



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

Evolution of Verb Meanings in Children and L2 Adult Learners through Reorganization of an Entire Semantic Domain: The Case of Chinese Carry/Hold Verbs

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Date: January 26, 2021 (Tuesday)
Time: 4:30pm - 6:15pm (Hong Kong Time, UTC +8)
***Seminar will be conducted via ZOOM**

Registration Deadline:
12:00nn of 24 January 2021 (Sunday) – Hong Kong Time
The Zoom Meeting details will be provided on 25 January 2021



Prior registration is required

Abstract

In studying vocabulary development, not only the growth of vocabulary size but also the depth of word meanings must be considered. It has been widely known that young children infer word meanings by fast-mapping, where they tentatively map a word to its meaning at the first exposure to the word. However, word meanings attained by fast-mapping by no means are adult-like: children need to go through reorganization of word meanings to be able to use words like adults. Here, it is important to acknowledge that the meaning of a word is not acquired in isolation of other words in the lexicon: For full acquisition of the meaning of a given word, knowing what other relevant words exist and how it shares the boundaries with these words is critical. In this light, studying how learners learn multiple words belonging to the same lexical field and how learning the meaning of one word affects the meaning of other words in the field is extremely important for understanding how learners attain adult-like full word meaning representation.

In this talk, I explore the process through which children learning their native language and adult learners learning L2 acquire meanings of 13 Chinese verbs that roughly correspond to English verbs “carry” and “hold”. We studied how Chinese-speaking 3-, 5, and 7-year-olds and Korean-speaking and Japanese-speaking adults learning Chinese as L2 originally divide and label the semantic space in this domain, how they discover the boundaries between different words, and how their meanings of verbs in the domain as a whole evolve toward word meanings possessed by adult native speakers. We found that, for both children and L2 learners, it takes a long time to converge to adults’ word meanings, but children and L2 learners have different sources of difficulties.

Speaker

Mutsumi Imai is a developmental psychologist studying lexical and conceptual development. She received her Ph.D degree from Northwestern University. MI’s greatest interest is to specify the processes and mechanisms through which children build up the system of lexical as well as non-lexical knowledge. Her unique contribution to the field is her cross-linguistic perspective in the investigation of lexical acquisition. She has examined how universal and specific language factors affect lexical development, and she has also investigated the effect in the other direction, that is, how language and culture affect thought. She has established that the relation between cognitive development and language learning consists of a bi-directional bootstrapping process (Imai, Kanero, & Masuda, 2015, 2020; Imai & Masuda, 2013).

MI has also asked what cognitive function or knowledge enables children to anchor words to the world to start the bootstrapping process. In this vein, she has investigated how iconicity between word form and meaning plays a scaffolding role for children to anchor word forms onto object concepts first, and then to abstract relational concepts of verbs later (Imai & Kita, Nagumo & Okada, 2008). MI has proposed a sound symbolism bootstrapping hypothesis for language acquisition (Imai & Kita, 2014). This proposal has inspired hundreds of new research projects across a range of disciplines, including (but not limited to) language development, language evolution, embodied cognition and multi-modal cognition.

MI has been designated a Fellow of the Cognitive Science Society as well as is a Governing Board member of that Society since 2017. She is also a Fellow member of the Psychonomic Society and has served as Executive Board member of the International Association for the Study of Child Language (IASCL).

All are Welcome

Enquiries
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