

A Sociocultural Approach to Analyzing L2 Development in the Spanish L2 Classroom

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Abstract

Framed within a Sociocultural Theory of Mind approach to the field of Second Language Acquisition, this article proposes a comprehensive analysis to studying learners' development and internalization of grammatical concepts in the L2 classroom. The present investigation focuses on the case study of Julian, a student enrolled in an advanced Spanish course struggling with the notion of aspect. Julian's development is examined through an analytic approach of multiple sets of data (definition, written performance protocols, and verbalizations) before and after being exposed to Concept-Based Instruction. It is proposed that interpreting learner's performance by connecting different types of developmental data allows for a closer examination of the process of concept formation and internalization in the L2. The analytical approach presented in this article also provides researchers and practitioners with the necessary tools to understand how learners transform their conceptual understanding through conscious manipulations, which have the potential to foster the development of complex grammatical notions.

Keywords: Sociocultural theory, concept-based instruction, verbalization, aspect, conceptual development.

Resumen

Partiendo de una perspectiva sociocultural de la mente humana, este artículo propone la adopción de un análisis que permita un estudio pormenorizado del desarrollo e internalización de conceptos gramaticales por parte de aprendices de segundas lenguas. La presente investigación se centra en el caso de Julian, un estudiante de español avanzado con dificultades para internalizar la noción de aspecto. El desarrollo de Julian se examina a través de un enfoque analítico que incluye múltiples fuentes de datos (definiciones, rendimiento escrito y verbalizaciones) antes y después de ser expuesto a una instrucción conceptual. Se propone que la interpretación de

la actuación del aprendiz en diferentes contextos posibilita un análisis más detallado de los procesos de formación e internalización conceptual en la L2. Asimismo, este enfoque analítico también informa sobre la transformación del conocimiento conceptual de los aprendices a través de manipulaciones conscientes que fomentan el desarrollo de nociones gramaticales complejas.

Palabras clave: Teoría sociocultural, instrucción conceptual, verbalizaciones, aspecto, desarrollo conceptual.

1. Introduction: An analytical approach to triangulate L2 developmental data

Grounded on Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory of human consciousness, sociocultural theory of mind (SCT) research applied to L2 learning and development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014) focuses on gaining a better understanding of how learners develop the ability to use new language in order to mediate their mental and communicative activity (Lantolf, 2011: 24). Unlike other theories of SLA, a Vygotskian approach to L2 learning emphasizes the importance of sociocultural elements in shaping developmental processes, including the crucial role of a properly organized instruction in the development and internalization of new languages (Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006; Negueruela 2008; García, 2012; van Compernelle, 2014). Based on these principles, the present article proposes the adoption of an analytical approach using the triangulation of three dialectically-connected types of data (definition, performance, and verbalization) to interpret learners' conceptual development of the grammatical notion of aspect. Poehner and Infante (2015: 161-165) indicate that dialectics and dialectically connected phenomena are essential to understand and describe how apparently opposed processes or activities, such as teaching and learning, can work together to create a more complex unity (Novack, 1971: 17). Drawing from this idea, the analytical procedure proposed here is supported by claims made by Kinginger & Farrell (2004), Lantolf & Poehner (2014), Negueruela (2008), and van Compernelle & Williams (2011) *inter alia*, that linguistic production alone (i.e. product-oriented data) does not provide an integrative picture of L2 learners' linguistic development.

In this sense, the analytical approach implemented in this study draws from Vygotsky's (1978) Genetic Method by looking at the development of mental functions in their formation and following the formation of relevant conceptual processes (Lantolf, 2011). That is, before they are transformed and internalized by the learner (García, 2012; Negueruela, García & Buescher, 2015), while they are being restructured, and still operate in the external plane. In other words, rather than looking at language

once an ability has fully formed, this analysis focuses on development as “an emergent process based on categories of meaning” (Negueruela, 2003), implying that research looking to ascertain L2 development should not see language as a complete product. Instead, it is proposed that new approaches should explain conceptual internalization through dynamic relations, and offer an analysis that returns to the source of conceptual formation and reconstructs all the points in development (Vygostky, 1978: 65). Following this model, the analytical approach implemented in this study will consider learners’ definitions, performance, and verbalizations as complementary types of data, each connected to L2 conceptual development in a different way (García, 2012). It is expected that the triangulation and analysis of this data will provide a more complete picture of learners’ L2 conceptual development.

2. The study

The data presented in this study is part of a larger project investigating the effects of Concept-Based Instruction (C-BI) on the internalization of the grammatical concept of aspect in the Spanish L2 classroom (see Table 1 for more details on the chronology). Although the original research involved the participation of 32 L2 Spanish learners enrolled in an advanced conversation class, this article will focus on the case of Julian (pseudonym), a 24 year-old student with an already rather sophisticated control of the language. Julian, who had been exposed to Spanish for more than five years before the beginning of the study, was a very motivated student who wanted to maintain and improve his fluency, especially his “listening and speaking” abilities. He also expressed a desire to gain a deeper understanding of the nuances of grammar in Spanish with the ultimate aim of achieving native-like fluency to travel and communicate with other Spanish-speakers. As will be discussed in the sections devoted to data analysis, despite Julian’s outstanding control over both preterite and imperfect in his written performance before instruction, an analysis of his definition and verbalization data at the beginning of the study indicated that he had an incomplete understanding of the concept of aspect, which limited his agency as an L2 speaker and his future communicative accuracy in regard to these two tenses. It was precisely this disconnect between performance and conceptual awareness even after many years of experience that made him an ideal candidate for the present investigation.

Table 1. Timeline of the study

Time	Procedure	Description
Week 1	Bio-data Questionnaire	Questions about the participants' age, education and linguistic background
Week 3	Pretest	Written performance and written definition data
Week 4	Mediated interview #1	Verbalizations in relation to performance and definition data
Weeks 5-9	Pedagogical intervention	Implementation of Concept-Based Instruction
Week 13	Posttest	Written performance and written definition data
Week 14	Mediated interview #2	Verbalizations in relation to performance and definition data.

Before the pedagogical intervention took place, all participants completed a Bio-data Questionnaire (Week 1) and a Pre-test (Week 3) to establish a baseline regarding their control and experience with the language. The pre-test (which followed the same structure as the post-test) consisted of two tasks. In the first one (see Appendix A), learners were asked to write a narration in the past based on a comic strip supplied by the researcher (performance data). The second task (see Appendix B) probed them to provide a working definition that captured their understanding of the grammatical concept of aspect (definition data). Following the completion of these tasks, the researcher scheduled individual mediated interviews (Weeks 4 and 14) where participants reflected on their understanding and use of aspectual contrasts based on their definitions and written narratives (verbalizing data). Both sets of mediated interviews -with a duration of 7 and 8 minutes respectively- were carried out and recorded by the researcher during weeks 4th and 14th. In both interviews, learners were first prompted to read their narrations and definitions out-loud, and make any changes they deemed necessary. After this step, the interviewer asked the learner to reflect on his aspectual choices and verbalize his explanations as a starting point for the interviewer/mediator "to engage in a process of thinking with the learner" (Poehner & Infante, 2015: 17). Mediation offered during this process by the researcher was targeted to the learner's ZPD and was scaffolded from very implicit forms of feedback (i.e. requesting clarification) to more explicit interventions (i.e. providing the right answer followed by an explanation) as needed by the learner (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994: 467). These mediated interviews were designed with the goal of observing and

actively promoting the potential formation of learners' L2 aspectual development both before and after instruction.

As mentioned in the introduction, this investigation presents three types of dialectically-connected datasets focused on analyzing L2 conceptual development. Learners' definitions illustrated their awareness of the concept of aspect and its potential quality to orient and mediate communicative activity (García, 2014: 219). Performance data, on the other hand, captured their aspectual and morphological accuracy in the production of preterite and imperfect forms through written discourse. Although the results of these tasks are extremely informative, they do not necessarily correlate with learners' overall control over the pragmatic and communicative features present in a particular grammatical notion (Negueruela, 2013). Consequently, a third set of data consisting of verbalizations was adopted, which provided crucial information about the dialectical relation between participants' understanding of the concept of aspect and their performance, and procured critical insights regarding their L2 development as a conceptual process. As will be argued throughout this article, the triangulation of performance, definition and verbalization data provides a more comprehensive picture of L2 conceptual development than traditional "product-oriented perspectives" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014), which are primarily focused on linguistic performance as the main marker of L2 acquisition.

2.1 Aspectual contrasts between Spanish and English and consequences for instruction

Unlike English, Spanish represents aspectual perfectivity and imperfectivity in the past by means of the preterite (1a) and imperfect (1b) tenses.

- (1) a. Juan cruzó la calle
 Juan cross[3psgPRET] the street
 "Juan crossed the street"
- b. Juan cruzaba la calle
 Juan cross[3psgIMP] the street
 "Juan crossed the street"

As can be observed in the previous examples, Spanish uses the preterite to refer to bounded events with a clear beginning and/or end (1a). However, while Spanish

usually marks unbounded events with imperfect (1b), English resorts to a wide variety of linguistic alternatives to convey the same notion, including the use of simple past/preterite forms (*Juan crossed the street*) or periphrases that either emphasize the habituality of the action (*Juan used to/would cross the street*) or its progressive nature (*Juan was crossing the street*), as reported by Andersen (1991), Comrie (1976) and Mittwoch (1988). In addition to these morphological considerations, the compositional nature of aspect also implies that the characteristics of a particular verb will also be affected by other linguistic factors, such as its inherent argument structure, its lexical nature, or the presence of adverbs and other expressions of time and duration within the same proposition (Hopper, 1982; Salaberry, 2013; Smith, 1983; Verkuyl, 1972, 1989). All of these factors make the acquisition of the preterite/imperfect aspectual contrast a rather challenging one, even for experienced L2 learners of Spanish (Bardovi Harlig, 2000; Slabakova & Montrul, 2009).

Unfortunately, most traditional language textbooks rely, for the most part, on the use of rules of thumb to explain aspectual contrasts, failing to reflect the full meaning of the concept. Salaberry (2008: 228) suggests that there is a general dissatisfaction with textbook rules for this reason, mentioning –among others– the critiques of authors such as Delgado-Jenkins (1990); Frantzen (1995); Hernán (1994); Negueruela & Lantolf (2006); Ozete (1988); Westfall and Forester (1996).

Since preterite/imperfect aspectual contrasts seem to be tackled in Spanish textbooks rather inconsistently, the present study used Bolinger's (1991) formal accounts of aspect, and Bull's (1965) as well as Whitley's (2002) recommendations and supporting visual representations to develop more complex conceptual explanations to foster learners' conceptual understandings through the notions of lexical and grammatical aspect. The model of Concept-Based Instruction (CBI) implemented in this study was based on Negueruela's (2003) proposal, which suggested that concepts in the L2 classroom: 1) Should be presented as the minimal unit of instruction *in lieu* of rules of thumb; 2) Need to be materialized and presented as functional and visual models that can be understood and transformed into new tools as learners' understanding of the concept grows; 3) Should be verbalized socially (i.e. interpersonally) and to the self (i.e. intrapersonally) to connect language and thought and create meaning in concept formation (Negueruela & García, 2016). After the pedagogical intervention, all participants completed a Post-test (Week 13) and participated in a second mediated interview (Week 14). The results obtained in these tasks were used to analyze whether learners exhibited changes in their initial awareness (i.e. understanding) and control (i.e. performance) over the concept of aspect.

Since this study defines L2 conceptual development as the learner's ability to establish a dialectical relationship between their understanding and control of the

grammatical concept of aspect, I analyze Julian’s data from two different perspectives. First, I consider his ability to use his own definition of aspect as a mediational tool to mediate his performance (section 3). Then, I follow the opposite process by examining his capacity to create meaning from his conceptual understanding of aspect, through the analysis of his performance and verbalization data (sections 4 and 5).

3. Definition data: Looking at L2 development through concept formation

In order to examine Julian’s development before and after C-BI, he was asked to write a short definition explaining the grammatical concept of aspect (see Appendix B). Learners’ conceptual understanding plays a critical role in guiding their performance by showing them the meaning-making possibilities available in the target language (Valsiner, 2001: 87). For this reason, definitions in this study are analyzed in terms of the conceptual resources available for the learner at that moment in time and how they may orient his future linguistic and communicative performance. In order to observe this process, Julian’s reflections were analyzed holistically following a classification system adapted from Negueruela’s (2003: 283-289) *Concept Interrelated Feature Analysis* and van Compernelle & Henery’s (2014) approach to analyzing L2 development as a conceptual process (see Table 2). The categories proposed were evaluated using three possible values (yes, some, no) that determined the presence of a series of features in the learner’s definition, assessing its quality and completeness before and after instruction.

Table 2. Proposed values for the features of the concept of aspect

Category	Features	Values
Aspectual awareness	Grammatical	Yes / Some / No
	Lexical	Yes / Some / No
Type of Awareness	Generalizable	Yes / Some / No
	Functional	Yes / Some / No
	Perceptual	Yes / Some / No
Significance	Ownership	Yes / Some / No
	Repetition	Yes / Some / No

The first category (“aspectual awareness”) evaluates the value of the learner’s definition by determining whether all the essential features comprised within the grammatical concept of aspect are present in his response. In this respect, two main features are interpreted: whether the learner is familiar with (i.e. aware of) the notion

of lexical aspect (characterized in this study in terms of cyclic or non cyclic); and with that of grammatical aspect, emphasizing the role of the speakers' perspective in determining whether an action is bounded or unbounded (Bolinger, 1991).

The category "type of awareness" focuses on the quality of the learner's definition, and whether it is based on generalizable criteria rather than on functional or perceptual grounds. A definition should include the following characteristics in order to be considered generalizable: 1) verbal aspect –whether lexical or grammatical- can be used to frame a particular stage of an action (its beginning, middle, or end); and 2) the decision to focus on any of these moments in time is made by the speaker, whose point of view is materialized in the choice of imperfect –marking imperfectivity- or preterite –emphasizing the perfectivity of an event. While this generalizable value helps learners recontextualize their definition so that it can be applied to a wider variety of tasks and communicative situations, perceptual and functional understandings, grounded on context-specific cues, limit the applicability of their definitions to future contexts and circumstances. A definition is considered functional when its tenets are not based on a systematic-theoretical (i.e. conceptual) understanding of aspect, but rather on how a specific verb is used in a given context (e.g. preterite is used to interrupt an action in the past, imperfect to describe habitual actions, etc.). As seen in the previous examples, functional definitions can be used to orient activity and discourse, allowing learners to solve a variety of tasks; however, they are very dependent on a specific context, and they eventually constrain learners' ability to apply them to other situations. Similarly, perceptual definitions are also based on observation and "rules of thumb", and imply that the appearance of very precise elements in the discourse such as time expressions or certain adverbs will trigger the use of preterite or imperfect. Learners with perceptual awareness of the concept of aspect, for example, usually provide justifications such as, "the action occurs rapidly" or "the text mentions the discourse/temporal marker 'three hours ago'" to explain their choice of preterite over imperfect.

Finally, the category "significance" analyzes the transformative value of the learner's definition, an essential notion for the understanding of L2 conceptual development as "the internalization of psychological tools resulting in the restructuring of psychological functions to achieve self-regulation in the process of participating in human activity" (Negueruela, 2008:196). In this sense, "ownership" shows intentionality and active agency in the linguistic choice of words present in the definition (i.e. pronouns, prepositions, etc.), indicating that the concept has a personal significance for the learner, who has made it his or her own. In this article, I propose that the feature of ownership is related to the notion of Concept-Mediated Agency (CMA), understood as "the socioculturally-mediated ability of consciously recognizing, interpreting, and using conceptual categories to create new meanings in specific contexts" (García, 2014:

215). In the context of the present study, CMA is interpreted as the learner's conscious and intentional use of the grammatical concept of aspect as a meditational tool for the development of complex L2 grammatical meanings (i.e. the contrast between the Spanish *preterite* and *imperfect* tenses). Due to its transformative value, ownership of an aspectual definition develops over time, and is first observed when learners begin to "consciously manipulate concepts to create new meanings in socioculturally-situated communicative contexts" (ibid). In contrast with the previous feature, the notion of "repetition" implies that the definition offered by the learner is based on the memorization of the rules or concepts provided during instruction. In this case, learners repeat and/or imitate a set of coordinates given by the instructor, and their definitions do not necessarily carry transformative value. Since a sophisticated notion of aspect will not be significant unless the learner can use it to mediate his or her performance during communicative activity (Karpova, 1977; Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006; Negueruela *et al.*, 2015), it is essential to include this category as a marker of L2 development as a conceptual process.

3.1 Julian's definition of the grammatical concept of aspect before and after instruction

Although Julian's understanding of the concept of aspect before being exposed to C-BI was quite sophisticated, a more detailed analysis of his definition reflected a partial dependence on certain lexical markers present in traditional rules of thumb often used in the teaching of Spanish aspect (see Excerpt #1):

Excerpt #1 Julian's definition of the grammatical concept of aspect before C-BI

- 1 *Puedo usar el imperfecto cuando estoy describiendo una acción en el pasado que*
I can use the imperfect when I am describing an action in the past that
- 2 *no es completa. Puedo usar el pretérito cuando estoy describiendo una*
is not completed. I can use the preterite when I am describing a
- 3 *acción completa. Los dos pueden ocurrir en la misma frase,*
complete action. Both of them can happen within the same sentence,
- 4 *por ejemplo: "Hablabas con mi hermano cuando mi amigo entró en el cuarto".*
for example: "I was talking [imperfect] with my brother when my friend
entered [preterite] the room."
- 5 *"Hablabas" es una acción que continúa pero "entró" es una acción completa.*
"I was talking" [imperfect] is an action that carries on but "entered"
[preterite] is a completed action.

- 6 *En algunos casos especiales, y un ejemplo es con el tiempo, siempre uso el*
 In some special cases, and an example is with time. I always use the
 7 *imperfecto con tiempo: “Eran las 11:00”, no “fueron*
 imperfect with time: “It was [imperfect] 11:00”, instead of “it was [preterite]
 8 *las 11:00”.*
 11:00.”

While still incomplete, Julian’s written definition after C-BI (Excerpt #2) appears to be a much more effective meditational tool to orient his communicative activity:

Excerpt #2 Julian’s definition of the grammatical concept of aspect after C-BI

- 9 *El pretérito describe una acción completa en el pasado. El imperfecto describe*
 The preterite describes a completed action in the past. The imperfect
 describes
 10 *una acción que no es completa en el pasado. También el imperfecto describe una*
 an action that is not complete in the past. Also, the imperfect describes a
 11 *acción habitual en el pasado. Pero todo de esto depende en el punto de vista del*
 habitual action in the past. But everything depends on the narrator’s point of
 12 *narrador. Si hay un verbo que no es cíclico, siempre uso el pretérito. Por ejemplo,*
 view. If there is a verb that is not cyclic, I always use preterite. For example,
 13 *“abrir”. Si el verbo es cíclico, todo depende en el punto de vista del narrador.*
 “open”. If the verb is cyclic, everything depends on the narrator’s point of
 view.
 14 *Si el verbo es cíclico y es algo habitual -“cada lunes mi hermano y yo*
 If the verb is cyclic and something habitual -“every Monday my brother and I
 15 *trabajábamos en un restaurante”- o es una acción que no es completa, según el*
 worked [imperfect] at a restaurant”- or it is an action that is not complete,
 from the
 16 *punto de vista del narrador -“caminaba por el parque”-, uso el imperfecto.*
 narrator’s point of view -“I walked [imperfect] through the park”- I use
 imperfect.

Indeed, an examination of Julian’s awareness of the grammatical concept of aspect using the categories proposed in this article (Table 2) shows conceptual development after C-BI at the levels of aspectual awareness (in particular lexical aspect), type of awareness (generalizability), and significance, as illustrated in the table below (Table 3):

Table 3. Julian’s awareness of the features that configure the concept of aspect before and after C-BI.

Category	Before C-BI	After C-BI
Aspectual Awareness		
Grammatical	Some	Some
Lexical	No	Some
Type of Awareness		
Generalizable	No	Yes
Functional	Yes	Yes
Perceptual	Yes	Yes
Significance		
Ownership	Some	Yes
Repetition	Yes	Some

As seen in Excerpt #1, before C-BI Julian was not aware of the importance of lexical aspect in the process of making aspectual distinctions in Spanish, and was only partially cognizant of how grammatical aspect worked, largely ignoring the importance of the speaker’s perspective to identify the perfectivity or imperfectivity of an event. An analysis of Julian’s definition after C-BI (Excerpt #2) shows that although he shows some aspectual awareness at a grammatical level (when he emphasizes the importance of the narrator’s point of view, and of conveying a point of reference to determine the perfectivity or imperfectivity of an action), there have been no visible gains across time. However, his definition in Excerpt #2 exhibits a certain degree of awareness of lexical aspect that was not observed before the pedagogical intervention, as seen in his use of the terms “cyclic” and “non-cyclic” (lines 12-16). Notwithstanding, these gains do not seem to indicate that Julian has developed a complete conceptual understanding of the notion of aspect. While he appears to have an increased awareness of lexical aspect, this knowledge is not reflected in a coherent conceptualization of this feature. His understanding of cyclic events (lines 12-13) after C-BI, contradicts how aspect works, and the examples that he provides to illustrate his definition are not appropriately connected to this notion either (lines 14-16).

Regarding Julian’s type of aspectual awareness, his understanding seems to have become more generalizable after instruction. Before C-BI, Julian relied mostly on a perceptual and functional understanding of aspect. On the one hand, he resorts to a perceptual observation to explain a specific use of the imperfect in Spanish, affirming that this tense is always used to tell time (lines 6-8). On the other, he exhibits a

functional understanding of aspect by using his definition to orient his discourse and provide very context-specific examples to justify his elucidations. Although partially correct, the examples provided are only operative in certain contexts, limiting Julian's ability to apply his definitions to other types of events. This is the case of lines (4-5), where he mentions that preterite and imperfect can go together in the same sentence, but that the former (preterite) can only be used to signal the interruption of an ongoing action, disregarding any other possible alternatives. After the pedagogical intervention Julian's aspectual understanding becomes more generalizable in that he does not rely as much on perceptual knowledge or rules of the thumb to define aspect. At this point, he incorporates the notion that the narrator's point of reference is a key factor for making aspectual decisions (lines 9-12), and begins to realize that lexical aspect of an event does not determine whether it can be expressed by preterite or imperfect. His awareness of the notion of point of reference as part of his conceptual understanding also becomes evident when he tries to use it to explain lexical aspect (lines 12-16), even though his examples at that point indicate that he has not fully internalized this concept or the difference between cyclic and non-cyclic events. This is also observed when he uses the term cyclic to characterize habitual actions in the past, traditionally linked to imperfect morphology by rules of thumb, as indicated by Negueruela (2003), García (2012) and Polizzi (2013) among others. These details indicate that there are still traces of perceptual and functional features in Julian's understanding of the grammatical concept of aspect even after CB-I, and that his most visible gains were present in his ability to generalize it to other contexts.

Finally, Julian's shift toward conceptual ownership is also evident when his first definition (Excerpt #1) is compared to the second one (Excerpt #2). Before C-BI, Julian presents a high degree of "repetition" in his reliance on memorized rules of thumb such as his belief that imperfect is always used to telling the time (lines 6-8) or his description of aspectual contrasts in Spanish (lines 1-5). However, there are also some traces of "ownership" in this definition, as seen in his ability to contextualize his understanding with concrete examples (lines 4-5; 6-8), and his choice of first person throughout the whole explanation. After C-BI, Julian's developing "ownership" becomes more evident as his understanding of aspect gains transformative value. Even though there are still traces of "repetition" in his definition (i.e. when he connects the imperfect tense to habitual actions in the past in lines 10-11), he has made the concept his own, consciously recognizing, interpreting, and using aspectual contrasts to create new meanings in specific contexts (lines 12-16). While his understanding of aspect is still incomplete, Julian has started to consciously use this concept as a meditational tool for the development of meanings in communicative contexts in the L2.

As argued in the previous section, although the qualitative changes in Julian's conceptual understanding provide invaluable information about his developing aspectual awareness over time, they do not show a complete picture of his L2 conceptual development without the inclusion of performance and verbalization data. As seen in Table 3, even very sophisticated notions of grammatical concepts may be in fact mere verbalisms, or "knowledge detached from reality" (Vygotsky, 1987:217), if they are not contrasted with actual performance in communicative activity. The following sections tackle precisely this issue, providing performance and verbalization data to ascertain Julian's L2 conceptual development in more detail.

4. Performance Data: L2 development through conceptual control in written production

According to Vygotsky (1986) when the form is almost ready to emerge in speech, the concept begins to emerge as well. This view on language development implies that the appearance of linguistic forms marks the beginning of L2 development as a conceptual process; hence the importance of including this type of data to describe, evaluate and promote learners' L2 conceptual development. The analysis of Julian's performance data considers his aspectual and morphological accuracy in written production before and after C-BI, comparing it with his definition and verbalizing data to document the process of L2 conceptual development.

To obtain this data set, Julian was asked to create a narration for the wordless comic strip *El accidente de Miguel* ("Miguel's accident") originally published in the Spanish textbook *Dos mundos* (Terrell, Andrade, Egasse & Munoz 2002: 422). The images depicted the story of a young boy that was run over by a car while riding his bike (see Appendix A). The rest of the story reproduced the events that unfolded after the accident, and was chosen because of its potential to elicit preterite and imperfect forms in a wide variety of contexts. From the onset, Julian appeared to have an outstanding control of Spanish preterite and imperfect use and morphology:

Table 4. Julian's control over the concept of aspect in written production

Tense	Before C-BI		After C-BI	
	<i>Aspectual accuracy</i>	<i>Morphological accuracy</i>	<i>Aspectual accuracy</i>	<i>Morphological accuracy</i>
Preterite	100% (13/13)	85% (11/13)	100% (11/11)	91% (10/11)
Imperfect	100% (4/4)	100% (4/4)	89% (8/9)	70% (6/9)
Overall performance	100% (17/17)	88% (15/17)	95% (19/20)	80% (16/20)

As illustrated in Table 4, there is no significant increase in terms of aspectual and morphological accuracy in Julian's individual written performance before and after the pedagogical intervention. In general, Julian's written performance seemed to be stable and rather advanced. Before C-BI, his aspectual accuracy, that is, his ability to use preterite and imperfect correctly, was at ceiling for both tenses. The same was found for his morphological accuracy in the case of imperfect forms (4/4), followed closely by his use of preterite (11/13), where he exhibited some minor spelling and person/number marking errors. After C-BI, Julian's aspectual accuracy remained at 100% for preterite (11/ 11) but dipped to 89% for the imperfect (8/9). However, his morphological accuracy rose to a 91% for the preterite (10/11) and also decreased in the case of the imperfect (6/9) at 70%. It is possible that this progressive decline over his control of imperfect could be the result of an incomplete -yet developing- transformation of his understanding of aspect. However, this type of product-oriented data does not provide a clear picture of learners' actual level of conceptual development (as seen in the definition data analyzed in section 3.1), ultimately failing to inform us of the rationale behind their aspectual choices. For that reason, it was decided that a triangulation between dialectically-connected definition, performance, and verbalizing data was essential to understand Julian's L2 development in more detail.

5. Verbalization data: Breaking the dichotomy between definition/awareness and performance/control.

In this section, I examine the verbalizations recorded in the process of problem-solving and concept-formation that surfaced during the dialogic interactions between Julian and his instructor during two mediated interviews conducted before and after C-BI. While definition data showed Julian developing aspectual awareness, his performance exhibited a rather sophisticated -yet still unstable- control over this

notion in communicative activity. An analysis of Julian’s mediated verbalizations in this section will give us direct access to the process of concept-formation, showing the extent to which the awareness and the quality of the concept allows the learner to create and control new meanings based on the aspectual features available to him. Building off from Lantolf & Thorne (2006) and Negueruela (2013), I argue that L2 development is a conceptual process that can be ascertained through the qualitative changes in the transformative value of the learner’s awareness and control over a concept when consciously applied to create new meanings.

The categories proposed in Table 5 allow for this type of exhaustive evaluation of the learner’s dynamic development. They document all of the qualitative changes observed in Julian’s aspectual understanding and ability to use the concept of aspect to mediate his thinking during communicative activity (i.e. thinking through the concept). This approach to analyzing L2 development during mediated verbalizations helps maintain the integrity of the data analysis procedure, and allows the researcher to observe the connection between conceptual understanding and performance. (García, 2012). This analytical tool pays special attention to the core features of the grammatical concept of aspect displayed during communicative activity: aspectual control, quality of tool usage, and significance.

Table 5. Proposed values of the concept of aspect as a meditational tool for thinking

Category	Features	Values
Aspectual Control	Grammatical	Yes / Some / No
	Lexical	Yes / Some / No
Quality of tool usage	Generalizable	Yes / Some / No
	Functional	Yes / Some / No
	Perceptual	Yes / Some / No
Significance	Ownership	Yes / Some / No
	Repetition	Yes / Some / No

In the interest of space, and given that the majority of categories, features, and values presented in Table 5 are very similar to those used to analyze aspectual awareness (see Table 2 for more information), I will only provide a brief explanation of the most relevant notions used to characterize Julian’s data. The first category (“aspectual control”) refers to the learner’s overall ability to integrate grammatical and/or lexical aspect in his mediated verbalizations. In particular, this notion focuses on documenting the completeness and coherence of his understanding of aspect, and

whether this knowledge can be used as a meditational tool for thinking when engaged in communicative activity. The category “quality of tool usage”, on the other hand, refers to whether Julian’s aspectual understanding is applicable to a wide range of contexts (generalizable), to specific situations (functional), or whether it is supported by discourse markers and observations often reinforced by rules of thumb (perceptual). Finally, the notion of “significance” analyzes the transformative quality of the learner’s understanding to create meaning during communicative activity, looking at whether conceptual understandings are used to orient his actions and create new meanings (ownership), or whether he is unable to use definitions to mediate or justify his performance.

As mentioned earlier, Julian was given the opportunity to actively reflect on his understanding of aspect during the mediated interviews. In this activity, he was prompted to re-read his narrative (i.e. performance data) out loud, think about his aspectual choices, and make any changes that he considered necessary. During the first interview, Julian needed implicit mediation from the interviewer to detect the incorrect use of two morphological forms that he had produced in the writing performance task (see table 4). In the second mediated interview, however, he was able to use the concept of aspect to mediate himself and successfully notice and correct two morphological errors while reading aloud. Additionally, he was also able to detect his faulty temporal choice (Excerpt #3) after minimal external implicit mediation was provided by the researcher:

Excerpt #3 Julian’s mediated performance after CBI

- 1 I: *En la línea 4 dices “su velocidad era más alta que la ley permite. ¿Por qué “permite”?*
(In line 4 you say his speed is higher than the law allows[present]. Why “allows”?)
- 2 J: *Uhm... [pauses] ¡Oh! ¡Permitía! [Laughing]. Lo siento.*
(Uhm... [pauses] Oh! Allowed [imperfect]! [Laughing]. Im sorry)
- 3 I: *Ok, vale, ¿por qué “permitía”? ¿Por que imperfecto y no pretérito?*
(Ok, alright, Why “allowed” [imperfect]? Why imperfect and not preterite?)
- 4 J: *Es una acción que no es completa en el pasado. Todavía puede ocurrir en el presente.*
(It’s an action that is not complete in the past. It could still happen in the present)

The analytical approach used to evaluate Julian’s mediated verbalizations (Table 6) not only provided additional support for some of the trends observed in his definition

and performance data, but also allowed for a more detailed account of his conceptual development over time. Even though Julian’s written performance before C-BI was at ceiling (see Table 4), his verbalizations indicate that his aspectual control is reduced to the notions of event completion, and a very vague understanding of lexical aspect.

Table 6. Julian’s aspectual conceptualization in mediated verbalizations before and after C-BI

Category	Before instruction	After instruction
Aspectual Control		
Grammatical	Some	Yes
Lexical	Some	Yes
Quality of tool usage		
Generalizable	No	Yes
Functional	Yes	No
Perceptual	Yes	No
Significance		
Ownership	Yes	Yes
Repetition	Yes	No

Similarly, his view of this grammatical concept is eminently functional and perceptual, and cannot be transferred to a wide range of conversational contexts. Despite exhibiting a certain degree of ownership in his definition, his aspectual choices are generally oriented by memorized rules of thumb learnt over several years of L2 instruction. After C-BI, however, Julian’s verbalizations show a steady development in his understanding and control of aspect (see Excerpts #3 and #5). At this point, he is able to utilize the notions of grammatical and lexical aspect to orient his performance, and to transfer this knowledge to other contexts and communicative situations. This gain in control allows him to transform his definition and create new meanings thorough the concept of aspect.

In what follows, I present examples of Julian’s mediated interviews before and after the pedagogical intervention to support the previous observations. The first fragment (Excerpt #4) consists of the transcription of one of his mediated verbalizations before C-BI, where the interviewer/mediator (I) asks Julian (J) to justify the choice of preterite in the form *se dio cuenta* (“realized” [preterite]) found in his written narrative (turn 17). Although the use of this form was contextually appropriate, the interviewer was

looking to obtain more information about Julian's overall understanding of Spanish preterite and imperfect:

Excerpt #4 Julian's verbalization as a tool for internalization before CBI

- 17 I: *Ahm, después [escribes] "Conté a la policía que Tom no se dio cuenta"... ahm, ¿por qué "dio"?*
(Ahm, then [you write] "I told the police that Tom had not realized (that) [preterite]"... ahm, why "realized" [preterite]?)
- 18 J: *Porque era en un momento...*
(Because it was in a moment...)
- 19 I: *Aha...*
- 20 J: *... el momento antes del accidente. Él no se dio cuenta al señalizada. No es algo que puede durar por algunos minutos.*
(The moment before the accident. He did not realize [preterite] that there was a sign. This is not something that can last for minutes)
- 21 I: *Aha...*
- 22 J: *: ... porque la velocidad del coche fue tan alta que no hay mucho tiempo. Necesita ser una acción completa.*
(... Because the car's speed was so high that there is not a lot of time. It has to be a completed action)

As observed in the previous fragment, when Julian is asked about his choice of tense, he provides a justification that points to a highly perceptual understanding of aspect. According to the learner, the use of preterite is triggered by the short duration of the action (i.e. the sudden crash caused by a car's high speed) rather than by the perspective and narrative intent of the speaker (turns 20 and 22). It is thus apparent in his verbalization that Julian's control of lexical and grammatical aspect is very limited, as he neglects to establish a contrast between the event's inherent aspectual nature and the speaker's aspectual perception of the action. This type of analysis of Julian's verbalizations reveals that his aspectual choices were based on semantic perceptions, suggesting that even before pedagogical intervention had occurred, he had already achieved a certain degree of conceptual development. Additionally, it also shows that he had not fully internalized all the features involved in the preterite/imperfect contrast, as he was not able to use them accurately to mediate his communicative activity.

After C-BI instruction Julian exhibits a higher control over the grammatical notion under consideration, as can be seen in the quality of his verbalizing data. In

the example reproduced in Excerpt #5 below, Julian (J) is invited once again to reflect upon his understanding of aspect after having revisited his second narrative:

Excerpt #5 Julian's verbalization as a tool for internalization after CBI

- 23 J: [Pauses] *Uhm, depende en el punto de vista del narrador...*
([Pauses] Uhm, it depends on the narrator's point of view)
- 24 I: *Aha...*
- 25 J: *El imperfecto describe una acción habitualmente, una acción que no [pauses], hasta ahora no, no está terminado...*
(The imperfect describes an action habitually, and action that doesn't [pauses], until now doesn't, it's not completed...)
- 26 I: *Aha...*
- 27 J: *TerminADÁ [capitalized to mark emphasis].*
(COMPLETED [capitalized to mark emphasis].)
- 28 I: *Sí. (Yes.)*
- 29 J: *Y, eh, el pretérito es una acción completa.*
(And preterite is a completed action.)
- 30 I: *Aha...*
- 31 J: *Hay algunos [pauses] hay algunos casos cuando necesitamos usar el pretérito y algunos cuando necesitamos usar el imperfecto, según esta clase son cíclicos y cuando hay verbos no cíclicos...*
(There are some [pauses] some cases when we need to use preterite and some when we need to use imperfect, according to this class [this happens when we have verbs that] are cyclic and when there are verbs [that are] non-cyclic...)
- 32 I: *Sí... (Yes...)*
- 33 J: *Por eso si quiero decir que, abrí, la puerta, no puedo decir "abría" la puerta porque es una acción completa no hay un...*
(That's why if I want to say that, I opened [preterite], the door, I can't say opened [imperfect] because it is a complete action. There is not a...)
- 34 I: *Aha, ¿siempre? (Uhu, always?)*
- 35 J: *No, no siempre... (No, not always...)*
- 36 I: *¿Por ejemplo? (For example?)*

- 37 J: *Puedo decir, ah, según esta clase [pauses] abrir la puerta es “abrí” la puerta, pero...*
(I can say, uh, according to this class [pauses] to open the door is opened [preterite] the door, but...)
- 38 I: *No siempre...* (Not always...)
- 39 J: *No siempre, pero, ah, por ejemplo si quiero decir “mientras abría la puerta oí un explosión”, por ejemplo.*
(Not always, but, uh, for instance, if I want to say “while I was opening the door I heard [preterite] an explosion” for example)
- 40 I: *Sí, sí, sí. Pero, en, en el esquema también ves que la, que aunque [el verbo] sea cíclico, si la acción, si se ve la acción como continua, puede ser imperfecto.*
(Yes, yes, yes, in, in the graphic one can also see that the, that even though [the verb] is cyclic, if the action is seen as ongoing, it can be imperfect)
- 41 J: *Sí* (Yes)

During his verbalizations, Julian reached a level of abstraction that had not been documented in any of his earlier interventions –including his previous written definitions and oral interactions in previous interviews. As can be observed in turns 23-41, he was able to detect the need to establish a point of reference when conveying a particular aspectual interpretation (turn 23), and to talk about the notions of lexical and grammatical aspect with considerable ease, exemplifying the existence of cyclic and non-cyclic events appropriately and emphasizing the role of the speaker’s point of view and intention (see turns 33 and 35-38 where he described the possible forms of the verb *abrir*, “to open”). In spite of this improvement, he still needed implicit mediation from the researcher to entertain the possibility of non-prototypical aspectual pairings, that is, the combination of cyclic events (i.e. those where the verb expresses a telic event) with the imperfect (turn 34). By thoroughly reflecting on his own conceptual understanding, Julian was able to connect the role of the speaker and his communicative intent to the choice of preterite and imperfect (turns 33-38). These findings can be directly connected to the analysis of Julian’s aspectual conceptualizations illustrated in Table 6, allowing us to see his L2 conceptual development at three different levels: aspectual control, quality of tool usage, and significance.

As hypothesized at the beginning of this article, the triangulation of definition, performance and verbalizing data allowed for a more complete and fair evaluation of L2 conceptual development, integrating different sources of information focused on examining the students’ learning process, rather than their static end products.

6. Discussion and conclusions

In this study, I have argued in favor of using multiple sets of dialectically-connected data to examine their individual role in the study of L2 development as a conceptual process. In the case of Julian, an analytical approach to ascertain his degree of internalization and conceptual development of the grammatical notion of aspect revealed microgenetic changes after instruction that would have remained hidden in other types of analysis. It also showed that it is possible for different –and sometimes contradictory– features to co-exist in a learner’s grammatical conceptualization. For instance, Julian’s initial performance data alone could have been pointed to a high degree of control over the concept of aspect, even though his aspectual understanding was not fully developed (see tables 3, 4, and 6). Moreover, while the presence of perceptual and functional markers in the participant’s definition data after instruction could have been interpreted as a lack of control over the concept of aspect, this analysis suggests that this is not the case, as the presence or potential emergence of generalizable understanding across time is also likely (see Table 6, and Excerpt #5 for specific examples).

Using of concrete features to assess different categories in learners’ conceptual development allows researchers to break down extremely complex and abstract grammatical notions, such as aspect, in comprehensible markers that can be more easily identified in the data. This has interesting implications for future pedagogical interventions, which might be able to identify particularly troublesome notions for a specific learner that would remain otherwise hidden. In Julian case, for example, this may be the interplay between lexical and grammatical aspect. While verbalization data shows that he is able to identify these features accurately during communicative activity, he could possible benefit from additional instruction to foster his conceptual development.

The nuanced nature of the analytical approach proposed in this study is also observed in the inclusion of linguistic and emotive/agentive features to assess development in a second language. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, one of the most relevant principles of SCT is that the human mind is mediated (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, the goal of researchers and practitioners within the field of SLA is to help learners develop into self-aware and fully agentive beings, able to adapt to the world and “change it through conscious intentional activity” (Lantolf, 2013: 27). By incorporating the evaluation of the category labeled as “significance”, either characterized by the learner’s ownership or mere repetition of the concept, we are tackling a very important part of L2 development, namely changes in learner’s agency through time.

As seen in this study, the triangulation of various types of data (definition, performance and verbalizations) examined by means of a highly descriptive analytical approach permitted a more complete and fair evaluation of a learner's progress before and after C-BI. This type of analysis not only improves the work of the researcher/practitioner, who finds the daunting task of assessing learner's conceptual development much more specific, but also increases the percentage of inter-rater reliability of assessing L2 development as a conceptual process (van Compernelle and Henery, 2014; van Compernelle, Webber, and Gomez-Laich, 2016), ensuring the future replicability of studies employing this type of analysis.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: Written performance activity

1. **The accident.** Imagine that you witnessed an accident. Use the following pictures to describe what happened. How was the victim? What was his/her name? What was he/she doing before the accident? How did people react to it? What happened during/after the accident? **Retell the story of what happened with your own words.**

- Use the preterit and the imperfect.
- Write a minimum of 10 sentences.

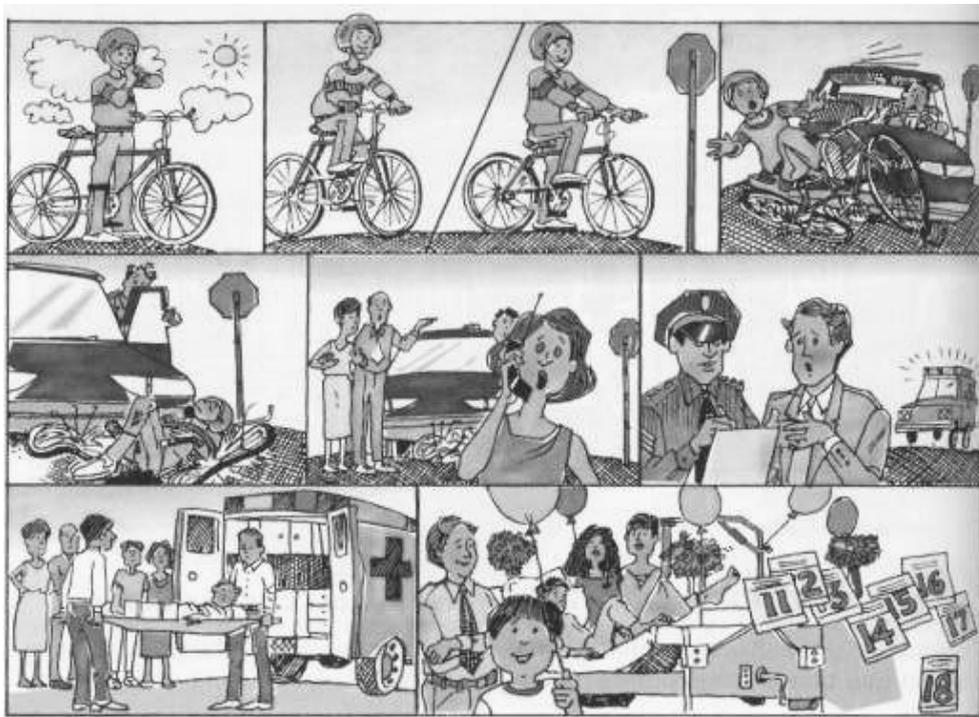


Image adopted from the activity *El accidente de Miguel* (Miguel's accident) in Terrell, T., Andrade, M., Egasse, J., & Munoz, E. M. (2002: 422).

Appendix B: Definition data activity

2. Aspect. Explain with your own ideas the relation between preterit and imperfect, and describe when and how each of them should be used. You can write this rationale in either English or Spanish.