

The Use of Phonetics in the Analysis of the Acquisition of Second Language Syntax

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Among the scholars of second language (L2) acquisition who have used prosodic considerations in syntactic analyses, pausing and intonation contours have been used to define utterances in the speech of second language learners (e.g., Sato, 1990). In recent research on conversational analysis, it has been found that lexically marked causal clause combining in the discourse of native speakers can be distinguished as "intonational subordination" and "intonational coordination (Couper-Kuhlen, Elizabeth, forthcoming)". This study uses Pienemann's Processability Theory (1995) for an analysis of the speech of native speakers of Japanese (L1) learning English. In order to accurately assess the psycholinguistic stages of syntactic development, it is shown that pitch, loudness, and timing must all be considered together with the syntactic analysis of interlanguage speech production.

Twelve Japanese subjects participated in eight fifteen minute interviews, ninety-six dyads. The speech analyzed in this report is limited to the twelve subjects interacting with two different non-native speaker interviews for a total of twenty-four dyads. Within each of the interviews, four different tasks are analyzed to determine the stage of acquisition of English for each subject. Initially the speech is segmented according to intonation contour and pauses. It is then classified according to specific syntactic units and further analysed for pitch, loudness and timing.

Results indicate that the speech must be first classified prosodically and lexically, prior to beginning syntactic analysis. This analysis distinguishes three interlanguage lexical categories: discourse markers, coordinators/subordinators, and transfer from Japanese. After these lexical categories have been determined, the psycholinguistic stages of syntactic development can be more accurately assessed.

Reference

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