



Concordia Working Papers
in Applied Linguistics

Concordia Working Papers in Applied Linguistics, 6, 2015
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The role of telicity, task, and L1 in the use of the simple past tense

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Abstract

This study investigated whether two groups of ESL learners with different L1s, Mandarin and Tamil, would both have greater accuracy in the use of the simple past tense with telic verbs than atelic verbs. The Tamil L1 group was more accurate in their use of the simple past tense in obligatory environments with telic verbs regardless of the task – a fill-in-the-gaps task, an oral film retell task, and oral responses to interview questions. The Mandarin L1 group was more accurate with telic verbs than atelic verbs on both oral tasks. However, on the fill-in-the-gaps task, telicity made no difference in their accuracy of use of the simple past tense. Thus, it appears that the effect of telicity may interact with task and learner L1.

In the acquisition of the past tense, the Aspect Hypothesis states that L1 and L2 learners initially mark past tense primarily with telic verbs (Li & Shirai, 2000). Support for the early association of the telic events with the past tense is the most widely supported finding in the development of verbal morphology in interlanguage. This finding has been supported in studies of a wide variety of target languages – English, Dutch, Catalan, French, Italian, Spanish, and Japanese (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000). Despite the relevance of telicity to the learning of the simple past tense, however, to the best of my knowledge, this information is not generally known by ESL

teachers teaching the simple past tense or by ESL materials designers designing practice material on the simple past tense. Acquisition of the simple past tense is important beyond itself. There is research evidence that there is an acquisitional order for past time verbal morphology in English. Accuracy with the simple past tense precedes the emergence of the past progressive, followed by the emergence, in the following order, of the present perfect, present perfect progressive, and past perfect (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000).

Most studies of the effect of telicity have used a cloze task as the sole methodological research tool (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995; Collins, 2002a, Collins 2002b, Collins 2004). The use of a cloze task promotes the focus on form by the participants (Mayo, 2004). This task may not elicit the participants' more natural use of the simple past tense and lexical aspect. Participants' use of the simple past tense and lexical aspect may be different on a task which promotes focus on form than on a task which does not. The current study was motivated by a desire to determine whether a task which tends to promote focus on form (i.e., the cloze task) would have different results from tasks which promote the use of more unguarded use of the simple past tense (i.e., an oral film retell task and interview questions).

In addition, few studies have contrasted the use of the simple past tense by two different L2 groups in order to examine whether there might be an interaction between telicity and L1 in the use of the simple past tense. There is, however, some research to support the notion that learner L1 may influence the interaction of lexical aspect and use of the simple past tense (Collins, 2004). The current study was also motivated by a desire to investigate the question of whether the Aspect Hypothesis is universally identical to all adult ESL learners in their acquisition of the simple past tense, or whether there is some L1 influence in its application. This study sought to remedy the paucity of research on the topic of L1 influence on the Aspect Hypothesis by examining the impact of telicity in the accuracy of use of the simple past tense by two different L1 groups of ESL learners – an L1 group with a grammatical past tense in their native language (i.e., Tamil) (Lehmann, 1989) and an L1 group without a grammatical past tense in their first language (i.e., Mandarin) (Smith & Erbaugh, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lexical Aspect and Telicity

The Aspect Hypothesis proposes that the acquisition of verbal morphology is often influenced by lexical aspect (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). Lexical aspect concerns the inherent temporal properties of a verb (Binnick, 2006; Van Valin & Lapolla, 1997) together with the arguments and sometimes even adjuncts of a verb (Binnick, 2006; Van Valin & Lapolla, 1997). Within studies of the Aspect Hypothesis, the most commonly cited classification of lexical aspectual categories was devised by Vendler (1957). Vendler (1967) proposed the existence of the following four lexical aspects: states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. The telic feature distinguishes between verbs that portray a state of affairs with an inherent endpoint and verbs that portray states of affairs without an inherent endpoint. For example, the verb “finish” in the sentence “I finished my homework” would be construed as telic while the verb “watch” in “I’m watching a movie” is atelic. States and activities are *atelic* lexical aspects in that they both refer to situations with no inherent endpoint (Salaberry & Shirai, 2002). Accomplishments and achievements are *telic* lexical aspects in that they both refer to situations with a clear endpoint (Li & Shirai, 2000).

The Aspect Hypothesis and Telicity

A wide number of SLA studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between telicity and the use of the simple past tense. The common finding in these studies has been that, particularly for L2 learners with a lower level of proficiency, the simple past tense is used more accurately with telic verbs than with atelic verbs (Li & Shirai, 2000). In addition to this finding, research by Collins (2004) indicates that L1 may interact with lexical aspect and the acquisition of the simple past tense. In this study, Japanese L1 participants were often more accurate in their use of the simple past tense with achievements than French L1 participants on a cloze task. Collins found that this difference in accuracy between the two L1 groups was due to oversuppliance of the present perfect in obligatory contexts for the simple past tense by the francophone participants (Collins, 2004). Collins attributed this difference to the fact that French has a verb tense-aspect form similar to the present perfect (the *passé composé*) while Japanese does not have a verb form similar to the present perfect. See

Table 1 below for a summary of some notable studies on the Aspect Hypothesis and telicity.

Table 1. Summary of Studies on Telicity and the Aspect Hypothesis.

Study	Relevant research question(s)	Participant(s)	Methodology	Results with respect to telicity
Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds (1995)	Hypothesis: The acquisition of the simple past tense will be influenced by lexical aspect	182 adult ESL learners with a wide range of L1s; six proficiency levels from beginning to advanced	cross-sectional study; 32 short rational cloze passages	Across all six levels, telic verbs were marked for simple past tense more accurately than atelic verbs.
Collins (2002a)	Will the L1 French participants have the greatest accuracy of simple past tense use with telic verbs?	70 adult francophone ESL students; six proficiency groups based on participants' accuracy with the simple past tense on rational cloze passages	cross-sectional study; 32 passage rational cloze task	The participants had the greatest accuracy in simple past tense use with telic verbs.
Collins (2002b)	As above in Collins (2002a)	108 adult francophone ESL students; nine proficiency groups based on participants' accuracy with the simple past tense on the rational cloze task	cross-sectional study; a revised version of the rational cloze task above	As in the first study (Collins 2002a), learners used telic verbs more accurately than atelic verbs.
Collins (2004)	Hypothesis: Both L1 groups will use the simple past more accurately with telic verbs than atelic verbs.	91 adult L1 French speakers and 120 L1 Japanese students; 6 groups devised based on the participants' use of the simple past tense on the rational cloze task	cross-sectional study; the 25 passage rational cloze task from Collins (2002b)	Both L1 groups used simple past tense marking more accurately on telic verbs than on atelic verbs. Japanese L1 learners were

frequently more accurate with achievements than French L1 learners.

The greater accuracy with telic verbs may possibly be influenced by the similarity of telicity to the simple past tense. Previous studies of L2 tense-aspect acquisition have found that L2 learners at all levels of development more frequently use prototypical combinations of tense and aspect than non-prototypical combinations (Li & Shirai, 2000). For ESL learners, a prototype model may predict that English past tense verbs with an inherent endpoint are better exemplars of the simple past than verbs without an inherent endpoint. In addition, the prototypical association by both L1 groups of past tense and lexical aspect may perhaps be partially explained by the distributional principle (Andersen, 2002). This principle asserts that learners are likely to be exposed to more telic past tense forms than atelic past tense forms in the input they receive. Due to this skewed input, the learners are more likely to notice past marking on telic verbs (Andersen & Shirai, 1994).

Tiittanen's (2013) results are somewhat consistent with Collins' (2004) finding of the influence of L1 on use of the simple past tense. Tiittanen used the same participants and methods as in the current study at hand. However, the study did not analyze telicity. The results of his study revealed that task and L1 may both influence the use of the simple past tense. In this study, there was no difference between the L1 groups on the fill-in-the-gaps task. However, on a task that did not have a focus on form, the L1 group with a grammatical past tense (i.e., Tamil) used the simple past tense more accurately than the L1 group without a grammatical past tense (i.e., Mandarin). The present study used a fill-in-the-gaps task in order to make it somewhat comparable to other similar studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Collins 2002, 2004). However, unlike Collins' (2004) study, which contrasted two L2 groups that have a past tense in their respective languages (Dahl & Velupillai, 2005), the current study analysed the use of two L2 groups that differ with respect to the presence of the past tense in their respective languages.

One shortcoming with studies of the Aspect Hypothesis which only use one data collection method is that a single data collection method does not permit researchers to compare different types of learner knowledge (Norris & Ortega, 2003). Partly to allow for such comparisons, within SLA,

multiple data collection methods are often used (Chaudron, 2003). Some data collection methods, such as a cloze task, may allow primarily for the deployment of declarative knowledge, while other tasks, such as oral tasks, may allow learners to primarily draw on procedural knowledge. Current theories in skill acquisition theory such as the various versions of Andersen's *ACT* theory assert that declarative knowledge differs from procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge is often referred to as knowledge *that* and as knowledge about whether something is true or correct. It can be explicitly expressed and is stored in declarative memory. Moreover, it is slow and generalizable. In contrast, procedural knowledge is knowledge that can only be performed. It is stored in procedural memory. In addition, it is efficient and highly difficult to generalize (Carlson, 2003). There may be a gap between the participants' declarative knowledge and their procedural knowledge, as has been found in other SLA research (DeKeyser, 1997; Tiittanen, 2013; Witton-Davies, 2004).

Research Questions

The study investigated the following research questions:

- a) Will both the Tamil and Mandarin L1 groups have greater accuracy with telic verbs than atelic verbs in their use of the simple past tense?
- b) Will there be an interaction between L1 and telicity?
- c) Will task have an effect on the accuracy of telic versus atelic verbs?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 21 native speakers of Tamil and 21 native speakers of Mandarin. Mandarin and Tamil were chosen because these two languages differ with respect to past tense. Tamil has a grammatical past tense (Lehmann, 1989), while Mandarin does not (Smith & Erbaugh, 2005). These languages were chosen to determine whether L1 might have an effect on telicity and lexical aspect in the participants' use of verbs in contexts for the obligatory use of the simple past tense. As can be seen below in Table 2, the two L1 groups had few differences in the proportion of males and females in their groups (Tamil group: 16 females and 5 males; Mandarin group: 15 females and 6 males). Their mean age at

the time the research was conducted was similar (Mandarin: 35.7 years old; Tamil: 33.3 years old). Their mean age of arrival in a country in which English is spoken was also similar (Mandarin: 34.2 years old; Tamil: 31.1 years old). Their mean length of residence in an English-speaking country was likewise comparable (Mandarin: 1.61 years; Tamil: 2.08 years). Independent samples *t*-tests indicated that there was no significant difference between the two L2 groups in terms of these variables.

Table 2. Comparison of Participants by L1.

	Tamil	Mandarin	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Gender	16 F, 5 M	15 F, 6 M	n.a.	n.a.
Age M (SD)	33.3 years (11.2)	35.7 years (7.1)	0.417	-.256
AoA M (SD)	31.1 years (11.1)	34.2 years (7.2)	0.291	-.331
LOR M (SD)	2.08 years (2.03)	1.61 years (1.81)	0.429	.244

Note. AoA = age of arrival in an English-speaking country, LOR = length of residence (in years), *p* = statistical significance of *t*-test, *d* = Cohen's *d* for effect size

Data Collection

For the study, the following data elicitation techniques were used: the grammar section of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), an oral film retell task, interview questions, and a fill-in-the-gaps task. The OPT grammar test served as a placement test to determine the L2 level of the participant. This assessment is a timed 50-minute multiple-choice test, which consists of a variety of different grammatical structures. There are 100 multiple-choice items on the exam, each of which has three different choices (e.g., Water is to boil / is boiling / boils at 100°C).

The film retell task was intended to tap primarily the participants' procedural knowledge. Arguably, this task required the use of procedural knowledge since it involved spontaneous, meaning-based, productive use of language and was performed under time pressure. This task was *not* intended to elicit a balanced number of telic and atelic verbs. In this task, the participants were shown a video of a short story in which a man joined a health club, did various types of physical exercise, and spoke to the owner of the gym. Before showing the video, the researcher pre-taught some of the vocabulary from the video to the research participants. The video is approximately seven minutes long. The video was shown twice to the participants and each time that the participants watched the video, the researcher left the room. After the second showing of the video, the participants were asked to recount the events of the video to the researcher.

Like the film retell task, the interview questions were also designed to elicit the participants' procedural knowledge of the simple past tense, and they were also *not* intended to elicit a similar proportion of telic and atelic verbs. The respondents were asked the interview questions in Appendix A in the order shown. However, sometimes questions not on the interview schedule were asked. This was done in order to add to the naturalness of the "conversation" or to try to elicit more verbs in obligatory simple past tense environments. The following is an example of a follow-up question, within the context of the interview, the researcher asked in order to elicit another verb in an obligatory simple past tense environment:

R: (*question on interview question schedule*) Mm-hmm. OK. And what did you do last weekend uh J_____?

P: Oh last weekend I met some mm friends in Beijing. Have, have lunch.

R: Mm-hmm.

P: Yes, had lunch. With them.

R: OK.

P: Yeah.

R: (*follow-up question*) Anything else last weekend?

P: Last weekend mm last uh Saturday I doing some uh I done some homework.

R: Mm-hmm.

R: *researcher* P: *participant*

Unlike the film retell task and the interview questions task, the fill-in-the-gaps task was designed to encourage the participants to reflect on the form of their answer. The fill-in-the-gaps task was designed to allow the participants to deploy their declarative knowledge. It was assumed that the lack of a time limit on this task would permit the participants time to access their metalinguistic knowledge that the simple past tense was required in the relevant obligatory contexts. Nevertheless, given that the participants were required to actually use the simple past, it is clear that this task also elicited the use of the participants' procedural knowledge.

The task consisted of a narrative about a traveller's experiences at an airport and his/her flight. The participants were asked to write the correct form of a verb. The task required the participants to use the simple past tense, but there were also a number of distractors. The predicates on the fill-in-the-gaps task (see Appendix A) were equally balanced for both telic and atelic verbs, as well as all four lexical aspects. As seen below in Table 3, the target simple past tense forms were equally distributed amongst all of the four Vendlerian lexical aspects. There were eight states, eight activities, eight accomplishments, and eight achievements.

Table 3. Target Simple Past Tense Verbs in the Fill-in-the-Gaps Task.

States (atelic)	Activities (atelic)	Accomplishments (telic)	Achievements (telic)
enjoy	continue (looking for	ask	arrive
feel	some time)	buy	choose
know	eat (in a coffee shop)	call	decide
look	play (some video	drive (to the	fall
need	games)	airport)	find
see	speak (French)	give	get (to the airport)
think	stand (in line)	show	start
want	study (my university	tell	stop
	textbook)	walk (to the	
	watch (TV)	security gate)	
	write (in my diary)		
(n = 8)	(n = 8)	(n = 8)	(n = 8)

In addition, there were ten distractors on this task. In order to increase the likelihood that the participants would have been exposed to the simple past tense forms, all of the target forms are on the list of the 200 most commonly used simple past tense forms in the American National Corpus, which is a corpus of about 22 million words of American English, including both written and spoken data (Davies, 2008). Moreover, all of the lexemes that the target simple past tense forms belong to are also within the 900 most frequent lexemes of American English, as found on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA).

Data Analysis

The research data derived from the data elicitation procedures was analysed in the following manner. Every item in the OPT grammar test was scored as being either “right” or “wrong”. Only one of the three choices is correct. The correct answers were validated with seven native speakers of Canadian English. Items to which more than one answer was given by the validation group were excluded from the total. This resulted in the exclusion of seven items from the test. After the exclusion of these items, the maximum possible score was 93.

The study conducted a token analysis rather than a type analysis of the verbs used by the participants in the film retell task. Verb tokens in obligatory simple past tense contexts were scored as being either correct, incorrect, or partially correct. Partially correct scores were given a score of 0.5 correct. Such scores were given to verbs that were uttered both correctly and incorrectly in the same utterance, as in self-corrections (e.g., “I go, went to the store”). For the determination of lexical aspect in the film retell task, the researcher used tests for lexical aspect which had been used in previous research on second language learners’ acquisition of English tense-aspect forms (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Robison, 1995). These tests were the same tests for lexical aspect used for the target items in the fill-in-the-gaps task to determine their lexical aspect. These tests distinguished stative verbs from dynamic verbs, telic verbs from atelic verbs and accomplishments from achievements (see Appendix B).

To assist in the determination of lexical aspect, the researcher used Robison’s (1995) method for determining whether a given predicate belonged in one lexical aspect feature category or another (i.e., stative or dynamic; telic or atelic). Robison’s test first required the determination of whether the predicate was stative or dynamic. If the predicate was dynamic, the next level of this test required one to determine if the

predicate was telic or atelic. As Robison's method did not have a test for accomplishments or achievements, Bardovi-Harlig's (2000) method for determining whether a predicate was an accomplishment or an achievement was used.

The same analysis was used for the data in the interview questions as for data in the film retell task. In the fill-in-the-gaps task, the answers the participants gave for the target simple past tense verbs were classified as being "correct", "incorrect" (e.g., "choose" instead of "chose"), or "half-correct" (e.g., "choosed" instead of "chose"), if the intention to use the past tense was evident to the researcher, but the form was incorrect.

RESULTS

As can be seen below in Figure 1 and Table 4, the Mandarin group and the Tamil group had similar group mean scores on the OPT grammar test. The Mandarin-speaking learners had a mean score of 53.1% on the test and the Tamil-speaking participants had a mean score of 49.8%. An independent samples *t*-test indicated that this difference was statistically non-significant, $t(1, 40) = .708, p = .483$. Thus, it would appear that the two L1 groups had a very similar level of declarative grammatical knowledge.

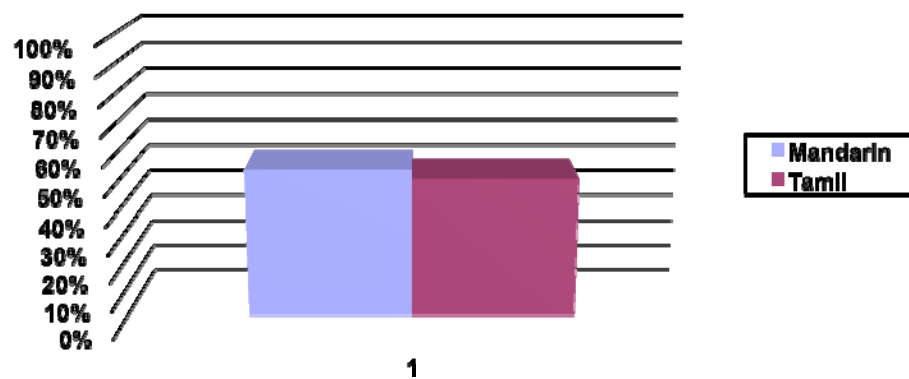


Figure 1. OPT grammar test results by L1.

Table 4. OPT Grammar Test Results by L1.

L1	N	Mean score	Standard deviation	<i>t</i> value	<i>p</i> value
Mandarin	21	53.1 %	15.3	.708	.483
Tamil	21	49.8%	15.3		

In the fill-in-the-gaps task, as shown below in Figure 2 and Table 5, there was not a statistically significant difference between telic verbs and atelic verbs for the Mandarin participants. For the Tamil L1 group, as shown in Table 5, there was an advantage for telic verbs over atelic verbs. The mean accuracy for telic verbs was 81.0%, while the mean accuracy for atelic verbs was 69.5 % ($p < .01$; $z = -3.184$; Wilcoxon). However, the effect size for the difference between telic and atelic verbs ($r = -.21$) was only intermediate between what is considered a small and medium value.

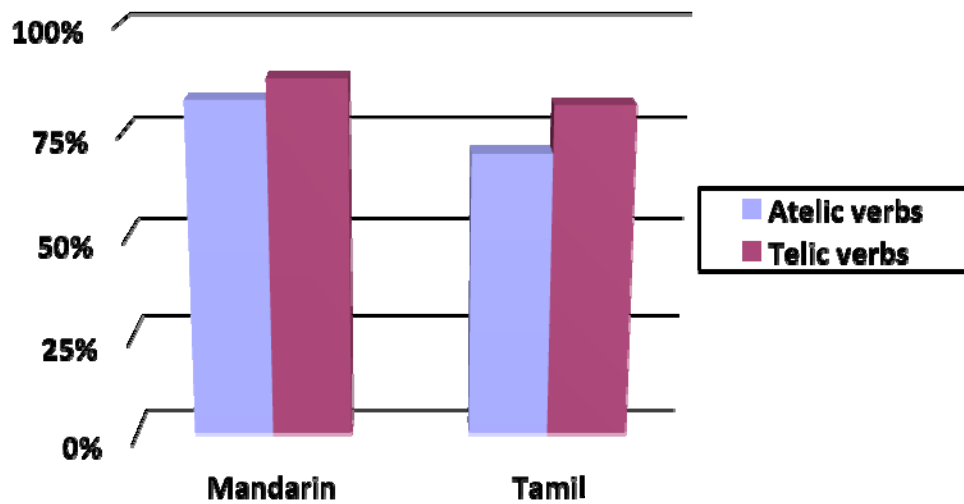


Figure 2. Differences in accuracy of telic versus atelic verbs – fill-in-the-gaps task.

Table 5. Differences in Accuracy of Telic Versus Atelic Verbs – Fill-in-the-Gaps Task.

L1 group	Atelic verbs mean score (SD)	Telic verbs mean score (SD)	Statistical significance (Wilcoxon test)	Effect size r	Type of verb with greater accuracy
Mandarin	82.2% (15.3)	87.4% (12.7)	$p = .079$ $z = -1.757$	-.19	n.a.
Tamil	69.5% (29.0)	81.0% (23.3)	$p = .001$ $z = -3.184$	-.21	telic > atelic

The results were very similar for both L1 groups on both the film retell task and the interview questions. On both tasks, both Tamil and Mandarin participants were more accurate in their use of telic verbs than atelic verbs (see Figures 3 and 4, as well as Tables 6 and 7 below). On the film retell task, the Mandarin learners had a mean accuracy of 44.6% with telic verbs and a mean of 12.0% with atelic verbs. This difference was statistically significant ($p < .001$; $z = -3.743$; Wilcoxon) and the effect size was large ($r = .589$). Tamil learners had a mean accuracy of 47.4% with telic verbs on the film retell and a mean of 26.1% with atelic verbs. This difference was also statistically significant ($p < .01$; $z = -3.119$; Wilcoxon), and the effect size was of a medium value ($r = .358$).

On the interview questions, the Chinese participants had a mean rate of accuracy of 44.5% with telic verbs and a mean of 13.2% with atelic verbs. This was statistically significant ($p < .001$; $z = -3.920$; Wilcoxon), and the effect size was large ($r = 0.71$). On this task, the Tamil participants had a mean rate of accuracy of 67.3% with telic verbs and a mean of 41.1% with atelic verbs. This was also statistically significant ($p < .001$; $z = -3.632$; Wilcoxon), and the effect size was close to a large value as well ($r = 0.43$).

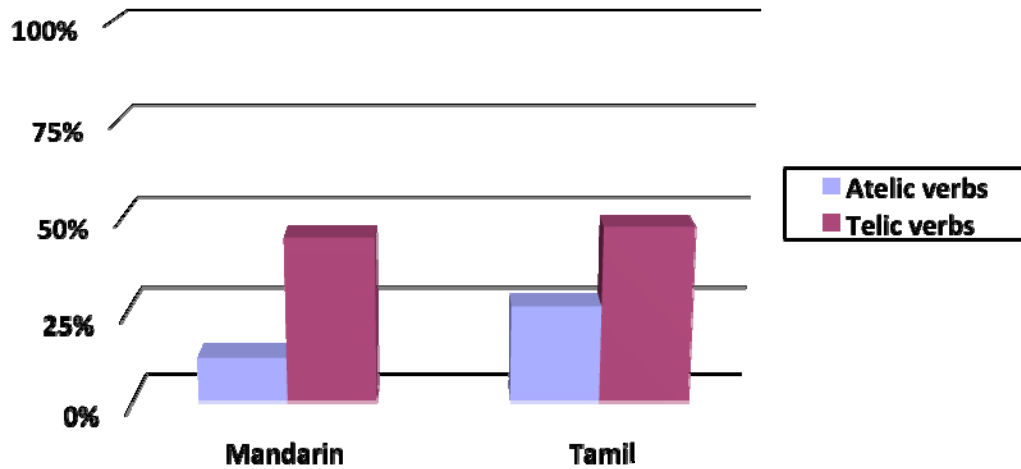


Figure 3. Accuracy with telic and atelic verbs in obligatory environments – film retell.

Table 6. Differences in Accuracy of Telic Versus Atelic Verbs – Film Retell Task.

L1 group	Atelic verbs mean score (SD)	Telic verbs mean score (SD)	Statistical significance (Wilcoxon test)	Effect size <i>r</i>	Type of verb with greater accuracy
Mandarin	12.0% (18.9) N = 21	44.6% (25.4) N = 20	$p < .001$ $z = -3.743$.589	telic > atelic
Tamil	26.1% (28.2) N = 21	47.4% (27.3) N = 21	$p = .002$ $z = -3.119$.358	telic > atelic

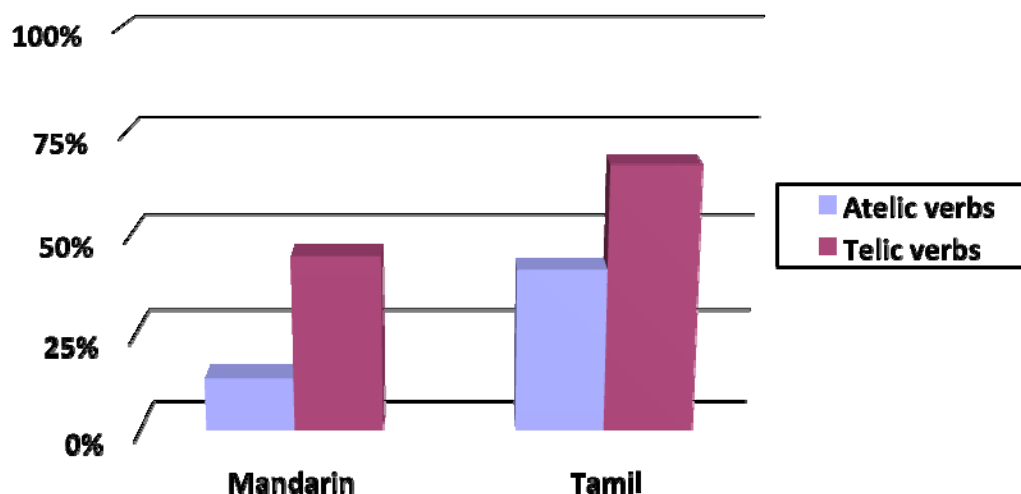


Figure 4. Accuracy with telic + atelic verbs in obligatory environments – interview questions.

Table 7. Differences in Accuracy of Telic Versus Atelic Verbs – Interview Questions.

L1 group	Atelic verbs mean score (SD) N = 21	Telic verbs mean score (SD) N = 21	Statistical significance (Wilcoxon test)	Effect size <i>r</i>	Type of verb with greater accuracy
Mandarin	13.2% (12.9) N = 21	44.5% (17.6) N = 21	$p < .001$ $z = -3.920$	0.71	telic > atelic
Tamil	41.1% (31.1) N = 21	67.3% (23.8) N = 21	$p < .001$ $z = -3.632$	0.43	telic > atelic

DISCUSSION

The first research question asked whether both L1 groups would be more accurate with telic verbs than atelic verbs. Both L1 groups had greater accuracy with telic than atelic verbs on the oral tasks. One possible reason for this is the similarity between the past tense and telic events. Telic verbs by definition have an inherent endpoint (Andersen & Shirai, 1994). There is also a conversational implicature that situations referred to by the simple past tense have an end point in past time (Declerck, 1991). Thus,

both the Tamil and Mandarin learners in the study may have been influenced by the typical usage of the simple past tense to form a prototypical notion of the simple past tense. Previous studies of L2 tense-aspect acquisition have found that L2 learners at all levels of development more frequently use prototypical combinations of tense and aspect than non-prototypical combinations (Li & Shirai, 2000). For the learners in the study, a prototype model could plausibly explain the greater accuracy with telic verbs. English verbs which have an inherent endpoint are better exemplars of the simple past than verbs which do not have an inherent endpoint. In addition, the distributional principle (Andersen, 2002) may have influenced the results as well. If the input that the participants had been exposed to had a distributional bias in favour of telic verbs, this may have been a factor in their greater accuracy with telic verbs.

It appears likely that the fill-in-the-gaps task allowed both the Tamil and Mandarin participants to access their declarative knowledge. This interpretation is supported by a stimulated recall conducted after the task. Four Tamil participants and four Mandarin participants were asked to think aloud, in their own language if they wished, about what they had been thinking while completing the fill-in-the-gaps task. Both L1 groups made verbalizations primarily about the past tense, past time, or a past event. However, telicity-related notions were not obviously apparent in their verbalizations. Thus, whatever role telicity played on the fill-in-the-gaps task, it appears that it is not readily available to conscious introspection.

The second research question asked whether there would be an interaction between L1 and telicity. It is possible that the results on the fill-in-the-gaps task were influenced by the L1s of the participants. The results on this task are somewhat similar to Collins' (2004) findings in that there was evidence of L1 influence on Collins' rational cloze task results. In Collins' study, L1 played a role in the use of one type of telic predicate (i.e., achievements). This difference was interpreted to have been influenced by the presence of a verb tense-aspect form present in French, but absent in Japanese. As in Collins (2004), the current study used participants who differed with respect to the presence of a verb tense-aspect form within their L1s. In the study at hand, the L1 groups differed with respect to grammatical past tense. Tamil has a grammatical past tense (Lehmann, 1989) while Mandarin does not (Xiao & McEnery, 2004). The Tamil-speaking participants may have been more sensitive to telicity on the fill-in-the-gaps task due to the fact that their native language has a grammatical past tense. This may have predisposed them to notice the

similarity between the semantically inherent endpoint in telic predicates and the simple past tense. Such noticing would be consistent with the Transfer to Somewhere principle. This principle asserts that ESL learners may notice some input which is similar to their L1 and then apply it in their L2 (Kellerman, 1995). The Mandarin-speaking participants may not have been as predisposed to notice the telicity of the verbs in the simple past tense. As N. Ellis (2006) suggests, L2 learners have problems with the use of linguistic categories not present in their L1. He attributes these problems partially to the notion that they are not sensitive enough to the relevant cues of the linguistic category in the L2, such as, perhaps, telicity.

The third research question asked whether task type would have an effect on the accuracy of telic and atelic verbs. The Tamil learners may have been aided in noticing the requirement for a simple past tense on telic verbs by the nature of the fill-in-the-gaps task. This task was not timed and required the participants to focus on the form of their answer, which may have predisposed some Tamil learners to notice that some predicates had a semantic endpoint (i.e., telic verbs) and required a simple past tense form. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of the efficacy of some focus on form research, such as processing instruction, which promotes the noticing of form-meaning connections (Quinn Allen, 2000). The untimed, focus on form fill-in-the-gaps task may have induced the Tamil participants to notice that many of the verbs on this task had a completed meaning (i.e., telic), drawing their attention to the requirement for the simple past tense form. These results suggest that L1 participants with a past tense in their native language may possibly be more accurate with telic verbs than atelic verbs if the task has a focus on form.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the research results on the fill-in-the-gaps task were not very robust. The effect size for the Tamil participants on this task was only intermediate between what is considered a small and medium value ($r = -.21$). In addition, the fact that the predicates used on the oral tasks were not balanced for telicity may also have influenced the results.

CONCLUSION

This study lends support to the notion that there are indeed some common developmental patterns that L2 learners exhibit with the simple past tense regardless of L1. Both groups of L1 learners exhibited greater accuracy with telic verbs than atelic verbs on the oral elicitation tasks.

However, this study also indicates that the Tamil learners, in contrast to the Mandarin participants, followed the predicted order of the Aspect Hypothesis in terms of telicity on the fill-in-the-gaps task. Thus, these results suggest that learner L1 and task may also influence the accuracy of use of telic and atelic verbs.

The results of this study may have some relevance for ESL materials designers and for ESL teachers teaching the simple past tense. ESL materials designers creating simple past tense learning tasks may wish to take telicity into account when choosing predicates for the materials. Learners may understand prototypical instances (i.e., telic verbs) as requiring the simple past tense more readily than non-prototypical instances (i.e., atelic verbs). Thus, more examples and practice with atelic verbs requiring the simple past tense may possibly be beneficial for learners.

Future studies on this topic may wish to explore the possible influence of learner L1 and task. Such studies may lend further insight to the question of whether the Aspect Hypothesis is completely universal or whether the similarity of the past tense to telicity is noticed more readily by learners who have a grammatical past tense on tasks that have a focus on form.

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APPENDIX A

FILM RETELL TASK

Please tell me everything that you remember that happened in the video from the beginning.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What's your (full) name?
2. a) What do you normally like to do on the weekend?
b) What did you do you last weekend?
c) What sort of hobbies do you have?
3. a) Let's talk about school now. What was your favourite subject in high school? (Why?)
b) i. Did you study English in your first country?
ii. (If 'yes' to above question) Did you like studying English in (country)? Why/why not?
(If 'no' to above question) When you first started studying English in Canada, did you like studying English? Why/why not?
4. a) Where were you born?
b) When did you immigrate to Canada?
c) Do you remember your trip to Canada? Can you tell me about it?
d) Do you remember your first day in Canada? What happened?
e) If you don't mind my asking, why did you immigrate here?
5. Can you tell me about a trip you took to another country or city?
6. Are you married?
 - i. (If "yes") Can you tell me about your wedding day?

- ii.(If “no”) Can you tell me about another person’s wedding celebration you attended?

FILL-IN-THE-GAPS TASK

Please fill in the correct forms of the verbs in the blanks below:

I really 1. like (like) traveling. My friends often 2. _____ (ask) me why I enjoy traveling so much. I usually 3. _____ (tell) them that I 4. _____ (believe) that traveling to other countries is a good experience. I have visited many countries, but until last year I 5. _____ never _____ (be) to England. I 6. _____ (know) people in England who often ask me to visit them there.

Last year my brother was working in England, and he 7. _____ (tell) me he missed me very much. I 8. _____ (decide) to go there to visit him during my winter holidays. My brother often writes to me but I 9. _____ not _____ (see) him for several years. This way I could see my brother and also see England. My brother was in London at that time, so I 10. _____ (call) the travel agency where my friend worked to buy a ticket to London on the date I preferred (July 2). The travel agency did not have any more flights to London on July 2, so I went to look on the internet. On the internet I could not find any more flights on that date, but I 11. _____ (continue) looking for some time. I still couldn’t find any flights with available seats on that date, so I 12. _____ (choose) a flight on July 3 instead. I 13. _____ (see) that Air Canada offered the best price. Because Air Canada offered the best price, I purchased a ticket with them. However, I was a little worried because I 14. _____ (need) to pay with my credit card and I am generally worried about the security of my credit card number. But I 15. _____ (buy) a ticket on this flight because I 16. _____ (know) I could not afford anything more expensive.

On the day of the flight, my friend 17. _____ (drive) me to the airport. I 18. _____ (get) to the airport early. The first thing I did at the airport was I went to the Air Canada desk. At the Air Canada desk, the Air Canada employee 19. _____ (ask) to see my electronic ticket. Unfortunately, I had lost my ticket. I was really worried that I would 20. _____ (miss) my flight. However, I was worried for nothing. I 21.

_____ (show) the Air Canada employee my passport. Then he 22.
_____ (give) me another ticket.

Before my flight, I had to find something to do, so I 23. _____ (watch) TV in a bar at the airport. I also 24. _____ (play) some video games and 25. _____ (write) in my diary. I was also a little bit hungry, so I 26. _____ (eat) in a coffee shop. At the coffee shop, I 27. _____ (study) my university textbook. An hour and a half before my flight, I 28. _____ (walk) to the security gate. At the security gate, I 29. _____ (stand) in line for a long time. When it was finally my turn, I handed the security guard my ticket. He examined it very carefully. I 30. _____ (feel) nervous because I didn't know why he was looking at it like that. Finally, he said in a loud voice, "The date for this ticket 31. _____ (be) wrong!" He 32. _____ (look) angry. I 33. _____ (start) to talk, but before I could finish my sentence, he 34. _____ (stop) me at once by saying "Oh, I'm sorry! I made a mistake! I 35. _____ (think) it was Saturday."

I was really angry! I was going to make a complaint about him, but I didn't because I just 36. _____ (want) to go to the gate that my flight was leaving from. So, after going through the security gate, I just 37. _____ (find) the gate that my flight was leaving from. While I was waiting there, I talked to one of the other passengers waiting there. He was from France, so I 38. _____ (speak) French with him to practice my French.

The flight was mostly OK, but as the first movie was ending, the plane began to shake up and down, and one of the passenger's bags 39. _____ (fall) down. All this caused me 40. _____ (feel) scared.

When the flight finally 41. _____ (arrive) in London, I was so happy. I can't honestly say that I 42. _____ (enjoy) this flight. When the plane was finally on the ground, I said to myself "I 43. _____ never _____ (forget) this trip!"

APPENDIX B

DETAILS ON LEXICAL ASPECT TESTS

Tests for states and activities from:

Robison. R. (1995). The aspect hypothesis revisited: A cross-sectional study of tense and aspect marking in interlanguage. *Applied Linguistics*, 16 (3), 369 – 370.

A. Tests for Stative/Dynamic

B. Tests for Telic / Atelic

A Tests for Stative/Dynamic

1. Non-states are regularly used in the present progressive, states normally are not.
 - a * Carla is knowing the answer.
 - b Carla is working.

2. Non-states can insert in *do*-clefts, states cannot. Equivalently, only non-stative predicates can answer the question *What did he do?*
 - a * What Carla did was know the answer.
 - b What Carla did was work.

3. With the verb in the simple present form and in a non-narrative context, the predicate is stative if it can be assigned a clearly non-habitual meaning.
 - a Carla knows the answer. (non-habitual implies state)
 - b Carla works (habitual implies non-state)
 - c Carla builds a house (? implies non-state)

B Tests for Telic/Atelic

1. Imperfective paradox. Assume that SUBJECT is (in the process of) PREDICATE [verb in present progressive form]. If SUBJECT stops in the middle, is it true that SUBJECT PREDICATE [verb in present perfect form]? If the answer is 'yes', the predicate is atelic, otherwise it is telic.

a Assume that Ana is (in the process of) studying. If she stops in the middle, is it true that she has studied? [yes]

b Assume that Victor is (in the process of) walking home. If he stops in the middle, is it true that he has walked home? [no]

2. Which of the following frames is more natural, assuming the interpretation that the entire situation occurs throughout the duration of the time period?

Atelic He/she can _____ FOR two minutes (hours, days, etc.)

Telic He/she can _____ IN two minutes (hours, days, etc.)

a ? Victor can walk home for ten minutes (or 2 hours, etc.)

Victor can walk home in ten minutes (or 2 hours etc.)

b Ana can study for ten minutes (or 2 hours etc.)

? Ana can study in ten minutes (or 2 hours etc.)

3. Which of the following frames is more natural, assuming the interpretation that the entire situation occurs within the time period?

Atelic He/she spent two minutes (hours, days, etc.) _____ (Verb in present participle form)

Telic It took (him/it/me) two minutes (hours, etc.) to _____

a ?Victor spent ten minutes (or 2 hours etc.) walking home.

It took Victor ten minutes (or 2 hours etc.) to walk home.

b Ana spent ten minutes (or 2 hours etc.) studying.

? It took Ana ten minutes (or 2 hours) to study." (Robison 1995, pp. 369 – 370)

In addition, for "enjoy", I used two tests from Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1998). Narrative structure and lexical aspect. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 20, 471–508.

'still' test:

If the predicate is ungrammatical with "still", it is a state. Otherwise, it is dynamic.

Present perfect progressive test:

If the predicate is ungrammatical in the present perfect progressive, it is a state. Otherwise, it is dynamic.

I used the following ordered tests for accomplishments and achievements reported in:

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (2000). *Tense and aspect in second language acquisition: Form, meaning, and use*. Oxford: Blackwell.

“Step 1: State or nonstate

Does it have a habitual interpretation in simple present?

If no – state (e.g. – *I love you.*)

If yes – Nonstate (e.g. – *I eat bread.*) → Go to step 2.

Step 2: Activity or nonactivity

Does ‘X is V-ing’ entail ‘X has V-ed’ without an iterative/habitual meaning? In other words, if you stop in the middle of V-ing, have you done the act of V?

If yes – Activity (e.g. – *run*)

If no – Nonactivity (e.g. – *run a mile*) -> Go to step 3.

Step 3: Accomplishment or achievement

If test (a) does not work, apply test (b) and possibly (c)

a) If “X V-ed in Y time (e.g. – 10 minutes),” then “X was V-ing during that time.”

If yes -> Accomplishment (e.g. – *He painted a picture*)

If no -> Achievement (e.g. – *He noticed a picture*)

b) If there ambiguity with *almost*?

If yes -> Accomplishment (e.g. – *He almost painted a picture* has two readings: he almost started to paint a picture/he almost finished painting a picture)

If no -> Achievement (e.g. – *He almost noticed a picture* has only one reading)”

(Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, pp. 220 – 221)