

Individual Paper Session 3

Syntax

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9:30-10:00am

Structural choices and argument mapping in learners of Japanese L2

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This paper aims to (1) present and apply the Lexical Mapping Hypothesis (LMH), one of the current extension of the Processability Theory (PT) to L2 development focusing on Japanese; (2) present supporting empirical evidence.

In discourse, the speaker chooses a particular syntactic structure over others because he/she takes a certain perspective on a conceptual structure to be expressed, e.g. the choice of either active or passive voice (Levelt, 1989). While such choices ensure effective communication, they may create structural complexity and impose learning difficulties: the choice of a specific grammatical structure may not be available to the learner when he/she has not developed the necessary procedural skill. LMH explores this pragmatic-syntactic interface and adds the developmental dimension of speaker-induced discourse-pragmatic choices implementing them in Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan 2001).

Like many other approaches to explaining language acquisition (e.g., Meisel, 1991; Meisel Clahsen and Pienemann, 1981; Pinker, 1984; Slobin, 1985 & later) PT predicts 'canonical order' as the initial hypothesis of syntax. In LFG terms this can be viewed as an alignment between the most prominent role in the argument structure hierarchy (say the 'agent' role) mapping onto the universally most prominent grammatical function (the subject) occupying the most prominent position in surface structure (initial). This is computationally the least costly means of organizing syntax (Pinker, 1984). I focus on developments following the establishment of canonical order in L2 learners in terms of argument mapping and look at how the learning of new lexical features is necessary in order to perform higher-stage language-specific operations which are morpho-lexical in nature (Bresnan, 2001).

LMH is tested against one three-year longitudinal study and one cross-sectional study of 28 university students of Japanese L2 in Australia. Production data were collected through speech elicitation tasks and analysed in terms of argument structure mapping.