



Department of  
*Linguistics and Modern Languages*  
語言學及現代語言系

# Children's Acquisition of Restitutive 'again' with goal-PP Constructions

Linguistics Seminars

Dr. Ting XU

Date: March 20, 2018 (Tuesday)

Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm

Venue: Swire Hall 1, Fung King Hey Building,  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

## Abstract

Successful language learners master many properties about their language that are hard to infer from their language experience. In this talk I investigate a case that addresses this overarching question: how do learners acquire these hard-to-observe properties, given that sometimes they show substantial cross-language variation? Specifically, I investigate the acquisition of 'again' modifying goal-PP constructions (e.g. walk to the village).

When again modifies an English goal-PP construction (e.g. John walked to the village again), the sentence is ambiguous between a repetitive and a restitutive reading: the former presupposes that the agent has performed the action before (John has walked to the village before), while the latter presupposes only that the result has held before (John had been at the village before). Interestingly, languages vary in whether their counterpart to English again permits a restitutive reading with goal-PP constructions (Beck 2005; Beck & Snyder 2001). I focus on how English-speaking children acquire restitutive again with goal-PP constructions, given the cross-linguistic variation. An experiment shows that 4- to 5-year-old children can understand these restitutive readings. However, examining the parental input of four children, I find that parental uses of restitutive again with goal-PP constructions are infrequent and (usually) ambiguous. I propose that in this case children can rely on more general evidence about the syntax of English goal-PP constructions, together with knowledge of a basic semantics for again, to deduce that the restitutive reading is available.

## Speaker

Dr. Ting Xu received her BA and MA at Tsinghua University (Beijing), and her PhD in Linguistics at the University of Connecticut. Her research focuses primarily on children's acquisition of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Many of her projects investigate children's production and comprehension of different kinds of sentence structures, such as decomposition adverbs, negation and passives. Her recent paper "There and Back Again: An Acquisition Study" has been awarded the annual (2017) Prize for the Best Paper Written by an Untenured Scientist in the journal *Language Acquisition*.

**ALL ARE WELCOME**

Enquiries

Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages, CUHK.

Tel: (852)3943 7911/7025 Fax: (852)2603 7755 E-mail: lin@cuhk.edu.hk

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