

How to put things in a typologically-different language: The case of Danish and Spanish placement events

Teresa Cadierno, Alberto Hijazo-Gascón, & Iraide Ibarretxe-Antuñano
University of Southern Denmark, University of East Anglia, & University of Zaragoza

Placement events are situations where a Figure moves an object to a given location in space. Recent research in this field (Kopecka & Narasimham 2012) has revealed considerable variation in the linguistic conceptualization of this domain by native speakers of different languages. For example, NSs of Germanic languages, such as Swedish, use posture verbs (e.g., *ställa* 'stand' vs. *lägga* 'lay') that express properties of the figure object and its orientation with respect to the ground, while NSs of Romance languages, such as Spanish, tend to employ several verbs that vary along the parameters of force dynamics and intentionality (e.g., *caerse* 'fall CL. + Dat', *dejar caer* 'allow fall', *tirar* 'throw') (e.g., Gullberg & Burenhult 2012; Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2012). This variation is interesting for SLA since the process of acquiring an L2 is assumed to entail the acquisition of appropriate L2 ways of thinking-for-speaking (TFS), i.e., learning the particular verbalized orientation to experience encoded in the lexico-grammatical resources of the L2 (Slobin 1996; N. Ellis & Cadierno 2009).

The present study examines the implications of these results for adult L2 acquisition by investigating how learners acquire the appropriate L2 TFS patterns when talking about placement. A group of L1 Danish learners of L2 Spanish and two groups of Danish and Spanish NSs were asked to describe a series of video clips picturing systematic distinctions in placement events (cf. Bowerman et al. 2004). The results of the study revealed instances of cross-linguistic influence at the level of TFS, both with respect to the lexical semantics of the L2 verbs used to distinguish among placement events of different kinds, and the semantic-syntax mappings that were made, i.e., how the spatial semantic notions were distributed across elements at the clause-level construction. The results of this study are discussed in the light of previous research into this area (e.g., Gullberg 2009) and in relation to the process of reconstructing the meanings of a second language.

References

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