The Acquisition of Cantonese Container Classifiers by native Cantonese children

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Introduction

Classification of Cantonese Container Classifiers (Chu & Wong, 2007)

1. Comparison between [shape | size | level]
   - Shape
   - Size
   - Features

2. Crunch Chocolate Bar
   - Flexibility
   - Shape
   - Features

3. Comparison between [shape | size | level]
   - Shape
   - Features

4. Features
   - Features

5. Age-related Differences
   - Ages 2-4 (n=5)
   - Ages 5 (n=11)
   - Ages 6-7 (n=9)
   - Ages 8-9 (n=10)

Research Question

- To investigate whether acquisition of the container classifiers were age related according to the proposed hierarchy.

Methodology

- Participants: 36 Cantonese-speaking children (18 boys, 18 girls)
- Age 2-4 (n=5), age 5 (n=11), ages 6-7 (n=9), ages 8-9 (n=10)
- Task: Object counting task
- Stimulus items: 12 items (6 confectionaries, 6 beverages) varying in shapes, materials, flexibility and size.
- Procedures: (1) Real object identification by the children.
- (2) Interviewer asked the children to count the number of individual items
- (3) Children answered in the form of the form "Number-Classifier" or "Number-Classifier-Size" construction.

List of Stimulus Items

- Items not shown in scale

Discussion

1. Omission of classifiers
   - There is a general trend that children will omit the classifier when they have not fully acquired the need for an obligatory use of it. When the children become older, they generally realize that there is a noun-classifier mapping and the percentage of the children using the noun classifier drops. For the age group 6-9, no omission of classifiers is observed.

2. The use of the general classifier "go3"
   - The use of the general classifier "go3" is inappropriate for all items. However, children tend to use this classifier to replace the more appropriate classifiers. The use of the general classifier "go3" was also reported by Tse et al. (2007) in the acquisition of other types of Cantonese classifiers. The percentage of using the classifier "go3" to substitute the correct classifiers decreases over time as the children become older. For the age group 6-9, the use of "go3" only restricted in the food items where there are more variations in the use of classifiers by Cantonese adults with these food items.

3. Overgeneralization in the use of classifiers
   - The classifiers "baau1", "baau1", "paai4" and "gau6" were overgeneralized to many other items.
   - In the ages 6-9, the children overgeneralize the classifier of 20% of many items which are in a group shape.
   - The classifier "go3", the children overgeneralized to in many different items. This may be due to the fact that no particular shape is associated with the specification of this classifier, so the children overgeneralized the usage of this classifier to items of various shapes.

Summary

- There is a general tendency that children will omit the classifier when they have not fully acquired the need for an obligatory use of it. When counting objects, in the next stage, they tend to use the general classifier go3 before they realize there is a need for the cognitive mapping of particular noun phrases with the pair of classifiers. When using classifiers for a particular item, children tend to focus on features higher in the hierarchy (shape and packaging materials) and these may sometimes lead to overgeneralization in the use of classifiers.

Selected References