

Heritage Language Reversal: The Production of Articles and Voice Onset Time (VOT) by Japanese Returnees

Abstract

Articles

Previous L2 studies by Shirahata (1995) and Tomiyama (2000) examined L1 Japanese L2 English child returnees' suppliance of articles and a range of grammatical morphemes. Shirahata focused on age-related L2 acquisition while Tomiyama was concerned with L2 attrition. Both studies found omission in obligatory contexts, though little evidence of L2 attrition. We adopt a neutral position for our study as both acquisition and attrition are likely to be taking place in heritage language reversal cases. This study examines datasets from two L1 Japanese L2 English speakers. The sibling child returnees were born in Japan and lived 8 years in the U.S. before returning to Japan. The younger child (KS) was exposed to L2 English from 3 years of age and the older child (CS) was first exposed from 12 years of age. Background questionnaires revealed that they have high levels of proficiency in English, based on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores. 'The Frog Story' (Mayer, 1979) was administered and the returnees' narrations were recorded and transcribed. The two participants were compared on their article suppliance to address the following two research questions:

RQ1: Does reduced input limit success in acquisition or lead to attrition over time?

RQ2: Are there any differences between the returnees given the difference in age of acquisition?

Voice Onset Time

This longitudinal study examines whether the decline in exposure to L2 input experienced by YS produces changes in voice onset time (VOT). YS met with researchers six times over the span of six years. Each meeting required YS to complete 'The Frog Story' and a picture description task (Goad & White, 2008) to elicit spoken production. Each time YS was recorded using a video camera and an iPod. The recordings of each session were subsequently analyzed in Praat for production of words beginning with voiceless consonants /p/, /t/ and /k/. Once located in the recordings, words were cut out of the original full-length recordings so that a more detailed analysis of VOT could be conducted. The results of the analyses for all recordings (across six years) shows that YS's L1 Japanese VOT values and L2 English VOT values are different in length and that there is no evidence of change or attrition in her VOT values for /p/, /t/ and /k/ in L2 English.