

How corpus data can inform about theoretical questions in SLA: Triangulating corpus and experimental methods

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In the field of bilingualism and second language (L2) acquisition research, experimental methods have traditionally been favored over naturalistic production methods (cf. Mackey & Gass, 2005 vs. 2012) and SLA researchers have often shied away from natural corpus-based approaches (Granger, 2021). However, recent work has advocated combining corpus and experimental methods in L2 linguistic research (Gilquin, 2021, *inter alia*). Corpus methods have begun to gain visibility in recent SLA research-methods handbooks (Slabakova et al., 2025) and are increasingly being used to address theoretically motivated SLA questions (Lozano, 2021; Tracy-Ventura et al., 2021).

Although methodological triangulation is common in many scientific disciplines (Egbert & Baker, 2019; Hastings, 2010), it is not yet widespread in SLA, despite being methodologically necessary. Triangulating corpus and experimental data not only provides a more comprehensive view of the linguistic phenomenon under investigation, but also increases the reliability of the findings (Callies, 2015).

In this talk, I present a model of *cyclical triangulation* (Mendikoetxea & Lozano, 2018), through which a single linguistic phenomenon can be investigated using different research methods and data types (in this case, corpus data and experimental data). We illustrate this model with several studies conducted in BilinguaLab (<http://bilingualab.ugr.es>) at the University of Granada, where we triangulate data from our linguistic corpora (the CEDEL2 and COREFL corpora: <https://www.learnercorpora.com>) and from psycholinguistic experiments to investigate anaphora resolution.

Importantly, triangulation goes beyond the mere use of two methodologies (Denzin, 2006), such as corpus and experiments. In corpus-based approaches, we can triangulate different types of data from the same learner (written vs. spoken) or from typologically different L1s, provided the corpus design allows it. Furthermore, incorporating additional database resources (e.g., the Syntactic Database of Spanish, BDS; the National Statistics Institute database, INE; word-frequency databases) offers key methodological advantages when designing ecologically valid experiments to investigate a given L2 linguistic phenomenon.

Ultimately, triangulation provides a richer and more robust perspective on the linguistic phenomenon under investigation—one that would not be possible if only a single research method were used.

About the speaker:

[Cristóbal Lozano](#) (PhD, University of Essex) is Associate Professor of English Applied Linguistics at the Universidad de Granada (Spain). His primary research interests include Second Language Acquisition, Bilingualism, and Learner Corpus Research. He leads [BilingualLab](#) (Laboratory for Language Acquisition and Processing in Bilinguals) and directs two major learner corpora: [CEDEL2](#) (Corpus de Español como L2), launched in 2006, a freely accessible and extensive corpus of L2 Spanish learners from eleven distinct L1 backgrounds (including English, Greek, Japanese, Arabic, and Chinese), and the similarly structured [COREFL](#) (Corpus of English as a Foreign Language).

His research team also manages [learnercorpora.com](https://www.learnercorpora.com), a platform where both learners and native speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds contribute to the corpora. Cristóbal has directed ANACOREX, a research project focused on the acquisition of anaphora resolution in L2 Spanish and L2 English—an area in which he has published extensively.

He advocates for the triangulation of corpus-based approaches and psycholinguistic experimental methods (such as reaction time and eye-tracking) to gain deeper insights into bilingual and L2 learner language.

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