Feature reassembly in the L2 acquisition of Chinese

Jiajia Su   McGill University

According to the Feature re-assembly Hypothesis (FRH) (Lardiere 2009), L1 features and the way features are bundled together constitute the initial state of L2 acquisition. L2 acquisition involves 'remap the right combination of features into the right L2 lexical items' and 'determining the appropriate conditioning environments for their expression'. In some cases, re-assembly is argued to be difficult or even impossible.

In order to test FRH, this study investigates the L2 acquisition of [plural] and [human] features by L2 Chinese learners whose L1 is Korean. Both [plural] and [human] features play a role in the syntax of Chinese and Korean, but they are assembled differently. The [plural] feature has one morphological realization (i.e. the nominal suffix –*tul*) in Korean but two (i.e. the nominal suffix –*men* and the demonstrative suffix -*xie*) in Chinese. When a noun co-occurs with a demonstrative, plural marking becomes obligatory in Korean (see (1a)) (Hwang & Lardiere 2013), whereas in Chinese plural marking is always obligatory on demonstratives but optional on nouns (see (1b,c)). The [human] feature is assembled in the Korean classifier system and in the Chinese number system. Human nouns in Korean require human classifiers (Hwang & Lardiere 2013) but human nouns can co-occur with the general classifier *ge* in Chinese. Plural marking of –*men* is restricted to human nouns in Chinese (Li 1999) but there is no such restriction in Korean (Lee 2015). The plural marker can co-occur with human classifiers in Korean (see (2a)) (Hwang & Lardier 2013), but in Chinese no classifiers can co-occur with either plural marker (see (2b,c)).

KOREAN	CHINESE	CHINESE
(1) a. i chayk-tul	b. zhe-xie haizi	c. zhe-xie haizi-men
this book-PL	this-PL child	this-PL child-PL
'these books'	'these children'	'these children'
(2) a. haksayng-*tul* twu myeng	b. san ming jingcha-(*men)	c. zhe-(*xie) san ming jingcha
student-PL 2 CL	3 CL policeman-(*PL)	this- (*PL) 3 CL policeman
'two students'	'three policemen'	'these three policemen'

48 Korean-speaking learners of Chinese at three proficiency levels and 23 native Chinese speakers were tested using a grammaticality judgment task (140 items). The results analyzed so far show that L2 learners successfully remap the [plural] feature to –*men* and –*xie* in Chinese (beginners accepting 95% and 85% grammatical items respectively) but have difficulty in realizing that plural marking is always optional on nouns but obligatory on demonstratives (the advanced group accepting 43% ungrammatical items). As for the [human] feature, L2 learners realize that plural marking is restricted to human nouns and accept human nouns to co-occur with the general classifier (beginners accepting 90% grammatical items), but they have not noticed that even human classifiers cannot co-occur with the plural marker –*men* or –*xie* (the advanced group accepting 45% and 28% ungrammatical items respectively). The results are consistent with the predictions of FRH that even when both L1 and L2 select the same features, differences in the way these features are assembled can cause difficulties in the L2 acquisition.

References

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