

Intervention Structures in L2 Acquisition

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In this talk we will discuss L1 Japanese L2 English learners' acquisition of three intervention structures in English: object relative clause (ORC), subject control (SC), and raising *seem* (SR) constructions (1). These constructions exhibit a structural effect of locality on the filler-gap relation or an intervention effect in the framework of featural Relativized Minimality (RM) (Friedmann et al., 2009.). In each construction an anaphoric relation between the matrix subject and its gap (Δ) is disrupted by the intervener, *the dog*, *Susan*, or *Mary*. Studies in L1 and L2 acquisition generally find that due to this intervention/RM effect, ORC, SC, and SR are harder to comprehend and produce than its counterparts, SRC (subject relative clause), OC (object control), and SR without an experiencer (2) (Belletti et al. 2012, Hirsch & Wexler 2008, Xia et al. 2022).

- (1) a. ORC: The girl that the dog is kissing Δ
b. SC: Hanako promised Susan Δ to join the tennis team.
c. SR: John seems to Mary Δ to be happy.
- (2) a. SRC: The girl that Δ is kissing the dog.
b. OC: Hanako told Susan Δ to join the tennis team.
c. SR: John seems Δ to be happy.

Our experimental results have revealed that Japanese EFL learners show early understanding of the ORC and the SC constructions, but late understanding of the SR construction (Nakayama & Yoshimura 2020, Yoshimura & Nakayama 2019). To account for this intervention asymmetry in L2 acquisition, we argue that relativization and the control structure in Japanese induce hierarchical structures on par with those in English. Therefore, the learners have acquired a way of avoiding intervention during the process of acquiring the equivalent structures in their native language. L1 grammatical knowledge helps nullify the intervention effect in L2 acquisition (Fujimori et al. 2022, Yoshimura et al. 2023). On the other hand, it takes time for them to overcome the effect in the SR structure with a specific strategy because Japanese does not have a construction similar to it. Cross-linguistic influences, either positive or negative, are critically evident in the acquisition of intervention structures in L2 acquisition.

References



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