**Aspectual tense choice in native and L2 English: The effect of priming**

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**Property:** Language users have a choice of aspectual tenses when describing ongoing events. In English, the present progressive (1b) is typically used to denote an ongoing activity simultaneous with speech. The present simple use (1c) is highly marked, e.g., in oral commentaries. This contrasts with French, where the *présent* (2b) and the progressive periphrasis (2c) can be used interchangeably. Thus, the forms are not exactly aligned.

**Hypothesis:** Based on the view that syntactic representations could be shared across a multilingual’s languages (Schoonbaert, Hartsuiker & Pickering, 2007), we hypothesise that L1 and L2 speakers’ choice of aspectual tense morphology will be influenced by a previously mentioned aspectual tense. In addition, since the tenses are not aligned perfectly, we expect an L1 transfer effect.

**Experiment:** We draw on findings from two experimental studies: Liszka (2009, Experiment 1), and our partial replication of that study, Experiment 2. In both studies, participants were asked to describe the events in a 9-minute video clip from the TV series *The Return of Mr Bean* while the video was playing (see instructions in appendix). Respondent data was recorded and transcribed. Participants were high-intermediate/advanced L2 learners of English with L1 French and a control group of English native speakers.

**Results:** Results (see Figure 1) show learners are as sensitive to the effects of aspectual tense priming as native speakers, albeit to different degrees. L1 speakers’ choices suggests that, when not primed, L1 speakers license both aspectual tenses in ongoing contexts. L2 speakers also chose the present simple significantly more in Experiment 1. These choices were considered an error in Experiment 1; Experiment 2 shows they may not have been.

**Conclusion:** Both L1 and L2 speakers demonstrated sensitivity to structural priming; in addition, learners were influenced by their native language. Shared syntax and syntax–semantics mismatch explanations will be discussed.
References:

Appendix:
Examples:

(1) a. She works at home on Mondays. (habitual activity)
   b. She is working at home (right now). (ongoing OR delimited, temporary activity)
   c. He runs with the ball, he scores! (ongoing activity, MARKED)

(2) a. Elle travaille à la maison tous les jours. (habitual activity)
   She works at home every day.
   b. Elle travaille à la maison en ce moment. (ongoing activity)
   She is working at home at the moment.
   c. Elle est en train de travailler en ce moment. (ongoing activity)
   She is working at home at the moment.

Instructions:
Experiment 1 (incl. of syntactic priming): You are going to watch a TV programme and I would like you to describe what is happening on the screen at the same time as you are watching. Experiment 2 (excl. of syntactic priming): Describe the events orally at the same time as the video.

Graphs:
Figure 1: Aspectual Tense Choices in Description of Ongoing Events

Note: Testing is ongoing in Experiment 2