

Implementing concept-based instruction in the heritage language classroom: A pedagogical proposal

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ABSTRACT

EN Framed within a Sociocultural Theory of Mind approach to Second Language Learning and Development (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014), this article presents a pedagogical proposal for implementing concept-based instruction (C-BI) in the Spanish heritage language (HL) classroom in order to promote the development and internalization of the grammatical concept of aspect. Although aspect has been found to be particularly troublesome for heritage language learners (Montrul, 2009; Silva-Corvalán, 1994), few studies have focused on teaching conceptual development of verbal aspect in the HL classroom. This paper contributes to filling this gap by proposing an innovative pedagogical design aimed at providing HL students with the opportunity to generate and transform a conceptual understanding of aspect through conscious interaction in significant, coherent, and systematic ways.

Key words: CONCEPT-BASED INSTRUCTION, ASPECT, HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS, SPANISH, SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

ES Enmarcado dentro de la teoría sociocultural de la mente aplicada al desarrollo y aprendizaje de segundas lenguas (Lantolf y Poehner, 2014), este artículo expone una propuesta pedagógica dirigida a la implementación de la instrucción basada en conceptos (C-BI, por sus siglas en inglés) en el aula de español como lengua de herencia (español LH), con el fin de promover el desarrollo e interiorización conceptual del aspecto gramatical. Aunque se ha comprobado que el aspecto entraña una especial dificultad en los aprendices de LH (Montrul 2009; Silva-Corvalán, 1994), no hay, por el momento, propuestas específicas sobre cómo enseñar a desarrollar conceptualmente el aspecto verbal en el aula de LH. El presente trabajo contribuye a llenar este vacío, proponiendo un diseño pedagógico innovador, enfocado en proporcionar a los aprendices de LH la oportunidad de desarrollar y transformar su comprensión del aspecto verbal a través de una interacción consciente y significativa con el concepto y una presentación del concepto coherente y sistemática.

Palabras clave: INSTRUCCIÓN CONCEPTUAL, ASPECTO, APRENDICES DE LENGUA DE HERENCIA, ESPAÑOL, TEORÍA SOCIOCULTURAL

IT Questo articolo si inquadra all'interno della teoria socioculturale della mente in relazione all'acquisizione della seconda lingua (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Il lavoro presenta una proposta pedagogica per l'impiego dell'insegnamento basato su concetti (C-BI) nell'ambito della classe di spagnolo come lingua ereditaria (SLE), al fine di promuovere lo sviluppo ed internalizzazione del concetto grammaticale dell'aspetto verbale. Sebbene si è visto che l'aspetto verbale è particolarmente difficile per studenti di SLE (Montrul, 2009; Silva-Corvalán, 1994), scarseggiano studi che si concentrino sull'insegnamento dello sviluppo concettuale dell'aspetto verbale nella classe di SLE. Questo testo contribuisce a colmare questa lacuna proponendo un innovativo disegno pedagogico volto a fornire agli studenti di SLE l'opportunità di generare e trasformare una comprensione concettuale dell'aspetto verbale attraverso la comunicazione consapevole in modi significativi, coerenti e sistematici.

Parole chiave: INSEGNAMENTO BASATO SU CONCETTI, ASPETTO VERBALE, STUDENTI DI LINGUE EREDITARIE, SPAGNOLO, TEORIA SOCIOCULTURALE

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1. Introduction

The number of Spanish speakers in the United States has grown exponentially in the past 20 years. According to the latest American Community Survey, 13.1% of the country's population speaks Spanish at home, making it the most popular non-English language among people aged 5 or older (US Census Bureau, 2014). In the face of this reality, American higher education has slowly adopted a series of measures to promote the integration of heritage bilinguals in college classrooms across the country (for a comprehensive overview, see Fairclough & Beaudrie, 2016). What started as the implementation of remedial courses for Spanish-speaking students more than 30 years ago (Valdés, 1997) has gradually evolved into the creation of programs with elaborated curriculum guidelines and learning objectives geared toward heritage language learners (HLLs), defined as “individuals . . . who are raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken, (or who) speak or merely understand the HL, and are to some degree bilingual in English and the HL” (Valdés, 2001, pp. 37-38).

One of the most significant changes to take place in this setting was the understanding that the psychological and linguistic processes behind heritage language (HL) acquisition differ in some ways from those operating in second language (L2) acquisition (Montrul, 2002, 2009, 2011; Valdés, 2005). This reconceptualization of heritage language learners brought about the transformation of one-size-fits-all models to meet the needs of this highly diverse student body (Beaudrie, 2011). If we consider Valdés's definition of HLL, given at the end of the previous paragraph, it is easy to see that HLLs constitute a very heterogeneous community, comprised of learners with varying degrees of proficiency and literacy in the heritage language. As Carreira (2012) pointed out, the interaction of students' diverse linguistic profiles with socioaffective factors (i.e. level of identification with the Latino community or confidence regarding their linguistic abilities) calls for a differentiated approach to language teaching.

In this paper, I present a pedagogical sequence for implementing concept-based instruction (C-BI) in the heritage language classroom, and I argue that the adoption of this model provides instructors with the framework needed to effectively promote HLL's cognitive and linguistic development through meaningful, transformative activity. Within this conceptual approach, the implementation of different instructional tools and activities—such as written and oral reflections (verbalizations), visual models, and communicative scenarios—creates opportunities for heritage learners to understand complex categories of meaning through conscious and contextualized manipulation of concepts (García, in press).

2. Understanding Spanish heritage language learners

The growing number of heritage speakers (HS) who enroll in Spanish classes looking to improve their knowledge of the heritage language raises the question of whether their grammars and linguistic experience are comparable to those of L2 learners. Montrul (2012) argues that beyond differing age of onset of bilingualism, variations in HL and L2 learners' settings of initial acquisition (naturalistic vs. instructed), modes of input (aural vs. aural and written), and frequency of input (more vs. less activation) make the groups fundamentally different. Additionally, unlike their L2 counterparts, HS generally undergo a certain degree of attrition and reanalysis in their home language due to a wide range of factors, including incomplete acquisition (Montrul, 2011), low levels of literacy (Pascual y Cabo & Rothman, 2012), and lack of activation of the heritage language (Putnam & Sánchez, 2013). Prolonged contact with the majority language (English, in the United States) from an early age is also likely to modulate HS' control of certain grammatical properties in the home language (Montrul, 2011; Pascual y Cabo & Rothman, 2012; Putnam & Sánchez, 2013). Aspectual contrasts—the focus of this proposal—are particularly problematic in the case of HL grammar, as they are believed to be mastered around the ages of 6;0-7;0 in monolingual speakers (Montrul, 2002), the time when HS begin schooling in English and often undergo a shift in language dominance (i.e. from Spanish to English). If schooling is not also provided in the HL, reduced input and decreased use of Spanish can prompt a reanalysis of preterite/imperfect contrasts, following English-like patterns in which the preterite assumes two aspectual values: [±perfective] (Montrul, 2002, 2009, 2011; see section 4.1 for more details).

2.1. General approaches to teaching and evaluating HLLs in the Spanish classroom

Given the differences between HS and L2 learner grammars, the teaching of HLLs should involve the adoption of specialized techniques that take into consideration the affective and linguistic needs of this group of students. The field of Spanish heritage language (SHL) education has traditionally focused on two key areas of the HL classroom: the implementation of fair assessment tools capable of evaluating such a heterogeneous

student population and the development of effective instructional methods dedicated to the teaching of grammar and other aspects of language. Regarding the former, Beaudrie (2012, 2016) and Potowski and Carreira (2004) propose that placement exams and classroom assessments should be as individualized and as flexible as possible. As Carreira (2012) showed, this can be achieved by setting up ongoing formative assessments throughout the semester, which allow for close monitoring of HLLs' progress and the adaptation of classroom practices to better suit their needs. Regarding instructional methods, the pioneering investigations of Montrul and Bowles (2010) and Potowski, Jegerski, and Morgan-Short (2009) tackled the difficult task of examining whether grammatical instruction would foster HLLs' development following the patterns reported in L2 acquisition (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Russell & Spada, 2006). Although the results in both studies indicated that HLLs showed significant gains in comprehension and production after being exposed to several treatments, it was not clear how different approaches (processing instruction, traditional techniques) had affected their performance. Consequently, Bowles (2011) and Correa (2011a) proceeded to analyze the role of explicit and implicit knowledge in HL development, evaluating learners' abilities using a wide range of experimental tasks. Data from these investigations showed that, when compared to proficiency-matched L2 learners, HLLs exhibited better results in measures where explicit knowledge was not needed.

The studies summarized thus far suggest that the development of complex grammatical notions in HLLs can benefit from grammatical instruction, but that acquisition is highly dependent on HLLs' ability to build upon pre-existing knowledge. Two specific approaches that attempt to capitalize, therefore, on pre-existing knowledge, by implementing instructional techniques focused on the links between mind, language, and society, are Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1993, 1998, 2004) and Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Within SFL, the work of Colombi and collaborators has explored the academic and linguistic development of HLLs (Achugar & Colombi, 2008; Colombi, 2006, 2009; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2008). From a systemic-functional perspective, language learning is understood as a social process where grammar plays a central role, especially in more advanced uses of language (Achugar & Colombi, 2008). The majority of these studies have been primarily dedicated to the teaching and development of two areas in the HL classroom: register (academic/scientific vs. informal) and dialects (standard vs. non-standard varieties). While these topics provide HLLs with the opportunity to develop the skills needed to achieve advanced biliteracy (Colombi & Harrington, 2012), they do not address specific grammatical notions that might also be problematic for HLLs. And while the development of grammatical concepts has been examined from other theoretical perspectives, in this paper, I propose an approach to HS grammar development using an SCT approach to language learning and development. The next section reviews the main tenets of the SCT approach, as well as the most relevant investigations dedicated to the implementation of concept-based instruction (C-BI), an innovative approach focused on the teaching of grammar concepts in the language classroom.

3. Concept-based instruction: A sociocultural approach to aspectual development in the HL classroom

Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory of human consciousness is the basis of a sociocultural approach (SCT) to the study of second and heritage language development (see Lantolf & Poehner, 2014 for a general overview). One of Vygotsky's fundamental claims is that the human mind is mediated; that is, human beings do not interact directly with the world, but through physical and psychological tools (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Mediation, then, indicates that conscious human activity is guided, shaped, and transformed by material/physical (i.e. a hammer, a phone, a pen) and psychological/symbolic (i.e. speech, literacy, logic, geometry, music, etc.) tools and artifacts. In his theory of concept formation, Vygotsky (1986) makes a distinction between two types of knowledge: everyday concepts (learned through observation and characterized by being highly contextualized, based on empirical observation and subjective to concrete practice) and scientific concepts (largely abstract and systematic in nature, and generally learned in educational settings). Everyday concepts typically emerge from a bottom-up reasoning developed from empirical observation and lack the malleability to be transferred to other contexts (Vygotsky, 1986). In other words, learners construct these notions from specific experiences and internalize them through abstract thinking. However, while spontaneous concepts facilitate the internalization of new knowledge, they are difficult to generalize due to their lack of systematicity (Wertsch, 2007). In the L2/HL classroom this is seen in learners' and teachers' use of "rules of thumb", which use observations and situated contexts to engage

with complex grammatical notions (García, 2014; Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006; van Compernelle, 2014). This type of simplified rules includes recommendations such as “always use the imperfect in Spanish when an action is repeated in the past”, or “use preterite when an action happens only once” (see Whitley, 2002 for a complete review). The main consequence of employing this type of everyday knowledge in the language classroom is that learners often fail to see its limited functionality, and they tend to apply rules indiscriminately in a wide variety of contexts (García, 2012; Negueruela 2003; Negueruela & Lantolf 2006; van Compernelle 2014).

Vygotsky (1986) claimed that higher forms of human thinking (e.g. reasoning, logical deduction) are mediated by scientific concepts, due to their high levels of abstraction, systematicity, and de-contextualization, allowing learners to consciously manipulate, transform, and apply this type of knowledge to multiple contexts (García, in press). Hence, pedagogical approaches within this framework place their focus in teaching scientific (i.e. abstract and systematic) linguistic concepts to mediate heritage and second language learners’ internalization of complex categories of meaning such as mood, voice, tense, or, in the case of the present work, aspect. In other words, an SCT pedagogical approach to the SHL and L2 classrooms sees learners as sense-making beings and focuses on putting in motion a coherent and systematic approach to foster learners’ ability to consciously manipulate scientific concepts as tools to mediate their mental and communicative activity (Lantolf, 2011, p. 24). The Vygotskian notion of using scientific concepts as mediational tools for understanding and creating meaning in the teaching-learning-development process, developed further in Davydov’s (1999, 2004) germ cell model and Gal’perin’s (1989, 1992) Systemic-Theoretical Instruction (see Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2010 for a complete analysis of both methods), is considered to be the basis of C-BI.

3.1. Defining concept-based instruction

As its name indicates, C-BI is a pedagogical approach where learners actively interact with concepts in a significant, coherent, and systematic manner to create new meanings in their second/heritage language. While the materialization and transformation of conceptual understandings is deemed essential to promote linguistic development (Negueruela & García, 2016), communicative activity and language reflection through categories of meaning play a fundamental role in the classroom. As a result, a basic C-BI sequence always intertwines the understanding and development of theoretical concepts through didactic models with the use of verbalizations (Negueruela, 2003, p. 224).

Its focus on development as a conceptual process is precisely what makes C-BI different from mainstream pedagogical approaches. While traditional models of L2 and HL instruction expect students to acquire forms first and meanings second (for example, learning verbal morphology related to the Spanish preterite and imperfect first, and then their respective uses), C-BI focuses on teaching categories of meaning and explaining how they are connected to forms in context (van Compernelle, 2014). In summary, a C-BI approach to language teaching and development is based on three basic principles. First and foremost, the quality of the explanation given to the students matters; thus instructors need to develop pedagogically-adequate accounts of the phenomena at all times. Second, conceptual explanations are expected to be presented, using concise visual representations to foster learners’ assignment of functional value in communicative activity. Lastly, students need to engage in social interaction—with the self or with others—to convey their understanding of a particular grammatical notion through written and/or oral verbalizations (Negueruela & García, 2016).

Although research suggests that C-BI is a feasible tool to support learners’ grammatical development, there are a limited number of publications that provide specific pedagogical designs detailing how this approach could actually be implemented in the HL classroom (Aguiló & Negueruela, 2015; García, 2012; Negueruela, 2003; van Compernelle, 2014; Yáñez-Prieto, 2008). The present work adds to the literature on C-BI by proposing a complete pedagogical sequence to promote the conceptual development of aspect in the SHL classroom.

3.2. The implementation of concept-based instruction in the L2 classroom

In the years since Negueruela’s (2003) groundbreaking study, the implementation of C-BI to promote the development of categories of meaning has been explored in a wide range of studies across languages. For example, in French, there have been investigations in literacy (Buescher, 2015), aspect (Gánem-Gutiérrez & Harum, 2011), locative prepositions (Buescher & Strauss, 2015), the grammatical concept of voice (Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, & Brooks, 2009), and the sociopragmatics of self-representation, social distance, and

power (van Compernelle, 2014). In L2 English, studies have examined C-BI for teaching locative prepositions (White, 2012) and sarcasm (Kim, 2013); in L2 Chinese, tense (Lai, 2012) and topicalization (Zhang, 2014); and in German, declensions (Walter & van Compernelle, 2015). In the Spanish L2 classroom, C-BI has been used to explore aspect, tense, and mood (Negueruela, 2003, 2008); locative prepositions (Serrano-López & Poehner, 2008); the development of literary metaphor (Yáñez-Prieto, 2008); the use of motion events as mediational tools for giving directions (Aguiló-Mora & Negueruela, 2015); the sociopragmatics of self-representation, social distance, and power applied to *tú/usted* (van Compernelle, Webber, & Gomez-Llaich, 2016); and the concept of aspect applied to the relationship between Spanish preterite and imperfect tenses (Gánem-Gutiérrez 2016; García, 2012, 2014; Negueruela, 2003; Polizzi, 2013).

Among the previous studies, Negueruela (2003) was the first to propose a well-articulated C-BI pedagogical sequence. In that investigation, he worked with 12 intermediate Spanish L2 learners to improve their use and understanding of aspect. After being exposed to a didactic design similar to the one proposed in this article (see Negueruela, 2003 and 2006 studies for more details), students were asked to engage in verbalization activities with themselves aimed at reflecting on and promoting their aspectual understanding. Although results from Negueruela's intervention indicated that learners' development was not even across the board, there appeared to be a connection between the implementation of C-BI and an improvement of L2 learners' control of aspect.

The pedagogical proposal in this article—in contrast with Negueruela (2003)—is geared toward HLLs and suggests a more nuanced teaching sequence that includes a wide range of activities tapping into different modalities (oral and written) and involving various dynamics (groups, dyads, and individual work), aimed at enhancing the positive effects of C-BI observed in previous research and at promoting the internalization of aspect in the HL classroom.

3.3. The implementation of concept-based instruction in the HL classroom

As indicated in previous sections, HLLs' exposure to the home language occurs largely in naturalistic settings, in which the acquisition of grammatical notions such as aspect, mood, or agreement emerges from the linguistic input received (Montrul, 2009, 2011). This type of experience with the heritage language stands in contrast to popular L2 pedagogical models, which typically involve the explicit instruction of morphology and prioritize memorization and recognition, often creating a disconnect between meaning and form (Correa, 2011b). Unlike those models, C-BI focuses in the development of complex grammatical notions by exploring the semantic and pragmatic value of the underlying concept behind them, establishing a link between meaning and form in the last stages of the instructional sequence. Given HLLs' informal experience with the heritage language, it is proposed here that SCT and C-BI's emphasis on meaning and contextualized learning activity is more in tune with this population's needs as language learners.

Despite these observations, there has been just one investigation (García Frazier, 2013) that has attempted to adopt C-BI for the SHL classroom. The objective of García Frazier's qualitative study was to improve HLLs' ($N = 6$) understanding and use of indicative and subjunctive mood by exposing the HL students to C-BI instruction. García Frazier noted that, before adopting this pedagogical approach, the majority of the students exhibited a rather simplified perception of mood, which affected their oral and written performance. In her study, she proposed the use of systemic-theoretical instruction (STI), a tool-mediated teaching and learning approach created by Gal'perin (1969, 1989, 1992), based on Vygotskian principles. As noted by Negueruela and Lantolf (2006), "C-BI in itself does not constitute a pedagogy, but a theoretical claim about the appropriate object of instruction in any educational domain" (p. 98). As such, it requires the implementation of concrete didactic models (such as STI) to be used as tools for cognitive and linguistic development. Given the difficulty García Frazier's students showed regarding the notion of mood in Spanish, she decided to use Negueruela's (2003) cheme of a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action (SCOBA), shown in Figure 1, to introduce aspect to the class.

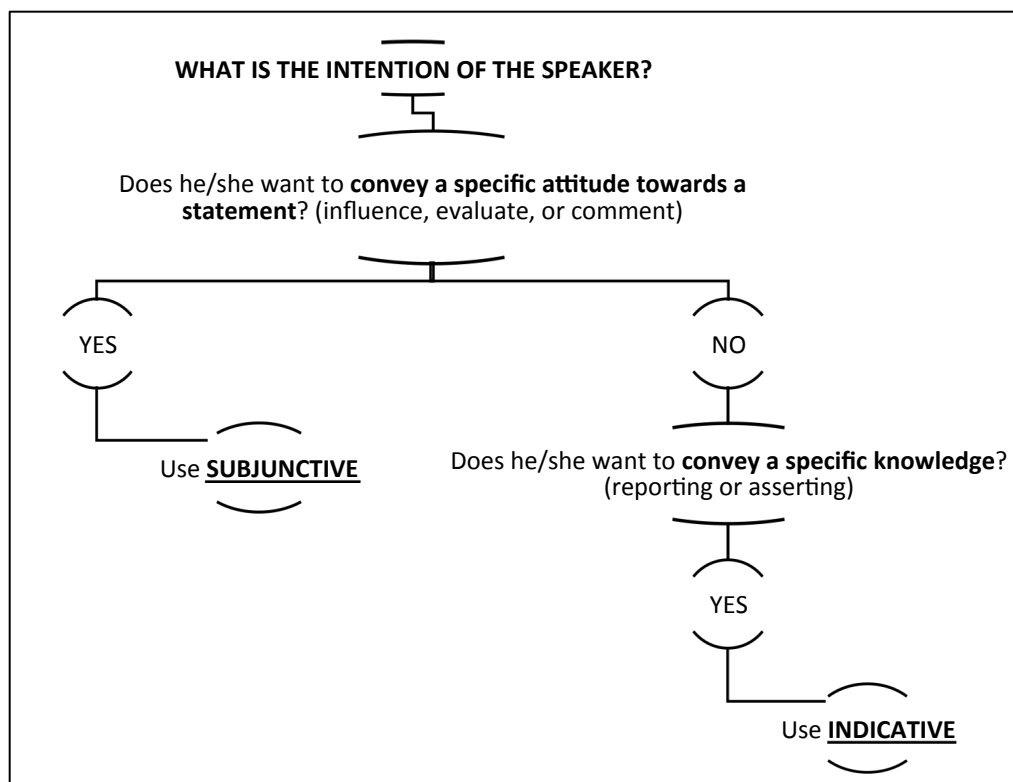


Figure 1. Adaptation of the SCOBA implemented by García Frazier (2013) in her C-BI study

García Frazier’s graphic representation was designed to help HLLs visualize the semantic and pragmatic parameters that trigger mood selection in Spanish. The SCOBA illustrated in Figure 1 not only allowed students to identify the meaning behind the presence of indicative or subjunctive in the subordinate clause of given sentence, but also fostered the use of this knowledge in new communicative contexts. After being exposed to the conceptual unit of instruction (mood) by means of the SCOBA, students were asked to complete a series of written activities (i.e. making recommendations, asking for favors, etc.) and verbally reflect on their modal choices based on the provided pedagogical model to justify their choice of indicative or subjunctive. These oral reflections (i.e. verbalizations), aimed at fostering L2 conceptual development, constitute what Gal’perin (1969, p. 260) called dialogic thinking, as they allow learners to use language to socially interact with themselves by using the concepts to explain their linguistic choices. In García Frazier’s study, HLLs’ verbalizations were recorded and later reviewed by the instructor. Once these activities had taken place, HLLs were prompted to construct their own definition of mood based on their experience with the concept. The analysis of students’ verbalizations and written data indicated that they were in the process of developing a much more nuanced understanding of Spanish mood. This, in turn, resulted in higher levels of accuracy in their use of indicative and subjunctive in a wide variety of contexts. These results suggest that, on the whole, the implementation of a concept-based approach appeared to be beneficial for the development and maintenance of a complex grammatical notion, such as mood, in HLLs.

However, from an SCT perspective, development of conceptual categories proceeds socially, through both intra-personal communication (with the self) and inter-personal communication (with others) (Negueruela, García, & Buescher, 2015, p. 23). Therefore, it makes sense to incorporate activities that not only prompt learners’ dialogic thinking with the self, but also “communicated thinking” (Gal’perin, 1969, p. 260), wherein learners aim at making their reflections comprehensible to others and receive mediation from more experienced peers to maximize their learning opportunities. In the following sections, I propose a detailed pedagogical sequence, based on these principles, for implementing C-BI in the HL classroom to present the concept of aspect.

4. The pedagogical proposal: Teaching aspect through C-BI

4.1. HLLs and the acquisition and development of aspect in Spanish

The instructional sequence presented in this article focuses on the grammatical concept of aspect, more specifically, the aspectual contrasts that emerge between the Spanish preterite and imperfect tenses. As reported in previous sections, there have been several studies dedicated to the teaching and learning of this linguistic notion within a SCT perspective (Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2016; García, 2012, 2014, 2017; Negueruela, 2003; Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006; Polizzi, 2013); however, this is the first proposal that presents a complete pedagogical sequence focused on how to present aspect in the SHL classroom.

HLLs have been reported to exhibit a considerable degree of attrition when dealing with aspectual contrasts even at high levels of proficiency (Borik, 2013; Cuza & Miller, 2015; Cuza, Pérez-Tattam, Barajas, Miller, & Sadowski, 2013; Montrul, 2002, 2009, 2011; Montrul & Bowles, 2010; Montrul & Perpiñán, 2011; Montrul & Slabakova, 2003). Difficulties in this area stem from several crosslinguistic differences between Spanish and English in the expression of aspect. Spanish, the weaker language of HLLs, presents a very complex aspectual system, in which perfectivity and imperfectivity in the past are conveyed by means of two morphological instantiations: preterite (1a) and imperfect (1b).

- | | | | | | |
|----|----|--|----------------|------------|--------------|
| 1) | a. | Estela | comió | un donut | de chocolate |
| | | Estela | eat [3psgPRET] | a doughnut | of chocolate |
| | | <i>Estela ate a chocolate doughnut</i> | | | |
| | b. | Estela | comía | un donut | de chocolate |
| | | Estela | eat [3psgIMP] | a doughnut | of chocolate |
| | | <i>Estela ate a chocolate doughnut</i> | | | |

In the first example (1a) the preterite form *comió* (“ate”) marks that the action of eating is seen as bounded by the speaker; its duration has a clear beginning and end. In the second example (2b) the imperfect form *comía* (“ate”) profiles that the event is viewed as unbounded, and that the emphasis of the action lies in its progressiveness and/or habituality. The problematic issue for HLLs is that, while English and Spanish overlap in their expression of perfectivity, they differ in the way they convey imperfectivity. As shown in the second example (1b), Spanish generally expresses unbounded events with imperfect forms. English, on the other hand, resorts to a wide variety of alternatives to convey the same notion¹.

The contrast between these two languages causes English-dominant HLLs to have difficulties remapping [±perfective] aspectual features to the corresponding tense/aspect morphemes in their home language (Spanish). In particular, many studies have reported that HLLs lose the preterite/imperfect contrast in favor of the adoption of a single tense (preterite) to convey perfectivity and imperfectivity (Montrul, 2002, 2009, 2011; Silva-Corvalán, 1994). In addition to the challenges that emerge from the mere fact of being bilingual, mastery of this linguistic property is also affected by the interaction of the inherent lexical properties of a specific verb (i.e. lexical aspect) and other linguistic components that extend beyond the verb phrase, such as temporal markers and nominal arguments (Verkuyl, 1972). If we focus on the former, a considerable number of investigations in the fields of first and second language acquisition have observed that speakers (monolingual and bilingual) tend to express congruent combinations of lexical and grammatical aspect (that is, telic predicates with the preterite, and atelic ones with the imperfect) more so than non-congruent ones (Andersen & Shirai, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig, 2000). This preference, known as Primacy of Aspect Hypothesis (PAH), is also predicted to affect HLLs, especially given the reinforcement of this tendency by means of rules of thumb (ROTs) when HLLs are enrolled in a language class (see section 3.1 for more information).

The widespread presence of these issues in heritage Spanish populations underscores the need for effective pedagogical interventions. The following section outlines a suggested timeline for the

¹ Some of these alternatives include the use of the simple past –i.e. preterite forms– (*Estela ate a chocolate doughnut*) or different types of periphrases that emphasize either the habituality of the action (*Estela used to/would eat a chocolate doughnut*) or its progressive nature (*Estela was eating a chocolate doughnut*). Note that the last periphrastic option is also available in Spanish (*Estela estaba comiendo un donut de chocolate*), but the auxiliary verb (*estaba*; “was”) appears in the imperfect.

implementation of a C-BI sequence and provides thorough descriptions and samples of the types of activities and instruments included.

4.2. Components and implementation of the instructional sequence

It is important to note that, from an SCT perspective, research and teaching are not seen as two separate practices, but rather as a unified activity (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Consequently, the effectiveness of any type of pedagogical decisions made in the classroom should be examined by the instructor from two different perspectives: that of a practitioner and of a researcher (García, 2012, p. 8). This dialectical relationship allows language teachers to put into practice new ideas and modify previous ones based on the observation and careful study of students' learning processes. Thus, although the implementation described below was originally designed to take place during four sessions of 70 minutes each, it could be adapted to different settings in order to work around specific constraints (total length of the session, number of weekly meetings, specific needs of the students, etc.).

Table 1
Timeline of the pedagogical implementation

Session	Objectives and Description
Day 1: Pedagogical intervention: CB-I and aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students and the instructor explore their previous knowledge on aspect and preterite and imperfect • Implementation of CB-I
Days 2 and 3: Practicing the use of preterite and imperfect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of controlled activities on the use of preterite and imperfect (contextualized multiple choices, elicited narratives) • Communicative scenarios (Di Pietro, 1987)
Day 4: Reflecting on the concept of aspect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual reflections and completion of activities • Mediated interview (student-instructor)

The pedagogical sequence outlined in Table 1 draws from the models presented in García (2012) and García and Perez-Cortes (2017), two studies focused on fostering the development of grammatical categories in L2 learners and HLLs respectively. Although these investigations implemented C-BI in the language classroom, they were both empirical studies that focused on verbalization data obtained after the completion of several experimental tasks and they both sought to determine the effectiveness of C-BI and dynamic assessment to promote these populations' aspectual development. This article builds on those, by proposing and describing a pedagogical sequence to implement C-BI in the heritage language classroom, providing a model for practitioners to use directly in their own classrooms or a template to be adapted according to their own pedagogical needs.

It is highly recommended that the instructor begin by gathering extensive information about the HLLs' previous knowledge of preterite and imperfect aspectual contrasts and uses before the start of the session. Given the documented production/comprehension asymmetries in HLLs (Hendriks & Koster, 2010; Sherkina-Lieber, 2011) and their sometimes-limited metalinguistic knowledge, this proposal advocates for the use of tasks tapping into different skills (comprehension, production, and acceptability judgments) to gauge students' underlying linguistic abilities. During this evaluative stage—prior to the implementation of C-BI—HLLs would be asked to complete a written task based on their perceptions and previous knowledge. They would be prompted to listen to two pairs of sentences (also be presented in written form on the blackboard), and asked to determine whether they detect any semantic difference between them. In order to expedite the process, answers should be done in writing and handed to the instructor. For example:

- 2) a. El barco llegó al puerto
The ship arrive[3psgPRET] to the harbor
The ship arrived at the harbor
- b. El barco llegaba al puerto
The ship arrive[3psgIMP] to the harbor
The ship arrived at the harbor
- 3) a. Mi madre estuvo con mis primos
My mother be[3psgPRET] with my cousins
My mother was with my cousins
- b. Mi madre estaba con mis primos
My mother be[3psgIMP] with my cousins
My mother was with my cousins

The aim of this exercise is two-fold. On the one hand, it reveals whether students are sensitive to aspectual contrasts triggered by the use of preterite and imperfect before they are exposed to C-BI. Given the diverse nature of the verbs used (telic and atelic), their responses are also able to identify any potential lexical constraints that may limit students' aspectual control. On the other hand, this activity promotes HLLs' awareness of perfective/imperfective distinctions in Spanish, a first step towards concept formation and conceptual development of the notion of aspect.

In addition to this short reflection, the instructor would also ask HLLs to write a couple of sentences explaining when they use the preterite as in (2a) and (3a) or the imperfect as in (2b) and (3b). The evaluation of the results can be used as an initial assessment of the students' previous knowledge, as well as a potential source for future interventions, as it provides details about the learners' potential development that will inform about the type of mediation required to foster conceptual development across the board, inevitably improving the quality of the teaching-learning process. One way of dealing with differences in learners' previous knowledge of aspect that may arise in this task would be to group students' according to their Zones of Proximal Development (ZPDs)², following Lipkina (1994) and Petrovsky (1985). The aim would be to create heterogeneous groups of learners with differing levels of control, who would promote different kinds of mediation (inter- and intra-group mediation, self-mediation and instructor-group mediation).

4.2.1. Implementing C-BI to the teaching of aspect

After the initial assessment, C-BI is then implemented. The approach to C-BI is based on Negueruela (2003) and García's (2012) proposals for the development of concepts as categories of meaning. In these studies, exposure to coherent and systematic didactic models, as well as to the conscious manipulation of the concept through significant communicative activity and language reflection, played a fundamental role in the development of aspect. These principles come into play here when students are asked to form small groups of 3 or 4 and to share the working definitions of aspect they had created during the previous activity. Although at this point it is expected that most of the definitions would rely on previously acquired rules of thumb and/or observations, it is beneficial to establish a dialogue so that students can become more familiar with the conceptual category at hand.

After this step, HLLs would be presented with a SCOPA, designed as a mediational tool for internalizing the grammatical concept of aspect in Spanish. Based on Bolinger's (1991) formal accounts of aspect, and Bull's (1984) and Whitley's (2002) supporting visual representations, the model suggested for this proposal—shown in Figure 2 below—consists of two parts: 1) a short, written explanation tackling the notions of lexical and grammatical aspect, as well as the importance of the speaker's perspective; and 2) a chart contrasting the preterite and imperfect tenses using visual cues.

² If we follow Vygotsky's (1986) original definition of ZPD created in the context of child psychology, this notion is used to determine the child's potential cognitive development, as indicated by the distance between what the child can do on his own and what can do with the assistance of an adult or a more developed individual.

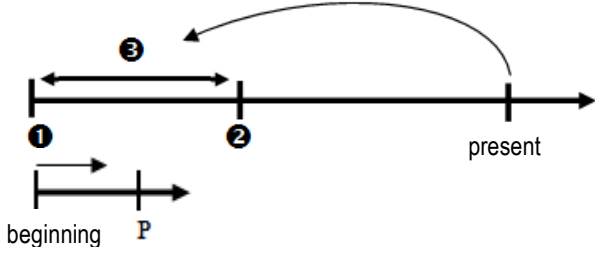

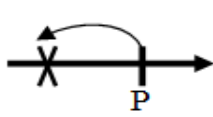
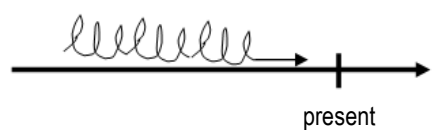
<u>Understanding ASPECT</u>	
<p>The concept of aspect indicates the speaker's perspective on an action. That is, what is the part/action that you as the speaker/writer want to emphasize.</p> <p>Aspect is determined by two factors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lexical aspect: based on the meaning of the verb (bounded or unbounded). Grammatical aspect: based on the context of an action (perfective or imperfective) <p>When these two elements are combined, they can emphasize the beginning, middle, end, or completion of an action. The speaker's perspective over the past action to choose between preterite and imperfect is determined by the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What part of the action is the speaker emphasizing? • Does the verb have bounded meaning (e.g. to fall)? • Where in the past is the action from our present perspective? 	
PRETERIT	IMPERFECT
<p>Indicates the beginning or end of an action or that an action is completed from the present perspective (our perception from the present).</p>	<p>Profiles an action that has no boundaries (limits) in the past.</p>
 <p><i>Salí de casa a las 6:00</i> (bounded event, points to the beginning of the action)</p>  <p><i>El banco cerró a las 3:00</i> (bounded event, points to the end of the action)</p>  <p><i>Viví en Londres durante un año</i> (Completed action from a present perspective)</p>	 <p><i>Juan vivía en Perú</i> (unbounded event, we don't know its beginning, end, or duration in the past)</p>

Figure 2. SCOPA used during the implementation of C-BI

Following the presentation of the SCOPA, learners should be given some time to explore and discuss the materials, ideally in heterogeneous groups previously formed according to their ZPD in relation to the concept of aspect. In groups, students would compare their initial definitions of aspect with the information given in the visual representation. Next, since the main objective of the didactic model is to orient HLLs' performance, it is recommended to have a phase of explicit instruction where the teacher presents the new grammatical notions, using the provided SCOPA. Then, to ensure that the learners understand this pedagogical representation, the final step of this class session would incorporate a practical application of the model to solve an activity. Once again, students would return to their groups and would be asked to analyze a narrative in the past in their dominant language. For example, in a class of Spanish HLLs whose dominant language is English, students could be exposed in English to the theme song of "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air"³.

In west Philadelphia born and raised
 On the playground is where I spent most of my days
 Chillin' out max, and relaxin' all cool
 And all shootin' some b-ball outside of the school
 When a couple of guys who were up to no good
 Started makin' trouble in my neighborhood
 I got in one little fight and my mom got scared
 And said you're movin' with your auntie and uncle in Bel-Air

Figure 3. Fragment of "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" lyrics used in an activity during the first session.

The lyrics, a short narrative from the show, "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," would be analyzed by all the members of the group. Students would be instructed to underline all the verbs in the past tense that appear in the song. They would then discuss whether they describe perfective or imperfective actions, connecting it to the concept presented in the SCOPA in order to decide whether that action would be expressed in the preterite or the imperfect in Spanish. As mentioned earlier, unlike Spanish, English does not mark aspectual distinctions in the past morphologically; however, both languages can express actions that profile perfective or imperfective events in the past. This type of comparative activity is designed to foster HLLs' awareness towards aspectual distinctions in their dominant language (i.e. English), which can be bridged to their heritage language with the mediation of the proposed pedagogical model. Ideally, the correction of this task would take place at the end of the session so that the different groups would have to justify their choices, using the SCOPA, in front of their peers and so that they would receive immediate feedback and mediation from the rest of the class (instructor included). However, it is also possible to resume the activity at the beginning of the next session to confirm that students had understood the material or have them complete the activity as homework, using the opportunity to have learners reflect upon their choices and voice-record their rationale for each of their decisions with the support of the previously presented SCOPA. This verbalization technique, used by Negueruela (2003) to foster L2 conceptual development, draws from what Gal'perin (1969, p. 260) called dialogic thinking, as it allows learners to use language to socially interact with themselves by using the concepts to explain their linguistic choices.

Lantolf and Poehner (2014) indicate that "concepts are relevant for the formation of consciousness because they shape how we perceive, understand, and act in and on the world" (p. 61). This activity helps HLLs to do precisely that. While the use of HLLs' dominant language (English) is generally discouraged in the communicative language classroom, this activity allows students to explore new concepts in a comfortable environment and create interlinguistic connections among languages while still emphasizing morphological differences in expression.

³ This song can be substituted by another song or text, as long as it features a narrative in the past. As mentioned in the proposal, the goal of this activity is for students to determine how past events are expressed in their dominant language (English) and make connections with their weaker one (Spanish), reflecting upon what would be the best way to convey the same aspectual nuances.

4.2.2. From controlled practice to communicative activity

Presenting HLLs with visual tools and representations (i.e. SCOBAs) is not enough to foster true conceptual development (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 148). In order to bring students closer to that goal, they need to be able to manipulate and transform concepts through meaningful communication, a process that García (in press) refers to as conscious conceptual manipulation (CCM). At this stage, it is essential that learners engage with the original models to make them their own by transforming, internalizing, and externalizing them through social interaction with others and with the self (Negueruela, García, & Buescher, 2015). In the second session, this would be achieved by exposing HLLs to a wide range of activities where they can apply their newly-acquired knowledge.

Ideally, these tasks should be organized from more to less structured in order to facilitate students' progress toward conceptual development. A suitable exercise to start this process would be a multiple-choice activity with 8-10 items, wherein students would have to choose between three potential answers that would best fit the blank provided:

- 4) Ella _____ (ir) a la piscina todas las semanas
 She _____(goINF) to the pool all the weeks
- a) iba b) fue c) ambas son posibles
went [3psgIMP] went[3psgPRET] both are possible
- 5) El estudiante _____ (comenzar) a trabajar a las seis
 The student _____ (startINF) to work to the six
- a) comenzó b) comenzaba c) ambas son posibles
started[3psgIMP] started[3psgPRET] both are possible

As illustrated by the previous examples, the target sentences feature linguistic characteristics (such as certain type of events, adverbs, and other details of time and duration) usually linked to the use of either preterite or imperfect by traditional ROTs. In Question 4 this was achieved by the presence of the expression *todas las semanas* (“every week”), generally associated to the imperfect; and in Question 5 by *a las seis* (“at six”), where preterite would be expected. As we know, however, the application of ROTs simplifies the richness and flexibility of Spanish aspect, which would actually allow for the presence of both tenses in each of the examples. The objective of this task is two-fold. On the one hand, it informs how HLLs’ make their aspectual choices (i.e. by observation, rules of thumb, alluding to the concept, etc.), and on the other, it provides learners with the opportunity to manipulate and transform the conceptual tools provided (SCOBA) to orient their responses as an additional step towards conceptual development.

The next activity is designed to favor the communicative strengths present in HLLs by prompting them to produce a written narration in the past, conceived to trigger the use of preterite and imperfect forms in context. The images provided—based on a short comic strip from the Spanish textbook *Dos Mundos* (Terrell, Andrade, Egasse, & Munoz, 2002, p. 422)—depict a sequence of events where Miguel, a young bike-rider is accidentally run over by a car, then taken to the hospital where he is seen by the doctors until he recovers from his injuries.

This task, which would be revisited during the last session, allows learners to produce preterite and imperfect forms in a contextually-rich environment; however, it still lacks the meaningfulness and communicative value needed to foster internalization (Gal’perin, 1969). The next activity, based on DiPietro’s (1987) scenarios, provides a strategic interaction approach to language pedagogy. These types of scenarios are comprised of three interconnected stages—preparation, performance, and debriefing—and allow for the implementation of communicative activity and language reflection in the classroom. In contrast to traditional role-playing, DiPietro’s proposal includes a dramatic element where students have different agendas and where none of the learners know the other’s role in the scenario. These characteristics generate situations with a “communicative meaning-making improvising quality” (Negueruela, 2003, p. 226), which is often lacking in traditional role-playing activities. Figure 5 shows this activity.

Original Activity	Translation
<p>Situación – Dos amigos se encuentran para tomar un café. Uno de lleva saliendo con su novio/a más de un año . El gran problema es que están discutiendo todo el día y la semana pasada tuvieron una gran pelea.</p> <p>Estudiante A: Estás muy enfadado/a con tu novio/a y le cuentas a tu mejor amigo/a tu versión de la discusión y le explicas porque está discusión fue diferente de las anteriores. Le pides a tu mejor amigo/a que te aconseje lo que deberías hacer.</p> <p>Estudiante B: Tu mejor amigo/a te cuenta la discusión que tuvo con su novio/a la semana pasada. Tú estás cansado/a de escucharle hablar siempre de sus problemas de pareja y le recomiendas que rompa con su novio/a basándote en tus experiencias de pareja anteriores.</p>	<p>Situation: “Two best friends meet for coffee. One of them has been seeing his/her boyfriend/girlfriend for more than a year. The big problem is that they’re always arguing, and last week they had a big fight.</p> <p>Student A: “You are very angry with your boyfriend and tell your best friend your version of the discussion, explaining why it was different from the previous ones. You ask your best friend to advise you on what to do next.</p> <p>Student B: Your best friend tells you about the discussion he/she had with her/his boyfriend/girlfriend last week. You are tired of listening to him/her talk about their relationship problems and recommend that they break up based on your previous experiences.</p>

Figure 5. Sample of García’s (2012) design of a scenario (DiPietro, 1987) for strategic interaction

The implementation of this task would be staged as follows: First, HLLs go through a short “preparation” process in small groups, where they receive instructions about their role and the context they will be working on. Once this phase is completed, each group performs their scenario in front of their peers, who in turn, take notes regarding the use of preterite and imperfect. During the last stage, known as “debriefing”, the whole class provides feedback using conceptual explanations with the help of their SCOBAs. If students are not able to justify their aspectual choices adequately, the instructor would provide the appropriate mediation to ensure the conceptual explanations were understood.

As argued throughout this article, one of the keys to internalization lies in fostering learners’ conscious conceptual manipulation (CCM) in the classroom, allowing them to reflect upon their performance by creating new abstract models to orient their actions (in this case, their aspectual choices). Although the 2-3 sessions described so far provide opportunities for HLLs to familiarize themselves with the concept of aspect with the help of the SCOBA, they have not been involved in the modification of this diagram based on their own emerging understanding of this notion. This appropriation and transformation from the original model is reported to increase learners’ agency “to the extent that it allows them to participate in the co-construction of new knowledge” (Stanfield, 2014, p. 175). Therefore, the last session would be dedicated to the deployment of tasks that emphasize introspection and CCM, while still exposing students to limited dialogic interactions.

4.2.3. Reflecting on the concept of aspect

In this fourth and final session, given that the goal is reflection on the part of the learner, the majority of the activities proposed have either a dyadic component led by the practitioner or an individual focus. Following the suggestions by Negueruela-Azarola (2013) and García (2017), during the first part of the session, learners would engage with the original models and transform them to appropriate them through conscious conceptual manipulation in social interaction with others and with the self. These pedagogical models then not only become a useful tool for the instructor, who is able to observe learners’ conceptual development in the making, but also for learners, who are stimulated to use scientific concepts to mediate their thinking.

Once students have created their models, they would be asked to revisit two of the five activities they had previously completed (the multiple-choice test and the written elicited narration) during a short, mediated interview conducted by the teacher. The main objective of these dyadic interactions is to reveal—and prompt—instances of conceptual development in the making and thus to provide more accurate information about HLLs’ progress than could be learned from their performance in static activities. As noted by García (2012), when engaged in verbalization activities, learners do not limit themselves to talk *about* a grammatical concept; instead, they talk *through* the concept to solve a particular task. As a result, these dialogic interactions are expected to prompt complex justifications for students’ choice of preterite and imperfect in specific situations (with or without the help of the SCOBA), inevitably exposing students’ real understanding of the concept of aspect.

In contrast with previous implementations of C-BI, the present proposal incorporates students' reflections (also known as verbalizations) in a wide range of activities, involving the participation of others (groups and instructor-student dyads) as well as themselves. This variety of classroom activities is particularly beneficial for HLLs, whose levels of instructional experience, literacy, and proficiency in the home language may affect how they perform in different types of tasks (Carreira, 2012). Additionally, the possibility of receiving immediate mediation by the instructor and by peers during certain classroom activities is very much in line with a differentiated approach to language teaching, essential in the SHL classroom (Beaudrie, 2012, 2016; Carreira, 2012).

5. Conclusion

As has been discussed throughout this paper, two main ideas form the basis of C-BI for the SHL classroom: Vygotsky's (1986) theory of concept formation and Negueruela's (2003) recommendations for the design and implementation of pedagogical models focused on language development as the internalization of categories of meaning. Grounded in those sociocultural principles, this paper has presented a didactic sequence aimed at the development of the grammatical concept of aspect, as a meditational tool for understanding and gaining control over the heritage language. A Vygotskian approach to language learning and development proposes that properly organized learning creates and promotes conceptual transformation through socially mediated and significant, goal-oriented activity (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). This is precisely what has been proposed in the present article: learners consciously engage with a grammatical concept as a tool for thinking, both intrapersonally or interpersonally, fostering awareness of new conceptual categories in the heritage language. This process of engaging with concepts and actively using them with others in social interaction is indeed the origin of conceptual intra-action, leading to language learning and development (Negueruela-Azarola, García, & Buescher, 2015). The implementation of C-BI in the SHL classroom presented in this paper emphasizes the importance of all these sociocultural elements, including the crucial role of a properly-organized instruction in the shaping, development, and internalization of grammatical notions. This paper provides practitioners with instructional tools to foster the development of grammatical categories of meaning for HLLs. While this work only presents a proposal for putting C-BI into practice in the HL classroom, a detailed discussion of empirical data related to the implementation of this pedagogical sequence can be found in García & Perez-Cortes (2017).

An SCT approach to HL education sees HLLs as socio-historical beings whose agency and identity are mediated by their experiences and social interactions, both inside and outside of the classroom (García, 2014). As such, it seems imperative to move away from traditional pedagogical models based on rules and repetition and to embrace those that empower learners and foster their agency as they co-construct, transform, and co-own their learning experiences. Through C-BI, teachers also become mediators who provide the sense-making tools and significant teaching-learning activity that allows learners to be active participants in the classroom.

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