

Tracking the Illusive Imperfect in Adult L2 Acquisition:
Refining the Hunt

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In this paper, I claim that second language acquisition research into the development of L2 temporal systems has yielded reasonable evidence for the emergence and development of the perfective past in a range of target languages, but that similar evidence for the emergence and development of the imperfective past is largely lacking. I will use previous acquisition research to assess what we know about the imperfective and to suggest new avenues of investigation that are more compatible with the semantics, discourse functions, and acquisitional sequences of the imperfective as we now understand them.

The Problem

Research on the emergence of tense-aspect morphology in adult second language acquisition has found substantial evidence for what has come to be called the aspect hypothesis. The current formulation of the aspect hypothesis predicts that

first and second language learners will initially be influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verbs or predicates in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers associated with or/affixed to these verbs. (Andersen & Shirai, 1994, p. 133)

The aspect hypothesis can be broken down into four separate claims (Shirai, 1991, pp. 9-10; see also Andersen & Shirai, 1996). These claims are stated in terms of grammatical aspect and its relation to lexical aspect.

1. Learners first use (perfective) past marking on achievements and accomplishments, eventually extending use to activities and statives.

2. In languages that encode the perfective/imperfective distinction, imperfective past appears later than perfective past, and imperfect past marking begins with statives, extending next to activities, then to accomplishments, and finally to achievements.

3. In languages that have progressive aspect, progressive marking begins with activities, then extends to accomplishments and achievements.

4. Progressive markings are not incorrectly overextended to statives.

The main effect of the influence of aspectual class is that, when interlanguage verbal morphology emerges, it is in complementary distribution, unlike in the target languages investigated in the same studies, where contrast is possible (Andersen, 1990, 1994; Smith, 1991, 1999). The predictions for initial emergence are clear: perfective with events, imperfective with states, progressive with activities. The interaction of hypotheses 1 and 2 are represented by the lines on Tables 1 and 2 (Andersen, 1991).

Tables 1 and 2

about here

The aspect hypothesis is actually a hypothesis based on prototype theory and, in fact, in Shirai's most recent work (Li & Shirai, 2000), it is called "the prototype account." Initial associations of grammatical aspect with lexical aspect are prototypical. It is not until the morphology begins to spread to other aspectual categories in increasing less prototypical combinations (or marked choices, Smith, 1991) that the system exhibits potentially nativelike contrasts (e.g., see stages 5-8, Andersen, 1991, and Table 4; also Andersen 1990, 1994). We could say that it is not until contrasts are possible in interlanguage that

grammatical aspect becomes true viewpoint aspect. (Access to nonprototypical or marked associations is what Andersen refers to as the native speaker advantage.)

The evidence for two of the four hypotheses has been relatively easy to come by, namely, (1) the spread of perfective past and (3) the use of progressive with activities, with (4), the nonuse of progressive with states requiring a different type of evidence, that of non-occurrence. When the quantity and quality of the evidence for the spread of the imperfect is compared to the sheer amount and quality of the data available for the perfective past, the evidence for the imperfective fails to measure up. In order to understand the emergence and development of the imperfective past in second language acquisition, we will need to focus our attention clearly on the imperfective rather than collecting tokens as a by-product of studying the perfective past. My goal for this contribution to the workshop is to assess what we currently know about the acquisition of the imperfective and to make recommendations for future study of the imperfective that will significantly enhance our knowledge. I will draw on studies of the L2 acquisition of Romance languages, French, Spanish, Italian, and Catalan.

The imperfect

Romance languages distinguish a perfective and imperfective morphologically in the past. French, Spanish, Italian, and Catalan share a generalized imperfective, and Spanish, Italian, and Catalan also share a morphological progressive in contrast to French which employs a lexical phrase, *en train de* with the verb *être* “be,” to express what is roughly a progressive. In this paper I will be concerned only with the general imperfect—the imparfait in French, the imperfetto in Italian, and the imperfect in Spanish and

Catalan. Although the progressive is also imperfective, its emergence is covered by hypothesis 3, and as mentioned earlier, is well documented.

The perfective forms--the *passé composé* in French, the preterite in Spanish and Catalan, and the *passato prossimo* in Italian--encode the view of a situation or event as a whole and as completed. In contrast, the imperfective past refers to the internal temporal structure of a situation, "viewing a situation from within" (Comrie, 1976, p. 24). Whereas the perfective viewpoints present a situation as closed with both endpoints, imperfectives are open, presenting situations as incomplete, with neither endpoint (Smith, 1991, p. 100). In contrast to the unitary interpretation that perfective aspect receives in the literature, imperfective aspect is characterized as having multiple characteristics. It is described as habitual, durative, iterative, and continuous (Comrie, 1976; Fleischman, 1995; Smith). As indicated by Andersen's diagram (Tables 1 and 2), the imperfect may co-occur with any lexical aspectual category (see also Smith, 1986, 1991).

Further evidence of the multiple meanings and functions of imperfective is the fact that the imperfective (although past in Romance languages) can co-occur with temporal adverbials such as *now* in English or *maintenant* in French (Fleischman, 1991; Smith, 1991). In addition, the imperfective often is associated with irrealis (Fleischman, 1995). Although these uses are unlikely to occur in input directed to low-level learners (the co-occurrence with present adverbs seems to be a literary convention), the fact remains that the imperfective has an inherent semantic range that will have to be taken into account in acquisition.

On the trail of the imperfect

Text Type

Tracking the imperfect in L2 acquisition turns out to be only partially a problem of research design. It is primarily a problem of understanding the imperfect better, and taking into account its semantic characteristics, its discourse functions, and its acquisitional behavior (as far as we know what it is). It is also a problem of understanding the acquisition and function of statives better in L2 acquisition, as statives are posited to be the primary initial carriers of imperfective viewpoint/grammatical aspect (Andersen, 1991). In addition we also need to consider the impact of task type and the quantitative analyses that we used to track the spread.

I will employ the aspect hypothesis as a convenient framework within which to structure the hunt for the imperfect, whether it is supported or not, of course, will depend on what cross-linguistic studies of the imperfect tell us once we have collected sufficient data.

On the trail of the imperfect

Text Type

By far, the most widely studied text type in SLA studies of tense-aspect has been the narrative. The obvious advantage to using narratives in the study of emergent L2 systems of temporal expression is the presumption of chronological order (Bardovi-Harlig, 1994). The narrative frame allows a researcher to understand a sequence in the absence of morphology (cf. Von Steutterheim, 1991). In addition, there has been a strong tradition of investigation of the narrative in theoretical linguistics and discourse analysis, resulting in comparable analyses of native-speaker narratives (e.g., Chafe, 1980, Hopper, 1979, Labov, 1972; Schiffrin, 1981).

In linguistic studies (as opposed to literary studies) a narrative is considered to be a text in which "the speaker relates a series of real or fictive events in the order in which they took place" (Dahl, 1984, p.116). Narrative discourse is comprised of two parts: the foreground and the background. The foreground relates events belonging to the skeletal structure of the discourse (Hopper, 1979) and consists of clauses which move time forward (Dry, 1981, 1983). The background does not itself narrate main events, but provides supportive material which elaborates on or evaluates the events in the foreground. Background clauses have many functions and may interpret, explain, evaluate, predict, or provide orientation.

Tense-aspect morphology is one way speakers distinguish the foreground from the background (Hopper, 1979). The perfective past which presents bounded or closed situations with its interpretation of sequentiality is particularly well suited for the function of the foreground, and it is in fact the dominant form of the foreground. The semantically more diverse imperfect, which captures ongoing as well as simultaneous and habitual situations, is suited to the background. The imperfective does not advance narrative time and is thus not part of the foreground (Fleischman, 1995; Silva-Corvalán, 1983). Studies of L2 narratives have shown that learners also observe these distributional patterns (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995, 1998, 2000). Giacalone Ramat's (in press) study of the acquisition of Italian reveals this distribution (Figure 1). What this tells us about our hunt for the imperfect is that we will have to examine the background of texts, and moreover, in order to have a significant number of examples from each learner, texts that are rich in background.

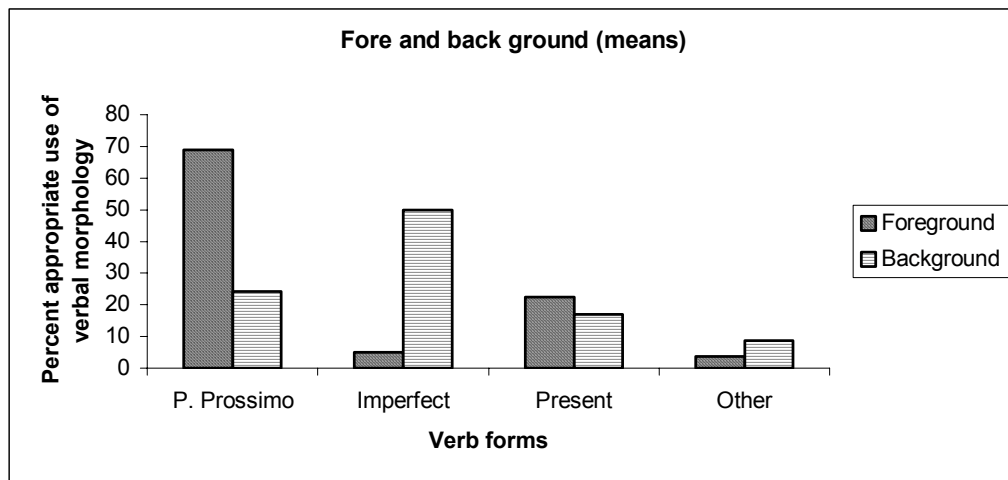


Figure 1 . *Distribution of imperfect, present and passato prossimo in Foreground and Background for four English-speaking learners of Italian.* Giacalone Ramat (in press, Figure 4)

In addition to tracking the occurrence of the imperfect, we must also track the occurrence of statives, given that statives are hypothesized to be the initial carriers of imperfect in acquisition. Although narratives yield opportunities to observe the perfective past, they do not favor the use of statives or imperfects by either learners or native speakers. Because of the structure and the goals of a narrative, the aspectual classes are unevenly distributed with achievements dominating in both NS and learner retell narratives. Roughly one-half of the predicates are achievements, whereas the other one-half is divided among the remaining three aspectual categories. A further indication that imperfect—if associated with statives—is not robust in retell narratives.

Table 3. *Distribution of Predicates in Lexical-Aspectual Categories in Film Retell Narratives by Learners and Native Speakers*

	Study	Target	<u>Lexical Aspect</u>				Total
			STA	ACT	ACC	ACH	
Bardovi-Harlig (1998)	English		226	223	206	663	1,318
	(Learners, written)						
Bardovi-Harlig (1998)	English		246	235	314	666	1,461
	(Learners, oral)						
Bergstrom (1995)	French		426	366	330	1068	2,190
	(Learners, written)						
Salaberry (1999)	Spanish		314	134		[620]	1,068
	(Learners, oral)						
Hasbún (1995)	Spanish		602	501	507	842	2,452
	(Learners, written)						
Hasbún (1995)	Spanish		223	190	207	534	1,154
	(Native speakers, written)						
Bergstrom (1995)	French		57	46	30	129	262
	(Native speakers, written)						

Note. STA=*states*, ACT=*activities*, ACC=*accomplishments*, ACH=*achievements*. [] = ACC and ACH combined into a single category

Types of narrative. Types of narratives can be divided into impersonal narratives and personal narratives (Noyau, 1984, 1990). Impersonal narratives are fictional and include well-known examples such as the Pear Stories elicited by film retell tasks (Chafe, 1980) and "Frog, Where are you?" elicited by picture book retells (Bamberg & Marchman, 1990). Personal narratives are told from a speaker's own life experiences

such as the harassment stories collected by Tannen (1989), the danger of death stories collected by Labov (1972, Labov & Waletzky, 1967), and the premonition stories collected by Silva-Corvalán (1983). For reasons of ensuring comparable language samples from all learners, the dominant type of narrative in L2 acquisition studies has been the impersonal narrative and most notably the film retell narrative. Although it is possible to elicit rich background through film and story retell tasks (see Bardovi-Harlig 1992, 1995), especially with visually rich animation as in the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* from *Fantasia* used by Lafford (1996), it is also possible for learners to comply with a researcher's request to "tell what happened" by relating the foreground alone. In any retell task there may be pressure which leads a learner to sacrifice background for foreground (c.f. Tomlin, 1984).

Noyau (1984) argued that elicited impersonal require the expression of sequences of events, they do not require reference to anterior or future events and, thus, will yield texts which lack the rich structure of a personal narrative. Noyau (1984, 1990) argues that personal narratives offer less of a structure than fictional (or retell) narratives and thus offer greater potential for observing how the learner manages temporal reference outside the bounds of an essentially chronological structure. She further argues that personal narratives may inherently offer more opportunities for background claiming that "the motivation of the speaker for sharing his own experience gives maximal expression of his repertoire" (1984, p. 115). This seems to be borne out by quantitative characterizations of narratives which show that elicited impersonal narratives (told by learners) show more foreground clauses than background clauses and native speaker personal narratives may show greater backgrounding than foregrounding: Schiffrin

(1981) reported a background to foreground ratio of approximately 3 to 1. Personal narratives told by learners also exhibit greater elaboration of the background as found by a longitudinal study of Catalan by Comajoan (2001) that yielded multiple retell and conversational narratives per learner. Consistent with the impersonal retell data from other studies (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 1995), the combined retells yield more finite foreground clauses than background clauses at a ratio of almost 3 to 2 (1.49). In contrast, in the narrative excerpts from the conversational interviews, there are more finite background clauses than foreground clauses, consistent with what Schiffrin (1981) reported for (native-speaker) personal narratives. In the personal narratives, the ratio of finite background clauses to finite foreground clauses at a ratios better than 3 to 2 (1.69), the inverse of the pattern found in the retell narratives.¹

In addition to influencing the depth of the background, text type may also influence the rate of suppliance for both perfective and imperfective morphology. Personal and/or conversational narratives show higher rates of use of verbal morphology than impersonal narratives (Comajoan, 2001 for Catalan; Giacalone Ramat & Banfi, 1990 for Italian; Liskin-Gasparro, 2000 for Spanish). Liskin-Gasparro (2000) studied eight American learners of Spanish rated at the high-intermediate to superior levels of the OPI. All three intermediate-high learners and one advanced learner produced more imperfects in obligatory contexts in the personal narrative than in the retell task. In other words, appropriate use rates were higher in personal narratives. (The other advanced learners and the superior learner were the same or slightly lower at overall all accuracy rates of tense-aspect use that ranged from 81%-97%, levels at which not much task effect is expected.) Similarly, Giacalone Ramat & Banfi (1990) report different rates of use of verb forms in

interviews related to personal experience and non-personal contributions (descriptions of illustrated stories, a fairy tale, and retelling a short film).

Restricted Stative Lexicon? (The acquisition of statives)

Given that the aspect hypothesis identifies statives as the starting point for the acquisition of the imperfect, statives form a central concern for this discussion. The image of the spread of morphology from a prototypical center to increasingly less central lexical classes evokes the image of the robust association of imperfect with a rich assortment of statives, a type of boiling and spilling over into the next aspectual class. The actual data seem to be quite different, however. Instead of a wide range of statives, many studies have found a very limited number of statives that appear in the imperfect.

Reports show that learners' stative vocabularies are very limited, often to under a half dozen verbs and are dominated by the use of *be* and *have* in Romance languages, e.g. *être* and *avoir* in French, *essere* and *avere* in Italian, and *ser/estar* and *tener* for Spanish. This finding is consistent in both adult and child second language acquisition learners, in both oral and written data on free production tasks that include both conversational interviews and narrative retell tasks. Even in English (where the imperfective is realized as the past progressive rather than a generalized imperfective) *be* dominates the statives, with 324 of the 472 stative predicates (69%; Bardovi-Harlig, 1998, 2000). These results are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4.

Studies reporting high frequency imperfect statives

Study	L2	Learners	Instruction	Task	Frequency of <i>be/have</i> in imperfective past
Harley & Swain (1978)	French	child (5)	immersion	conversational interviews	4/5 learners > 88% 1/5 learners = 67%
Bergström (1995)	French	adult	university	retell task	81% of statives
Bardovi-Harlig & Bergström (1996)	French	adult (23)	university	retell task	81% of statives
Salaberry (1998)	French	adult	university	retell task	92% of statives
Khilstedt (in press)	French	adult (advanced)	university	conversational interviews	single highly frequent verb <i>était</i> , IMP of <i>être</i> , also <i>avait</i> , <i>voulait</i>
Ayoun (ms)	French	adult	university	written narratives	<i>être</i> and <i>avoir</i> make up the majority of verbs in IMP
Giacalone Ramat (in press)	Italian	adult	university	retell task	<i>essere</i> and <i>avere</i> used by lowest learner
Comajoan (2001)	Catalan	adult	university	conversational and retell narratives	Excluded high frequency statives: 1156/1738 tokens (67%) were high frequency statives

The lack of stative variety in interlanguage may have at least three sources: dominance of high frequency statives in the respective target languages representing both potential input and the character of the language, presence of high frequency statives in NS production on the same tasks, and limited learner stative vocabularies.

Taking French as an example, *être* is identified as the most common verb in French (Müller, 1974). We have to expect some dominance of the imperfect statives by *have* and *be*, however, as Salaberry's (1998) data for native speakers of French shows:

58% of the imparfait with statives is due to the use of *être* and *avoir*. Even with the high frequency statives in NS narratives, native speakers, of course, are not limited in their stative vocabularies and Kihlstedt (in press, p. 14) reports that NS show greater use with more verbs than learners do. Imparfait shows the highest discrepancy in the range of statives used by NS and NNS. We do not infer from restricted use on the part of native speakers a limited competence, but there we cannot assume the same on the part of learners. The importance of the range of lexical statives is to be able to distinguish the acquisition of high frequency lexical wholes from imperfect morphology. As Kihlstedt observes, the real grammaticalization of imparfait begins when the imparfait is used in new lexical combinations and for new functions (p. 19).

Comajoan (2001) identified four high frequency stative verbs in the L2 Catalan production data: *ser-estar* “to be,” *haver* “existential be” (e.g. *hi ha*, “there is/are), *tener* “to have,” and *tenir que* “to have to.” Like studies of English and Dutch, but unlike the studies of Romance languages, Comajoan’s study excluded the high frequency verbs from analysis. Because he excluded these verbs from the analysis, his data represent the second stage of the hypothesized spread of the imperfective: from the high frequency statives *have* and *be* to the lexical statives en route to activities. And this is exactly the path that Comajoan reports. The longitudinal data are very clear about the direction and order of the spread.

Now, another question comes up, especially in light of the comparison between learner and native speaker data. The reports give the figures for verbs that appear in the imperfect. Not for statives in general. Although we would assume that native speakers control a range of statives, we have no such records of lexical development among

statives in the L2 tense-aspect literature. It remains to be seen what learners' stative vocabularies are. As the ESF studies have observed, acquiring verbs is a prerequisite to using verbal morphology. We also need to learn about the role of the lexicon in the case of statives and the spread of the imperfect. In retrospective interviews, learners who performed a reaction time experiment in English by Collins and Segalowitz (2002b) reported not having seen certain statives in the past prior to the experiment. This was reported for a variety of statives (including *seem*, *need*, *know*, and *tastes*) by multiple learners. These reports suggest that learners may indeed recognize the statives themselves, but be uncertain as to their occurrence in the past. Although these reports report on the learners' experience learning English, they nonetheless suggest that learners may build their stative vocabularies and associate them with verbal morphology in two separate stages.

Task type

Task type is a purely methodological consideration, but it interacts with both the questions of stative vocabularies and the function of the imperfect. As in many other areas of L2 grammar, task type appears to affect rates of use of the imperfect. As might be expected, learners can be guided to produce more statives in the past when completing a cloze passage than when performing a narrative retell task. Tasks that have used mandatory production of statives show an increase in the use of imperfect. That is, when faced with statives in a cloze passage, learners seem to be able to deal with them, although they are unlikely to produce a variety of statives on their own. Early uses of cloze passages in tense-aspect research are found in Bardovi-Harlig (1992), balanced cloze passages that increased the number and diversity of statives were first used by

Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds (1995) and these were used and modified by Collins (2002). Our work shows that in the context of cloze passages, learners seem to be able to manipulate a wider variety of statives than they use on their own in free production tasks. The stative vocabularies were very carefully controlled to allow the testing of the lowest level of learners. Unfortunately, for the current discussion, these cloze passages are in English, and equivalent tasks do not yet exist in Romance languages. Nevertheless, they show that learners who do not use a wide range of stative verbs on their own, apparently can recognize and inflect a greater range of lexical statives when confronted with them on a focused production task.

Bergström (1995) compared learner's production on the *Modern Times* retell and a cloze passage modeled on it which the learners completed after the narrative. Like the retell narratives, the cloze passage had a limited number of statives, only 5 tokens with 3 types (*être* occurred 3 times.) Learners produced statistically significantly higher numbers of imperfects in Statives, Activities, and Accomplishments on the cloze passage than the narrative (no difference in the ACH). (In contrast, the use of perfective past showed no difference in the cloze and narratives except in the stative category where learners overused perfective past. This shows that task effect is slightly more complex than what might be attributed to use of explicit knowledge which would suggest an across the board improvement.)²

Text type and task type also interact as shown in Salaberry's (in press) study to appear in *Hispania*. Salaberry constructed two cloze passages out of learner production samples: one an impersonal narrative and the other a personal narrative. The cloze passage based on the personal narrative showed higher rates of use of the imperfect than

the impersonal narrative did, demonstrating that learners recognized the different type of texts, even though they did not generate them themselves.

Late acquired

Studies that have investigated the imperfect in Romance languages generally agree that the imperfect is acquired later than the perfective past as predicted by the aspect hypothesis (Giacalone Ramat Italian, 1992, 1995, in press, longitudinal; Andersen 1991, longitudinal Spanish; French, Bergström, 1995, cross sectional, Schlyter, 1990, cross-sectional and longitudinal, Noyau, Houdaïfa, Vasseur & Véronique, 1995, longitudinal). Instructional effect studies show a differential effect for perfective and imperfective past supporting the observation that imperfective is later learned even when the focus of specialized instruction (Leeman, Arteagoitia, Fridman, & Doughty, 1995; Ayoun, 2001; Jourdenais, 1998).

These results of these studies suggest to me that the timing of the eight stages sketched in Andersen's (1991) often replicated figure may be somewhat optimistic. If the emergence of the imperfect is delayed, that means that in cross-sectional studies the same learners who are observed using the perfective past may not (yet) be using the imperfective past. One illustration of how late the imperfect is acquired comes from Kihlstedt's (in press) study. In the interlanguage of the Swedish learners of French (more advanced than learners in many studies), the imparfait spreads only to activities that have already occurred in the passé composé. One possible interpretation of this is that the acquisition of the imperfect is so delayed that it begins to cross from statives to activities only after the passé composé has completed its spread across the dynamic predicates, all the way to activities. (Another possible interpretation is that the passé composé emerges

as a default past and is only gradually replaced in specified environments by the imperfect. This is the interpretation that would be favored by Salaberry, Wiberg, for example.) The behavior of imperfect statives is crucial in determining which interpretation should be favored. That is evidence that we hope to have through empirical studies.

The issue of the timing of emergence interacts issues of text type. It could easily turn out that the imperfect looks like it appears even later than it does because the narrative tasks that we have thus far employed in the field favor the perfective past and therefore require that a learner be relatively secure in his use of the imperfect in order to use it at all in those tasks. That is, the narrative tasks may be biased against (early) use of the imperfect.

To say that the imperfect is late acquired begs the question of why it is acquired later. Whereas the perfective past may seem to be unified (at least in its prototypical reading), the imperfect with its many meanings, may be inherently more difficult from the perspective of establishing a form-meaning association. This was noted by both Bergström (1995) and Ayoun (2002, ms) that learners simply have more to acquire in terms of multiple meanings. Kihlstedt (in press) also notes the range of functions (habituality, progressivity, characterization) of the imparfait and suggests that early adherence to the one-to-one principle (Andersen, 1984) will cause learners to use one of the functions to the exclusion of others.

Analysis

Relevant to the discussion of the acquisition of any verbal morphology investigated within the framework of the aspect hypothesis is that two different

quantitative analyses have been employed, namely, the across-category and the within-category analysis (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, in press). The across category analysis answers the question "Where do various morphemes occur?" and calculates the sum of all of the occurrences of one morpheme, let's say the imperfect, in all of the aspectual categories and asks where it occurs the most. This analysis is greatly influenced by the number of predicates produced. Because native-speaker and learner narratives show roughly the same distribution of predicates in different aspectual categories (namely a dominance of achievements with similar low levels in the other 3 classes), this analysis rarely shows morphological development.

In contrast, the within category analysis, which asks "How are each of the lexical aspectual categories marked?," takes the sum of all the predicates *within* a lexical category and calculates the distribution of different verbal morphemes. This shows how a specific lexical category is inflected. Because each lexical category is analyzed independently of the others, this analysis is insensitive to the fact that some categories naturally have more members than other categories. As a result, the within category analysis reveals how the morphological marking of a lexical category changes over time. Although the across-category analysis is superior for capturing frequency effects such as the investigation by Shirai (1991), the within-category analysis better reflects developmental changes. The use of two, often unidentified, quantitative analyses often makes it difficult to evaluate or compare claims made in studies. (For a thorough discussion of the analyses, see Bardovi-Harlig, in press).

Closing in on the Imperfect

My overriding recommendation is that we need to modify our research to focus on the imperfect itself, rather than to collect tokens of it as a byproduct of research on the perfective. This is the approach that unites all of my suggestions to follow. Although natural production and naturalistic production tasks have been highly valued in studies of tense-aspect in second language acquisition, there is a role to be played by processing and judgment tasks as well.

A second methodological consideration related to the ordering and timing of emergence of the imperfect is the level of development of the learners. Because the imperfect is later learned, it will be necessary to include more advanced learners in the participant pool—without dropping the lower level learners. It may also be necessary to look at developmental level of learners more finely to be able to observe a stage such as the spread of imperfect to lexical statives rather than just larger jumps from high frequency statives to activities.

If I may be permitted a caveat before suggesting elicitation tasks: Although some tasks have already been employed in the literature as indicated, most of the tasks that I will suggest have either not been piloted or have been used with single learners. All of these will need to be carefully piloted before they are employed in any large scale investigation.

Use texts that make central use of imperfective: The case for descriptions

We need to expand the scope of our investigations beyond the narrative. If the main use of verbal (temporal) inflections is to distinguish the main point or goal of the talk from supporting evidence, then in the construction of the narrative, chronological action is emphasized against all else. In contrast, in descriptions, states are highlighted

and action is relegated to the explanatory (von Stutterheim & Klein, 1989; von Stutterheim, 1991). Exploring descriptions, then, would allow the investigation of states when they are central to the text rather than incidental.

Von Stutterheim and Klein (1989) argue that narrative structure, grounding, and description can be understood in a more general approach to main structures and side structures. In a narrative, the foreground answers the question "What happened next?" with unbounded states, habituals, and generics excluded. In contrast, in a description, specific temporal reference is normally excluded, and temporal location on the time axis leads to side structures, "exactly the reverse picture" from the narrative (Von Stutterheim, 1991, p. 391). However, what links inquiry into different discourse types, and studies of L2 tense and aspect, is the observation that the dominant temporal relation is determined by the discourse type (Von Stutterheim, 1991). Von Stutterheim reports that learners of German are able to negotiate both discourse types by essentially the same means: reliance on the discourse type and the inherent temporal properties of the utterances. In a narrative, temporal reference is moved forward by bounded events; in a description, unbounded states imply the maintenance of the temporal frame. Regardless of discourse type, learners use the limited linguistic means at their disposal to distinguish the main structure from side structures. This suggests that descriptive tasks should be as successful as narratives with beginning learners; by studying descriptions, researchers will be positioned to observe the emergence of the imperfect/tense-aspect morphology in another genre which can initially be navigated by learners prior to the acquisition of morphology.³

The methodological challenge with descriptions is twofold (at least): Maintaining the focus on past time reference and finding topics that generate descriptions of sufficient length to constitute a reasonable sample. Promising prompts which have a past time reference were employed by Jourdenais (1998) in which learners were asked to describe their initial experiences and impressions during their first job experiences, during their first few days of college, and as they began to learn Spanish. Haines (2002) used a promising topic in which a learner was asked to identify a favorite character from a movie and tell why the character was her favorite. (Interestingly, Haines's learner used the past to describe her favorite character's attributes; it is likely that the retell task which preceded the description may have primed her for the use of the past.)

In the interest of ensuring potentially comparable language samples from learners, film might again be pressed into service. It is also possible that some highly visually evocative film excerpts could serve to elicit similar descriptions from multiple learners.

Second choice for production tasks: Personal and personalized narratives

Although I think that the most gains are to be made by eliciting descriptions, narratives can also be manipulated to elicit more backgrounding. One obvious means is to employ the personal narrative as discussed above (see Liskin-Gasparro, 1996 for a personal learner narrative in Spanish). A second means that allows the researcher to maintain content control over the narrative is to ask learners to produce personalized narratives in which learners take the role of a protagonist in a film or story and to tell the story from the first person perspective. Initial investigations into this type of text indicate that learners show quite a different use of tense-aspect forms in such narratives (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999a). Salaberry's use of an impersonal and a personal text to create cloze

passages also indicates that learners respond to the differences in test types even when they do not create them themselves.

Study the acquisition of statives

Studying the acquisition of lexical statives seems to be crucial for the study of the imperfect. The first order of business seems to be to determine whether the acquisition of statives and the acquisition of lexical statives represent two processes or one. That is to say, do learners learn lexical statives and then apply their developing rules for tense-aspect morphology to them or do they acquire imperfective statives separately as wholes? Kihlstedt (in press) suggests that the early appearances of high frequency imperfective states in adult second language acquisition are not analyzed and that grammaticalization of the imperfect is not observed until it extends to activities (on which perfective has already occurred), or to new states. It is the acquisition of the low(er) frequency states that seems of particular importance to this inquiry. As expected, Kihlstedt finds that a developmental difference seemed to exist between learners who restricted their use of imparfait to high frequency states and those who extended it to dynamic verbs. This factor correlated with lexical variation and the range of aspectual values expressed. (p. 30).

One route to studying learners' knowledge of statives would be to follow various controlled production tasks (see discussion below) with vocabulary familiarity tests of the type used in vocabulary research. For example, a test such as the VKS (the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale; Wesche & Paribakht, 1996) which tests depth of knowledge could be modified to test stative vocabulary. The VKS tests at least five levels of knowledge including self-evaluated familiarity, suppliance of synonyms, and the production of the

item in a sentence. Many other types of vocabulary tests are available as well (see, for example, Nation, 1990, 2001). Putting the perfective, imperfective, and base forms of verbs on the test as separate items could potentially provide knowledge as to whether learners store the forms separately (as a formulaic interpretation may suggest) or as a paradigm depending on whether learners recognize all forms of the verb or only the high frequency forms. Vocabulary research, particularly in English, offers resources to tense-aspect researchers who rarely venture into vocabulary acquisition. Tests designed to investigate the acquisition of vocabulary of statives (or other aspectual categories) can be informed by the established word lists that reflect the proposed levels of vocabulary mastery (e.g., 1-2,000; 3,000; 5,000, academic word list, and 10,00 word zones; Nation, 1990, 2001).

A second route to investigating the acquisition of stative vocabulary might be experimental. For example, what effect would a stative input flood have on the developing interlanguage? In learners who show emergent use of imperfect on high frequency statives, would the introduction of lexical statives (in the present, and imperfective but not imperfect form) be sufficient to trigger the spread of the imperfective or do statives have to be introduced in their imperfect forms? These and other experiments may be necessary to learn about a process that has not been widely observed. (There is a possible confound in this suggestion, however, and that is that learners tend to first mark statives in the present/base form of the verb and present tense introduction of the statives might prolong the initial stage. The experiment could be carried out with imperfect statives.) Whichever form of the input flood is used, the results would tell us whether the addition of stative vocabulary to the interlanguage lexicon is

sufficient to jump start the spread of the imperfect first throughout the growing stative lexicon and then on to activities. If we do not find a distribution of imperfective among statives prior to the use of imperfective with activities, then this will constitute a (partial) counter example to the aspect hypothesis (imperfective may still spread from ACT to ACC to ACH). The spread across lexical statives seems to be the missing link.⁴

Manipulated tasks

Manipulated tasks will play a significant role in testing examples of statives and imperfect where learners do not show high rates of spontaneous usage. Such tasks will include cloze passages, recognition tasks, judgment tasks, and processing tasks. These types of tasks permit the researcher to control vocabulary, function of imperfective being tested, potential L1 effects, as well as other relevant features. Before discussing specific types of tasks, I will briefly consider two factors that have not yet been fully explored in the literature in the L2 acquisition on the imperfect, the multiple meanings of the imperfective and L1 effects.

Because the imperfective has a range of meanings and functions, it is important to test (at least in controlled tasks if not also by judicious use of prompts) a variety of functions. Not only is it important to determine which meaning emerges first, it is important to make sure that we inadvertently do not contribute to making the imperfective appear to emerge later than it might otherwise by presenting learners with tasks that utilize a later learned function.

Some studies of the acquisition of different readings of the imperfective have been undertaken. Working with production data from conversational interviews Kihlstedt reports the following implicational order based on the speech of advanced learners of

French: 1) Imperfect of total overlap, 2) habitual imperfect, 3) imperfect of short overlap, 4) imperfect “on the limits” (implicational scale, Table 7, no page yet). The late acquisition of habitual imperfect by Canadian Anglophones in French immersion programs has also been observed by Harley (1992). Investigations of the L2 acquisition of the various meanings of the Japanese imperfective *-te i-* which has progressive, resultative, and habitual readings are also being conducted (see Shirai, in press a; Li and Shirai, 2000 for reviews; Shirai in press b for a study). These studies show that learners acquire the imperfective in stages distinguished by its semantics.

A second factor to be taken into account in task design is the influence of the first language. Because English is often the first language when the acquisition of Romance languages is investigated, I will comment on English here, but a careful analysis is required of any first language, whenever claims are made about L1 effects. Smith portrays English as having a rich aspectual morphology whereas most L2 studies of Romance languages assume that English is impoverished because it lacks the preterite-imperfect contrast exhibited by Romance languages in the past. Smith (1986, 1991) and Comrie (1976) and others argue that the progressive is an imperfective (and is an aspectual distinction in English that is not restricted to the past). A more linguistically sophisticated approach to the differences among the tense-aspect systems involved may lead to more refined tests and approaches to the emergent system. It would certainly suggest areas where an English speaker might be expected to have no difficulty with imperfectives and where they would. (See, for example the comparative work of Shirai, 2000, for an example of an analysis based in temporal semantics rather than pedagogy.)

Production tasks. Naturally, production tasks vary in degree of control exerted by the researcher. Comajoan (in progress) is experimenting with providing the verbs for learners to use in a cartoon story construction task. In this way he guides the learners to use a range of statives as well as verbs from other lexical classes.

Recognition tasks. In this category I place the multiple choice and multiple cloze passages (Salaberry, 1998 for French, 2000 for Spanish; Shirai and Kurono, 1998 for Japanese). Cloze passages afford the opportunity to test different readings of the imperfective, a range of vocabulary, stative and otherwise, and prototypical and nonprototypical examples. Cloze passages are well represented in the general SLA literature and I won't discuss them further here.

Judgment tasks. Judgment tasks and interpretative tasks have not been fully exploited in SLA tense-aspect research. However, as work by Slabakova and Montrul (Slabakova & Montrul in press; Montrul & Slabakova, in press) shows, such tasks can be invaluable for understanding interlanguage temporal semantics in a way only hinted at by the data of production tasks. Slabakova and Montrul created a judgment task based on a well-known linguistic test of conjunction. (For a discussion of the conjunction test for perfective and imperfective, see Smith, 1991/1997, 1999.) Conjunction tests are based on the compatibility of two assertions (Smith, 1991, p.101). In the conjunction test a second conjunct is added to the sentence being investigated to test the semantic interpretation of the first. For example, Smith (p. 101) where the imperfective (in English the progressive) does not entail completion, but the perfective does, yielding (1) and (3) good, and (2) and (4) anomalous (indicated by the hatch mark).

1. John was living in London /and he may still live there

2. John lived in London /#and he may still live there
3. Mary was walking to school/ but she didn't actually get there
4. Mary walked to school/# but she didn't actually get there.

Slabakova and Montrul investigated the perfective and imperfect in Spanish asking learners to judge 56 combinations distributed across three lexical aspectual categories (STA, ACC, ACH), half of which were acceptable combinations and half unacceptable. These included items such as (5) and (6) for statives.

5. *La clase era a las 10 pero empezó a las 10:30.*

The class was-IMP at 10 but started at 10:30

6. (#) *La clase fue a las 10 pero empezó a las 10:30.*

The class was-PRET at 10 but started at 10:30

The wealth of examples in the theoretical literature lays the ground work for elicitation tasks. Slabakova and Montrul's work show how these might be adapted for the study of L2 development.

Processing tasks. An important avenue for the investigation of the aspect hypothesis is suggested by the work of Collins and Segalowitz (2002a, 2002b) in which the strength of association of lexical aspectual category and grammatical aspect is investigated. Collins and Segalowitz investigated reaction time and accuracy rates for the association of simple past in English with lexical aspectual categories (ACH, ACC, ACT, STA). The cloze passages used by Collins (1999, 2002), were computerized and became a multiple choice cloze task presented which presented three choices to the participants. Learners chose an inflected form of the verb from a target response, a prototypical response, and a distractor response. When the selection was made, the program inserted

the learner's selection into the text and the next item appeared on the screen, building on the previous selection, in the same way that a pencil and paper cloze task works. They found a significant effect in the choice of the simple past for lexical aspect for accuracy (most accurate with telics and least with statives). Reaction time shows that the learners were slowest with the association of simple past with statives. Such a design could easily be expanded to Romance languages where the association of both imperfective and perfective could be tested. Stative vocabulary can be controlled. If the aspect hypothesis holds for prediction 2, the spread of the imperfective, then we would expect faster reaction times and higher accuracy for the association of imperfective with statives, and we would expect the results with perfective past to replicate the results of Collins and Segalowitz for English.

Closing Remarks

Up to this point, research on tense and aspect in SLA has not focused specifically on the imperfective. The available research to date suggests that a specific focus on the imperfective will be necessary to understand its emergence and spread in interlanguage both in terms of the predictions of the aspect hypothesis, and beyond its framework. The study of the imperfective raises interesting issues in second language acquisition, including how such a multifaceted form-meaning association is integrated into the developing temporal semantics of interlanguage. There are many other questions as well, which the focused study of the imperfective raises, but I will leave these for another time. Suffice it to say that once the L2 research on imperfective begins, many intriguing questions will follow.

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Table 1.

Developmental Sequence for Encoding Tense and Aspect with “Past” Inflections
(original examples in Spanish)

	STATES “had”	ACTIVITIES “played”	TELIC EVENTS “taught x to y”	PUNCTUAL EVENTS “broke (in two)”
1	tiene	juega	enseña	Present
2	tiene	juega	enseña	<i>se partió</i>
3	[tenía]	juega	enseña	<i>se partió</i>
4	[tenía]	[jugaba]	<i>enseñó</i>	<i>se partió</i>
5	[tenía]	[jugaba]	<i>enseñó</i> [enseñaba]	<i>se partió</i>
6	[tenía]	[jugaba] <i>jugó</i>	<i>enseñó</i> [enseñaba]	<i>se partió</i>
7	[tenía]	[jugaba] <i>jugó</i>	<i>enseñó</i> [enseñaba]	<i>se partió</i> [se partía]
8	[tenía] <i>tuvo</i>	[jugaba] <i>jugó</i>	<i>enseñó</i> [enseñaba]	<i>se partió</i> [se partía]

Note. From “Developmental Sequences: The Emergence of Aspect Marking in Second Language Acquisition,” by R. W. Andersen, in T. Huebner & C. A. Ferguson (Eds.) *Cross Currents in Second Language Acquisition and Linguistic Theory*, p. 314.

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Table 2.

Developmental Sequence for Encoding Tense and Aspect with “Past” Inflections with Traditional Tense-Aspect Labels

	STATES “had”	ACTIVITIES “played”	TELIC EVENTS “taught x to y”	PUNCTUAL EVENTS “broke (in two)”
1	present	present	present	present
2	present	present	present	<i>preterite</i>
3	[imperfect]	present	present	<i>preterite</i>
4	[imperfect]	[imperfect]	<i>preterite</i>	<i>preterite</i>
5	[imperfect]	[imperfect]	<i>preterite</i> [imperfect]	<i>preterite</i>
6	[imperfect]	[imperfect] <i>preterite</i>	<i>preterite</i> [imperfect]	<i>preterite</i>
7	[imperfect]	[imperfect] <i>preterite</i>	<i>preterite</i> [imperfect]	<i>preterite</i> [imperfect]
8	[imperfect] <i>preterite</i>	[imperfect] <i>preterite</i>	<i>preterite</i> [imperfect]	<i>preterite</i> [imperfect]

Note. From “Developmental Sequences: The Emergence of Aspect Marking in Second Language Acquisition,” by R. W. Andersen, in T. Huebner & C. A. Ferguson (Eds.)

Cross Currents in Second Language Acquisition and Linguistic Theory, p. 314.

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Notes

¹ Cadierno (2000) reported that advanced Danish learners of Spanish who had had both foreign language instruction and 6-18 months contact in a Spanish-speaking country produced higher numbers of tokens of states compared to achievements. Ten learners produced 740 states in oral conversation compared to 323 achievements, and in the written narratives 287 compared to 221. (See "Methods of Analysis" to compare the distribution of states to achievements in other samples.) However, because only token counts were given and there were no type counts reported, it is not possible to ascertain what percentage of the states were high frequency statives (*ser/estar* or *tener*) or what degree of lexical diversity was attained by the advanced learners (discussed in the following section).

² Jourdenais (1998) also reports higher suppliance on both a multiple choice task and an essay than on the narratives. Topic may also play a role in the difference in scores in these results as a single topic was not maintained across the tasks as in Bergström's study.

³ Very few studies have investigated a range of texts (but see Giacalone Ramat & Banfi, 1990; Godfrey, 1980). Like the task comparisons, however, these studies compare rates of use rather than text structure.

⁴ I should note a bit of conceptual difficulty in writing about the study of the acquisition of statives. Whereas we usually talk about the lexical aspect of verbs and their arguments, which are realized as predicates and sentences, vocabulary research typically studies the acquisition of words or fixed phrases. This means that the basic units of investigation are different in the two inquiries. However, if we understand predicates to be compositional rather than fixed expressions, we might agree that in order to make a

distinction between *swim* (an activity) and *swim a mile* (an accomplishment) a learner must first know the verb *swim*.