

Asymmetries in L2 functional morphology

The Korean learner of English

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Acknowledgements

This story begins in a bookstore in Kyoto back in early 2001. I was a jaded, burnt-out English teacher working part-time at two Japanese universities, eager to return to the world of study that I had left behind almost six years earlier. Browsing in the linguistics section, I noticed a new textbook on a topic that perfectly melded my earlier training in formal linguistics with a more recent, classroom-inspired interest in second language acquisition. Roger Hawkins' "Second Language Syntax" was the book I needed to stumble across at that moment.

Fast forward to early 2005, when I enrolled in a PhD in second language acquisition at the University of New England. Casting around for a precise topic within this area, I e-mailed several leading researchers for suggestions. My expectations of receiving a response to my query were minimal given that these emails were unsolicited. Nonetheless, more than half of the people I wrote to answered me. Perhaps it was particularly appropriate that the most important of these responses should come from Roger Hawkins himself. And while the final topic of my thesis is somewhat different from the one that Roger suggested, I may not have thought of this particular topic if he had not steered me in this general direction.

Since then, my supervisors have made a significant contribution to this thesis. Einar Thorsteinsson has been approachable and responsive all the way. Heather Goad is not only well-informed, but also extremely adept at imparting this knowledge to students. Without a doubt, her copious and attentive feedback have improved this thesis greatly.

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Above all, over the much-too-long period I have spent trying to transform my inchoate musings and messy data-sets into something resembling a thesis, my wife Woo-Hwa Han, our three children Sean, Declan and Ashlynn and our two golden retrievers Richter and Zadie have stood by me and kept me going when the going got especially tough, and have reminded me of what really matters in life whenever I was at risk of forgetting. I dedicate this thesis to them with appreciation and love.

Abstract

Variability in the production of L2 functional morphology has long been recognised as a pervasive and entrenched characteristic of interlanguage development. As Trenkic (2007, p. 292) suggests, a potentially fruitful way of identifying the sources of this behaviour is to compare the rates at which a given morpheme (e.g., past tense) is omitted, substituted or oversupplied in two (or more) distinct contexts. The present thesis adds to earlier work exploring certain patterns of this type, while also seeking to address some of the main limitations of these studies. Using a combined elicited-imitation and story-recall task adapted from Snape (2006), I examine the production of various types of functional morpheme by Korean learners of English. Three experiments were conducted. In the first of these, I predicted asymmetries in the omission or substitution of definite articles in first- and second-mention DPs based on the effects of non-target form-meaning relationships plus communicative redundancy. The second experiment examined past tense, agreement and plural morphology, and investigated the claim that differences in stem length and (for tense inflection only) verb class would give rise to contrasting patterns of inflectional omission. The third experiment focused on various kinds of QP, and manipulated the effects of contrasts in quantifier type and syntactic structure on the omission of plural inflection in these phrases. The predictions of experiment 1 were not supported, while those of experiment 2 were not supported for tense inflection; however, I am able to suggest reasons for these unexpected results. The overall results of the thesis confirm that by systematically investigating asymmetries in the production of a given functional morpheme, we stand to gain an insight into the underlying causes of L2 variability.

Candidate's certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the candidate's signature.

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Signature

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List of abbreviations

A/Adj	adjective
ACC	accusative
ADV	adverbial
AH	addressee honorific
ANOVA	analysis of variance
AP	adjective phrase
APP	apperceptive
Art	article
ATB	across the board
C	coda/complementiser/consonant
CAUS	causative
CI	confidence interval
CL	classifier
CONJ	conjunction
COP	copula
CP	complementiser phrase
D	determiner
DAT	dative
DECL	declarative
DP	determiner phrase
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
FDR	False Detection Rate
Fin	finite
FL	filler
Foc	focus
HON	honorific
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IMP	imperative
INDIC	indicative

INTER	interrogative
INTIM	intimate
L1	first language
L2	second language
L2er	second language learner
LF	logical form
LOC	locative
MOD	modal
n	number of cases
N	noun/nucleus/number of participants
NOM	nominative
NP	noun phrase
Num	Number
Numl	numeral
O	onset
PASS	passive
PF	phonetic form
POSS	possessive
PP	prepositional phrase
PRES	present
PST	past
Q	quantifier
QP	quantifier phrase
QUOT	quotative
R	rhyme
REL	relativiser
RQ	requestive
S	sentence
SD	standard deviation
SH	subject honorific
Spec	specifier
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOP/Top	topic

UG	Universal Grammar
V	verb
vP/VP	verb phrase
X	consonant or vowel