The Marking of Indefiniteness in Narratives by Heritage Cantonese Speakers in the U.S.

美國繼承粵語在敘事中的不確定性的標記

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Despite longstanding Cantonese Chinese immigration, lack of research on Cantonese in the U.S.

Cantonese spoken in historically high ethnic Chinese immigration cities (e.g., New York, San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver) reflect the history of Chinese immigration and Cantonese language development outside of Hong Kong or Southern China contexts (Leung & Uchikoshi, 2012)
Research Context 研究背景-2

- Research on Cantonese-English bilingual students solely focused on English acquisition, not acquisition/maintenance of Cantonese

- Increasingly “language-as-problem” (Ruiz, 1984) orientations obfuscate gains of Cantonese-English in the U.S. context
California
  • 36.2% of Chinese American population in U.S. (ACS, 2010): 1,720,000+

San Francisco
  • Minority-majority city
  • 41% of “Chinese” speakers are Cantonese speakers (conservative estimate from ACS, 2010)
  • “Best case scenario” in understanding Cantonese-English bilingualism in the U.S.
### Current Study: Subjects & Controls

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5 to 7</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult Controls</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20s to 60s</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
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Method 方法

- Stimulus material: the wordless picture book “Frog, Where are You?” (Mayer, 1969)
- The children tested twice each year from kindergarten to Grade 2:
  - Once in Cantonese and once in English
  - 10 adult Cantonese immigrants as controls
- Total: 85 Frog Stories in Cantonese (75+10) and 74 Frog Stories in English.
- Transcribed and coded for various variables and did IRR tests on crucial measurements.
Why study the marking of indefiniteness in narratives?
(為什麼研究在敘事中的不確定性的標記)

1. Indefinite forms appear early but are acquired late.
   - Brown (1973): English articles (冠詞) appear between 2;8 and 3;5.
   - Introducing new characters in narratives with indefinites (不定冠詞) takes a long time to acquire (Hickmann, Hendriks, Roland, & Liang, 1996).
Why study the marking of indefiniteness in narratives?

(為什麼研究在敘事中的不確定性的標記)

2. K to 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade is a critical period for developing (in)definiteness in narratives (關鍵性時期).

Kindergarten (Age 5)

- Mainly Cantonese
- Substantial increase in English exposure

Target Children’s Dominant Home Language:
- 72% Cantonese dominant at Kindergarten
- 47% Cantonese dominant at Grade 2
3. Language typology: Article languages vs. non-article languages

- **L1 acquisition:**
  
  Article languages > non-article languages

- **L2 acquisition:**
  
  L1 & L2: Article languages > L1 Non-article language, but L2 article languages
  (e.g., Cantonese L1 and English L2)
Research Questions

RQ1: How do Cantonese-English bilingual children mark indefiniteness in Cantonese narratives at different ages? 粵英雙語的兒童在不同的年齡怎樣標記在敘事中的不確定性？

RQ2: Is there evidence of transfer from English? 有沒有從英語轉移到粵語的證據？
Results: Frequency Distribution of Referential Forms (參照詞的頻率分佈) for Introducing New Characters in the Frog Story

Errors: 17% definite nouns at K (確定性的名詞)
### Results: Most Common Lexical Noun Types for Character Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[CL N]</td>
<td>個男仔望住隻青蛙</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[NUM CL N]</td>
<td>一 個男仔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[DEM CL N]</td>
<td>喱個男仔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bare Nouns</td>
<td>男仔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Frequency Distribution (頻率分佈) of the Most Common Lexical Noun Types for Character Introduction

[NUM CL N]: Time is statistically significant (顯著性差異). F value 10.36 P=.001
Monolingual children (To, 2006)

1. 75 Cantonese-speaking children aged 3 to 7 in Hong Kong.

2. 15 native Cantonese adults

3. Retell a story after listening to a pre-recorded story based on a 8-picture wordless story book
Results: Proportions of [NUM CL N]
Results: Proportion of the Indefinite Article in the English Frog Stories (不定冠詞的比例)

Time is statistically significant: F value 6.56, P=.01
Results: Language Transfer (語言轉移)

- Kindergarten
- Grade 1
- Grade 2

Indef Article | NUM CL N
Results: Proportions of Bare Nouns

![Bar chart showing proportions of bare nouns for 5-year-olds, 6-year-olds, and 7-year-olds. The chart compares monolingual children (To, 2006) and bilingual children.]
RQ2: Is there evidence of transfer from English?

- Indefinite Article in English
- NUM CL N
  In Cantonese
- Bare Nouns

Different from monolingual children
RQ1: How do Cantonese-English bilingual children mark indefiniteness in Cantonese narratives at different ages?

- There is no evidence of hybrid NPs. The most common NP types are similar, e.g., [CL N] and [NUM CL N].
- Bilingual children in optimal sociolinguistic environments in the U.S. are able to develop their marking of indefiniteness in a comparable way as their monolingual peers across languages.
References


Chan, Y. M. (2005). Acquisition of the English article system by Hong Kong students. Master’s Thesis, University of Hong Kong.


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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENDING OUR TALK!