Cross-linguistic influences in the L2 processing of tense/aspect

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The expression of time is fundamental to communication and the acquisition of temporal expressions is a core task for all language learners. Despite the ubiquity of temporal expression, languages vary considerably in how time is expressed structurally and functionally. In many languages, it is deeply rooted in the grammatical system because the finite verb is mandatorily marked for the categories of tense, aspect, or both, via inflectional morphology (*pull-**ed**, **was** pull-**ing***); while some languages lack grammatical categories for tense/aspect altogether. Nevertheless, all have available a range of non-mandatory temporal adverbs to express time (*yesterday, tomorrow*), which tend to interact with tense and aspect. Existing corpus studies and data from metalinguistic judgement tasks have revealed much about both beginning and more advanced L2 learners' production and explicit (or consciously accessible) knowledge: learners show initial reliance on lexical means like temporal adverbs and persistent difficulties with inflectional morphology, that might only be overcome at advanced stages (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, Lardiere, 1998a). Despite the large body of research on the L2 acquisition of temporal expression, we know very little about whether L2 learners can develop *implicit* knowledge that can be applied automatically in real-time comprehension, or whether this is dependent on the properties of the first language and/or level of L2 proficiency. In this talk, I present the results from a range of studies investigating the real-time processing of tense/aspect distinctions in the L2, and argue that the findings suggest that learners of languages with grammatical aspect are more sensitive to tense/aspect distinctions in their L2 processing, even if those L1 distinctions are not instantiated in the same way in the target language.