

Title: *Issues in East Asian language acquisition.*

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This volume is a collection of papers on the first and second language acquisition of East Asian languages (Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, and Taiwanese). All but two of the papers were presented at a workshop on the psycholinguistics of East Asian languages held at Ohio State in 1999. It appears in the context of heightened interest in these languages from the standpoint of language acquisition theory, reflected in such publications as Whitman and Shirai 2001 (which publishes papers from the predecessor workshop to the 1999 OSU gathering, held at the 1997 LSA Summer Institute) and Li (2004, to appear).

Two of the most interesting papers in the volume from a general theoretical standpoint focus on with second language acquisition. Koichi Sawasaki and Mineharu Nakayama 'Null pronouns in English-speaking JFL learners' Japanese' investigate the acquisition of subject and object null pronouns by adult English speaking learners of Japanese. They find that the JFL learners' performance on a truth-value judgment task is quite close to the native control group, except with sentences of the pattern '[e_i] is looking at the father _{i} ', where the stimulus picture shows the father looking at himself in the mirror. Control group native speakers successfully judge such sentences deviant, but JFL learners vary, with advanced speakers closest to the native control group but beginning learners performing better than intermediate. Since any interpretation of [e_i] licensed by UG (pro, trace, and null anaphor) in this context should be deviant, it appears that the best explanation for imperfect acquisition is the pedagogical one suggested by

Sawasaki and Nakayama: classroom pressure to use null pronouns wherever possible may lead to confusion.

Choi, Mazuka, and Yamada ‘The influence of first language phonology on young children’s production of foreign sounds: Korean and Japanese children’s production of English /r/ and /l/’ investigate the effect of first language phonology on second language acquisition. As noted by previous researchers, Japanese and Korean provide an interesting contrast because neither has a phonemic contrast between laterals and rhotics, but Korean has two liquid allophones, flap [R] and lateral [l], the latter restricted to coda position, while Japanese has only /R/. The Korean-Japanese contrast thus poses the question of whether the inventory of phones (as opposed to phonemes) in a language provide a comparative advantage in acquisition. Previous researchers have examined this question with perception studies adult speakers of Japanese and Korean; Choi et al examine children between 4 and 8 using an elicited imitation experiment.

Choi et al’s results are consistent with previous perception studies: they find that in almost all environments, Korean children produce /r/ and /l/ exemplars judged by English native speakers as better approximations of the English models than those produced by Japanese children. The young age of their subjects shows that this difference cannot be a product of English teaching in the schools. At the most basic level, the result is predicted by a feature-based L2 acquisition model such as Brown (2000) which holds that learners more readily acquire a contrast in the L2 if the feature associated with the contrast is present in the L1 grammar. Thus Korean, but not Japanese, requires a feature [lateral]. Not all of the details of the Korean-Japanese contrast are predicted, however, either by a featural model or the Perceptual Assimilation Model (Best 1995) tentatively espoused by

Choi et al. For example, the ‘best’ exemplar produced by either group of children is the imitation of word-final /r/ produced by Korean children; but the Perceptual Assimilation Model seems to predict that the r~l contrast should be most difficult for Korean L1 speakers in exactly this position (p. 19).

A second study on phonological acquisition, Jane Tsay, ‘Phonetic parameters of Tone acquisition in Taiwanese,’ investigates first language acquisition on the tonal system in Taiwanese (Minnan). Tsay confirms previous findings that acquisition of the tonal patterns of Taiwanese is completed very early, indeed earlier than segmental acquisition: her subject consistently drops the finals in closed (‘entering tone’) syllables, but successfully acquires the distinctive durational features of these syllables.

Two papers deal with semantic/pragmatic acquisition in Sinitic languages. Thomas Hun-tak Lee and Ann Law, ‘Epistemic modality and the acquisition of Cantonese final particles’ is an ambitious and in many ways pathbreaking study of first language acquisition of epistemic modal particles, using both longitudinal data and two comprehension experiments. The experiments investigated children’s mastery of the pragmatic inferences associated with the unexpectedness particle *wo4* and the ‘elaboration’ marker *aa1maa3*. Both design and results are worthy of further exploration: Lee and Law found the performance of their six year old subject to be quite poor, but this result awaits against older child and adult control groups.

Overall, Lee and Law found abundant use only of the ‘obviousness’ particle *lo1* among young children. They discuss linguistic and cognitive developmental explanations for this non-adultlike patterning, but ultimately show that distribution of the epistemic particles in child speech closely mirrors their distribution in caretaker input, except for the elaboration marker, which is more heavily used by caretakers than children. Here too,

however, a sociolinguistic alternative to a cognitive explanation comes to mind: discourse markers of this sort, which indicate the casual relations between propositions in or inferred in prior discourse, may be more freely used by the participant in 'control' in a discourse analytic sense (e.g. Whittaker and Stenton 1988).

Xiaolu Yang 'Mandarin speaking children's interpretation of scalar particles *cai* and *jiu* investigates the first language acquisition of the particles *cai* 'as late/many as, only if' and *jiu* 'as early/few as, if'. Yang finds that children show evidence for acquiring *jiu*, the 'positive' member of this pair of scalar particles, earlier than *cai*, its 'negative' counterpart; and that the quantity and time sensitive uses of both particles are acquired before their conditional uses. The results are persuasive, but the study raises ethical concerns, because it uses ill formed sentences in an elicited imitation task.

The remaining papers in the volume deal with syntactic/semantic acquisition. Chungmin Lee 'Acquisition of subject and topic marker in Korean' provides an excellent overview of recent findings in Korean first language acquisition (there are however 18 lines of mistakenly duplicated text on pp. 45-6). Lee shows that the order of acquisition of information structure-sensitive and case particles in Korean is best explained not by assuming an impoverished child grammar (the deprivationalist view), but by assuming a grammar with adult-like structural representations containing unpronounced functional elements, which appear as their phonetic shape is learned by the child. Korean children thus begin with null topic structures (explaining the very high incidence of null arguments in early child production in this language), followed by unmarked (bare) topics, followed by fully realized topic contrastive topic markers. Lee makes the important point that high prominence functional markers are overtly realized first, so that contrastive topic marker precedes backgrounded topic marker, and overt nominative

markers appear first when they mark narrow focus. This tendency also accounts for a common pattern of overextension: nominative markers are overextended to objects as focus markers, not case markers.

Sungshim Hong ‘Acquisition of prenominal modifier in Korean and English’ replicates Matthei’s (1982) study investigating the structure assigned by children to English NPs with multiple modifier like second green ball. Matthei found that children tended to pick out from an array the ball that was second and green, rather than the second of the green balls. He concluded from this that children’s grammars have a ‘flat’ representation of pronominal modifiers, rather than the nested structure associated with the second, restrictive interpretation. Hong obtains similar results and draws similar deprivationalist conclusions about early NP structure in Korean. The difficulty with this conclusion is that it was shown as early as Hamburger & Crain (1984) that Matthei’s results reflect cognitive, rather than syntactic predispositions on the part of the child, since children do show evidence of being able to comprehend and produce nested modifier structures.

Two papers explore Japanese morphosyntax. Kazumi Matsuoka ‘The acquisition of the Japanese particle *ni*’ shows that young children do not distinguish the dative postposition *ni* from the homophonous postposition in early acquisition. Yasuhiro Shirai, Susanne Miyata, Norio Naka, and Yoshihoki Sakazai ‘The acquisition of causative morphology in Japanese: A prototype account’ builds on the observation that productive morphological causatives tend to appear in early child speech mainly in imperative/request forms. Shirai et al argue that this is related to a universal association between indirect causation and grammatical (morphological or syntactic) causatives. However Shirai et al note that indirect (e.g. permissive) causative imperatives are the predominant

causative pattern in caretaker input (the same is likely to be true of the English *lemme* permissive imperative). This provides a ready explanation for why the same patterns predominate in child production; the stronger conclusion that the child output reflects a cognitive preference for associating grammatical causatives with indirect causation requires experimental confirmation.

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