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The Acquisition of Tense- Aspect Marker ‘-ess/ass-’ by Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL) Learners

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Learner Language

- Teaching does not equal learning.
- When and how do learners use what they they were taught?
- Learner language analysis
- The development of learner language is not linear. It is systematic and also dynamic (Selinker, 1972).

Past Tense in Learner Language

- “First and second language learners will initially be influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verbs or predicates in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers associated with or affixed to these verbs” (Andersen & Shirai, 1994, p. 133).

- **Aspect Hypothesis**

Past tense marking initially appears on achievements and accomplishments, and is extended to activities and stative verbs.

Achievements → Accomplishments → Activities → Statives

Classification of Verbs

(Shirai & Andersen, 1995 based on Vendler 1967)

- Achievement verb expresses an action that takes place instantaneously and is reducible to a single point in time.
- Accomplishment verb has some duration, but has a single clear inherent endpoint.
- Activity verb has duration, but with an arbitrary endpoint, and is homogeneous in its structure.
- Stative verb has no dynamics, and continues without additional effort or energy being applied

Classification of Verbs

- Achievement verbs: 죽다, 끝나다, 결혼하다, 떠나다...
- Accomplishment verbs: 찾다, 고치다, 죽이다, 입히다, 편지를 쓰다, ...
- Activity verbs: 뛰다, 걷다, 말하다, 울다, 웃다, ...
- Cognitive-emotive verbs: 알다, 믿다, 모르다, 느끼다, ...
- Stative verbs: 예쁘다, 좋다, 덥다, 있다, 이다,

Past Tense Marking in Korean

- Past tense marking in Korean: ‘-ass/ess-’
- ‘-ass/ess-’ also indicates perfective aspect (Sohn, 1995).
- Park (2009) showed that the Chinese learners of Korean generally followed the Aspect Hypothesis in past tense marking.

Achievements → Activities → Accomplishments →
Cognitive-emotives → Statives

Past Tense Marking in Narratives

- **Discourse Hypothesis** (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 2000)

Past tense marking is more likely to appear on the verbs in the foreground (the main story-line) than in the background.

- The foreground relates events in the main story line and consists of clauses which move time forward
- The background elaborates on or evaluates the events in the foreground.

Research Questions

1. Do KFL learners mark ‘-ass/ess-’ more frequently on the verbs in the foreground than in the background following the Discourse Hypothesis?
2. Do KFL learners in the 2nd and the 4th year Korean classes show different past tense marking patterns?

Participants & Tasks

- **Participants***

Jake and Emma in the 2nd year Korean class

Lisa and Anna in the 4th year Korean class

- **Tasks**

Task 1: Oral interview on travel experience

Task 2: Picture-prompted retell task**

*All participants names are pseudonyms.

** The retell task pictures were developed by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Title VI International Studies and Research Program.

Foreground vs Background

RQ 1: Do KFL learners mark ‘-ass/ess-’ more frequently on the verbs in the foreground than in the background following the Discourse Hypothesis?

A: Yes, KFL Learners tend to use past tense marker more frequently in the foreground than in the background.

Foreground vs Background

- Excerpt 1: Jake (2nd year), Task 1

콜로라도에서 등산 많이 했어요. *[Foreground]*

산 위에 있는 호수에... 에머랄드 호수는 6마일 걸어서 가야 해요, 가야 됐어요. 도착했는데 아주 피곤해요. 돌아올 때 6마일 걸어서 가야 돼요. 아주 피곤해요. *[Background]*

Foreground vs Background

- Excerpt 2: Jake (2nd year), Task 2

아이는 창문으로 밖에, er 아이는 친구 만나러 창문으로 밖에
가요, 밖에 갔어요. 아 하지만 무서워졌어요? 음. 아 줌마는 하
지 마세요 라고 말했어요. 경찰들은 어 도, 도, 도착했어요. 아
이, 아이를 구.. 했어요? [Foreground]

아이는 아직 무서워서, 어, 아직 무서워요. [Background]

어 경, 경찰이 어 아이를 구..한 후에 어.. 엄마가 아주 화가 났
어요. [Foreground]

경찰이 기분이 아주 좋아요. 그래서 아이는, 아이를 구했
어요. 아, 고양이가 (웃음) 기분이 아주 좋아요.
[Background]

2nd year vs 4th year

RQ 2: Do KFL learners in the 2nd and the 4th year Korean classes show different past tense marking patterns?

A: Remarkable differences between the 2nd and the 4th year Korean learners were not found in past tense marking.

2nd year vs 4th year

Excerpt 3: Emma (2nd year), Task 2

어, 엄마, 엄마는 갔어요. *[Foreground]*

그 다음에 아파트에, 어 살아요. *[Background]*

그리고, 엄, 심심했어요. *[Foreground]*

그리고 친구들을 어 옆에 살았어요. *[Background]*

2nd year vs 4th year

Excerpt 4: Lisa (4th year), Task 2

고양이는 케이크를 먹었어요. 하지만 엄마는 몰랐, 몰라, 몰라서 미나한테 화가 났어요. . *[Foreground]*

음. So...그래서 엄마는 새 케이크 사야 돼요. 사야 돼요. 그래서 엄마는 아, 시장에 no 케이크 시장에 가야 돼요. *[Background]*

2nd year vs 4th year

Excerpt 5: Anna (4th year), Task 1

우리가 암... 베르사이 궁전에 갔어요. *[Foreground]*

베르사이가 아주 아름다워요. 궁에 다.. 있어요. 하지만 여름이라서 아주 더웠어요. 그래서 조금 그리고 아... 아... 다른 여행 가는 사람들이 많아서 아주 복잡했어요. 조금 불편해요. *[Background]*

Suggestions for Teaching

- A balance between form and meaning in context

Teachers need to consider that the narrative structure affects the use of ‘-ass/ess-’ in the context.
- Various uses of past tense marker ‘-ass/ess-’ in context need to be taught in the intermediate and higher level

The meaning of ‘-ass/ess-’ is not determined grammatically but dependent on contextual interpretations (Lee, 2003; Oh, 2003).
- Focus on what is learned, not only on what to teach

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