

Spatial events in native and second language production contexts

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First language (L1) speakers of a language learn language-specific patterns of spatial event expression at an early age and these patterns remain largely unchanged over time. Second language (L2) learners, on the other hand, show variability in their mastery of language-specific patterns in the expression of spatial events in their L2. What explains these differences? I explore this question by studying speech patterns of voluntary motion (e.g., *girl runs into room*, *boy crawls out of house*) and placement events (e.g., *put glass on table*, *put stone into pocket*) produced by native and L2 speakers of languages that encode such events in typologically different ways (German vs. Polish vs. Spanish)^{1,2,3}—using an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on both oral productions (i.e., descriptions by experimental probes) and written texts (novels). My results suggest patterned differences in the acquisition of target-like patterns in L2 based on the relative specificity of event expression in L1 vs. L2, with shifts to less specific systems posing fewer challenges than the opposite type of transition. I discuss possible explanations of this pattern of results and outline a forthcoming research project that expands this earlier work in two novel directions: on the one hand, it provides a more comprehensive assessment of similarities and differences in the ways L2 speakers express spatial events—focusing on both speech and co-speech gesture^{4,5}; on the other, it explores the role of co-speech gesture as a pedagogical tool that bolsters longer-lasting positive learning outcomes compared to instruction in speech-alone in teaching spatial language in L2 acquisition contexts.

References

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