SLA Lab Report #2

After having spent a great deal of time with Ricardo, my second-language learner from Mexico City, I have noticed some patterns in his English errors that I can definitively evaluate. There are others but I have very few clear examples that establish a pattern within those errors and cannot clearly evaluate what the problem might be. Ricardo seems to be having trouble with auxiliary verb movement in question formation, exceptions to past tense verb formation, omission of pronouns, and pronoun redundancy. The following are the clearest examples I have gathered of these errors.

1. How you are getting to the game?
   What you are going to have to eat?
   Where you are going for vacation?
   What you think is going to happen?

This group of errors is an example of not understanding question formation and all of the rules involved. It might simply be inability to process on-line rather than a complete lack of understanding. The learner is in a later stage of question formation. He understands Wh-movement and where the question words belong but does not always understand where his auxiliary verb belongs. This could also be a significant source of confusion because in his native language (Spanish) pronouns can be implied by the form of the verb being used and are going would be replaced with only one Spanish word as Spanish does not have auxiliary verbs. In the last example the learner does seem to grasp auxiliary verb movement.

2. I runned to the store.
   Julia haved to be there by three o clock this morning to get on the train.
   When we were in Hawaií I swimmmed everyday.
   I played soccer in school when I was a child.
   I called my mother last night to tell her we are going to be married.

This particular group of errors shows trouble forming past tense verbs. The learner knows how to form past tense verbs but is overextending the pattern and does not know about English's special exceptions to grammar rules. He actually corrected himself and replaced haved with had just after he finished uttering the phrase. His self-correction shows that he is transitioning, which in this case probably has to come simply from modeling and exposure to English.
3. Have to be there by when?
   Went to the jewelry store to buy our rings last night. Have no money left today! The rings were very much money.

This is a piece of casual conversation between the learner and another second language learner that was sitting at lunch with us one afternoon. This is an omission of pronouns and would be a native language transfer error. In Spanish, the verb-form chosen implies the pronoun and this is not the case in English. Ricardo seems to only do this when he is speaking at a more rapid pace.

4. My brother and Alicia they are going to Mexico City to visit my mother.
   That lady she forgot to give me my change.
   That guy he is the one that we know from our job.

This is an example of pronoun redundancy. The learner does not make this error in all instances but it is rather frequent. Since we have been working together it has become less frequent and seems to become more frequent again when the pace of the conversation speeds up and there is less concentration on English.

   In addition to the errors discussed above, there have been some errors that I cannot definitively identify such as syntactic word order errors. Sometimes Ricardo puts adjectives after nouns rather than before them. There is also double negation in our conversations occasionally but he seems to catch his errors and correct them immediately. Ricardo also substitutes native words in the middle of his sentences occasionally without even realizing what he did. Luckily for us, I do understand a little bit of Spanish vocabulary! Ricardo’s English is very clear and very seldom inhibits comprehension by a listener.