language (e.g., UG), they are not completely incompatible (VanPatten, 1997). Glass and Pérez-Leroux (1997) also point out that while researchers agree that input plays a significant role in acquisition, questions regarding the processing of input remain to be answered. VanPatten has devoted nearly three decades in the search for an answer to this question. He has proposed a model of language learning that goes beyond the classroom. His investigation has developed a theory of language learning based on the processing of Input as well as a pedagogical approach to the teaching of foreign languages. Because this theory is the result of years of investigation and different published studies that have influenced the investigation of foreign language learning and teaching in general, I will give a summary of what it consists of and examples of studies that have used it as their theoretical framework..

VanPatten (1996; 2004) proposes a model that addresses the specific issue of how intake, the portion of the input that does get processed and is then a candidate for integration into the learner's developing system, is derived from input and which psycholinguistic strategies the second language learner tends to rely on during input processing. Forms that become part of the intake may not become part of the developing system right away. It may take several exposures

to the form for it to become part of the developing system. Once the learner notices this part of the intake, learning is said to take place and a reorganization of the developing system is said to happen. VanPatten's (1996; 2004) line of research has yielded two main principles that guide learners on the processing of input. These two principles are subdivided into several sub-principles each and are the results of empirical evidence gathered mostly from learners of Spanish as a foreign language with English as their first language. The principles are The Primacy of Meaning Principle and The First Noun Principle which are presented in Appendix A.

From this theory of learning, VanPatten (1996) proposes a pedagogical approach called Processing Instruction. Lee (2004) describes it as a very well described intervention (i.e., instruction) that intercedes as learners process input rather than at the time they formulate output. This instruction's intent is to affect the learner's processing strategies so that they process input for both form and meaning triggering a more accurate processing of the input. By doing so, learners supply better data to their developing systems. Processing instruction includes two features: explicit information on forms, and processing strategies along with structured input activities. In other words, this type of instruction addresses a processing problem by correcting an inappropriate processing strategy or by instilling an appropriate one (Wong, 2004).

Because the studies comparing Processing Instruction to Traditional Instruction are numerous, I will present only one study, its methodology, and its findings. VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) investigated the effects of processing instruction based on the principle 3 in VanPatten (1996) that later became principle 2 in VanPatten (2004) of the Input processing which states that learners process a default strategy that assigns the role of agent to the first noun or noun phrase they encounter in a sentence. This principle is called the "first noun principle". This principle can be overridden by lexical semantics and event probabilities and learners will adopt other processing strategies for grammatical role assignment only after their developing system has incorporated other cues. VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) argued that this processing principle (formerly strategy) may cause learners of Spanish a number of problems in delivering intake to the developing system. They studied data coming from three groups. The first group was a control group that received no instruction. The second a group defined as the "traditional" group who received instruction based on one of the most widely adopted college-level textbooks and accompanying workbooks. The third group was called the "processing group" who received instruction developed by VanPatten which was based on the processing instruction approach. The authors asked whether altering the way in which learners process input had any effect on their developing systems, whether this effect, if any, was limited solely to processing more input or whether instruction in input processing would have an effect on output, and whether this effect was the same as the one traditional instruction has. They collected data through an interpretation task and a written task. Their independent variables included five sentences in

the OVS word order, five in a + OVS and five distracters in SVO, they also included time (i.e., pre- and posttests) and task. The authors found that on the interpretation task, there was a main effect for instruction, a main effect for time, and a significant interaction between instruction and time. Post-hoc tests revealed that the main effect for instruction was owing to the fact that the processing group made significant gains, whereas the traditional and control groups did not. The main effect for time was due to the fact that the post-test scores were significantly greater than the pre-test scores and the processing group scored higher in the post-test than the other groups. The results suggested that processing instruction is more beneficial than traditional instruction, that altering the way in which learners process input data does have an effect on their developing systems, the effect is not limited to input processing but is also observable in output, and that processing and traditional instruction have differential effects, with processing instruction being superior overall.

Cadierno and VanPatten's (1993) study is a sample of the number of studies that has demonstrated the effectiveness of processing instruction and processing input in the acquisition of instructed second languages. This line of research has molded the teaching of foreign languages such as French, Spanish, and Italian in the U.S. and England. Researchers using this theory as a their framework have discovered that Input Processing and Processing Instruction are superior to other methods in achieving the goal of the processing of the input, whereas they have shown to be as good as others with regard to production. Some of the authors following this line of research are Farley (2001) in Spanish, Wong (2003) in French, and Benatti (2001) in Italian.

Not only has input processing theory and processing instruction re-shaped foreign language instruction, but also they have been proven to aid the second language acquisitional processes. This is possible because processing instruction is well informed of the SLA processes at play in the learning of second languages and uses them as aiding tool to help learners acquire second languages in a more effective way.

Research Methodology

Another area of research in which Spanish studies have shown their influence and success in achieving their goals of SLA pointed out by Bonch-Bruevich et al. (2001) regarding the adoption of approaches to guide, form, validate, and advance SLA studies is the study of the acquisition of copula choice. Because of the limited space, I will describe the article with the greatest generalizability in this area and will point out the influence it has had within the area of general SLA.

Geeslin (2000) presents innovative work on SLA that overarches to different sub-areas of inquiry within the acquisition of Spanish and languages in general. First, it fulfills the need to

bring about the type of approach mentioned above by combining methodologies from three areas of inquiry, SLA, theoretical accounts, and Sociolinguistics. Geeslin (2000) moves away from an error analysis approach to an analysis of contextual features on copula choice and adds analyses used in sociolinguistics to support her claim that many contextual features can be identified as relevant to the copula + adjective distinction in learner Spanish. In her study, Geeslin (2000) follows theoretical accounts on the use of copula in monolingual Spanish (i.e., Clements, 1988). She asked the questions of which linguistic contextual features are significant predictors of the usage of estar at all levels of development, and which linguistic contextual features serve to describe change across time as learners progress towards the acquisition of copula choice. Geeslin (2000) collected data via a semi-structured oral interview, a picture description activity, and a contextualized questionnaire. She studied data from 77 high-school students of Spanish at different levels of proficiency. Geeslin (2000) excluded participants with high levels of contact with native speakers of Spanish, or with fluency in other languages. Geeslin (2000) coded all instances of copula + adjective. She included variables such as response type, task type, and grammatical accuracy. The latter refers to morphological features such as person and number and not the appropriateness of copula choice. Geeslin (2000) uses an innovative approach to the analysis of learner language. Her analysis is based on use and includes statistical analysis used in sociolinguistics such as forward stepwise regression. This type of analyses allowed her to test the relative effect of each feature on the usage of estar at each level of enrollment. She found that copula choice can be predicted at all levels of proficiency by factors such as dynamicity and perfectivity, but different factors also help predict copula choice at different levels.

Geeslin's work is innovative in SLA because she moves away from traditional data analysis methods (i.e., obligatory context or accuracy) and implements a method based on use. This move to an analysis based on use is evidence of the paradigm shift that L2 research experienced in the 20th century when researchers began to look at the use of learner's second languages in their social contexts (Lafford & Salaberry, 2003). This has prompted the appearance of studies that use this type of methodology in different areas of SLA research. Examples of these studies are Gudmestad (2006) on the Spanish subjunctive, Díaz-Campos (2004)on phonology, Geeslin & Guijarro-Fuentes (2006) on Spanish and Portuguese. It has also triggered a shift on the study of copula choice in the field of sociolinguistics. Examples of these studies are Díaz-Campos & Geeslin (2004) and Aguilar-Sánchez (2007)on monolingual Spanish.

Conclusion

To evaluate the impact Spanish SLA has had on the general theory of SLA, I have taken into account areas such as acquisition principles, learning processes, linguistic structure, language

characteristics, instructed learning, and research methodology in general and have presented articles that can be said have the most generalizability to general SLA theory. The overall effect that Spanish SLA has had on the field of SLA in general was evaluated and we can conclude that most of these studies have not only generalized to the general SLA theory, but they also have shaped the way in which we see, analyze, or account for second language acquisition. However, more work is needed in areas such as L2 Spanish phonology in areas such as the acquisition of stress patterns and also the acquisition of dialectal differences, or even the development of new varieties such as the United States Spanish. More work is needed in pragmatics in the areas such as the acquisition of address forms and how learners cope with pragmatic differences both in foreign language contexts and in study-abroad contexts. Second language learning settings have been compared, but more longitudinal work is need in the acquisition of Spanish in study-abroad contexts. Learner and learner strategies have been studied in detail in relation to the effects of processing instruction, but more work is needed in the overall effects of processing instruction over time (i.e., studies over longer periods of time). Even though Spanish second language acquisition research has come a long way and has influenced the general field of second language acquisition research, we are still in need of more replication studies to build a solid body of knowledge as a science.

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Appendix A
Input Processing Theory Principles

Principle 1. The Primacy of Meaning Principle. Learners process input for meaning before they process it for form.

Principle 1a. The Primacy of Content Words Principle. Learners process content words in the input before anything else.

Principle 1b. The Lexical Preference Principle. Learners will tend to rely on lexical items as opposed to grammatical form to get meaning when both encode the same semantic information.

Principle 1c. The Preference for Nonredundancy Principle. Learners are more likely to process nonredundant meaningful grammatical form before they process redundant meaningful forms.

Principle 1d. The Meaning-Before-Nonmeaning Principle. Learners are more likely to process meaningful grammatical forms before nonmeaningful forms irrespective of redundancy.

Principle 1e. The Availability of Resources Principle. For learners to process either redundant meaningful grammatical forms or nonmeaningful forms, the processing of overall sentential meaning must not drain available processing resources.

Principle 1f. The Sentence Location Principle. Learners tend to process items in sentence initial position before those in final position and those in medial position. (14)

Principle 2. The First Noun Principle. Learners tend to process the first noun or pronoun they encounter in a sentence as the subject/agent.

Principle 2a. The Lexical Semantics Principle. Learners may rely on lexical semantics, where possible, instead of word order to interpret sentences. Principle 2b. The Event Probabilities Principle. Learners may rely on event probabilities, where possible, instead of word order to interpret sentences. Principle 2c. The Contextual Constraint Principle. Learners may rely less on the First Noun Principle if preceding context constrains the possible interpretation of a clause or sentence.