

A Study on Acquisition of Sentence-final Particles among Chinese-speaking Children

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In Chinese, people often use sentence-final particles (SFPs) to express their attitudes and opinions towards certain behaviors or events. There is no lexical category as there is with SFPs in English, Russian, and other Indo-European languages, which therefore causes difficulties for foreign language students in their learning of SFPs -they often fail to use one when needed, while using one when there is no need. On the other hand, Chinese children have acquired their use of SFPs at an early stage with few errors. Therefore, it is worthwhile for studies to focus deeply on the reasons Chinese children are able to acquire their use of SFPs in comparatively short periods and being sensitive to the mood expressed in their mother language.

Research on Children's use of SFPs were found mainly in Japanese (Miyahara,1974; Clancy,1985; Matsuoka, 1998; Shirai,Shirai,&Furuta,2000; Fujimoto,2008; Murasugi,2013) and Korean (Clancy,1989 ; Choi,1991 ; Lee,2009), in which there is a similar category of SFPs as found in the Chinese language. Chinese academic research on children's acquisition of SFPs concentrated primarily on the Mandarin(Li, 2005;Liu, 2009;Qian,2003;Song,2013;Tao,2012; Peng,2016), Cantonese (Lee,Wong& Wong,1995; Lee & Law, 2001), and Taiwanese (Erbaugh,1992; Chang,1991). The above research focuses on the syntactic and semantic aspects of SFPs and has achieved certain results. Yet the common inadequacies of the above research are with the insufficient number of subjects being studied (only 2-3 children), some of the corpus not being collected according to CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System), the lack of underpinning theories to systematically analyze the data, the lack of overview of overall SFPs' categories, and failing to put forward a general rule that can explain the results. Therefore, there are still some questions to be considered: (1) What is the acquisition order of SFPs? (2) Do adults' language input affect the acquisition of children's acquisition of SFPs? (3) Is it feasible to construct a model of children's SFPs acquisition?

Based on a corpus of four Northern Chinese Mandarin-speaking subjects (children ranging from 1 to 4 years old), this study is intended to explore the subjects' acquisition pattern of SFPs and the dominant factors in their acquisition by analyzing the data of their time of SFPs acquisition, mean length of utterance (MLU), the output frequency of children's SFPs, and the input frequency of parents' use of SFPs. It is found there are nine SFPs frequently used by the subjects, and the acquisition order is: tone particles> functional modal particles> general modal particles (">" means earlier than). The dominant component affecting the overall internal language development of the subjects' SFPs is the functional modal particle. There is a correlation found between parents' input and subjects' acquisition of SFPs, but with low significance. The abstract classification structure and the predominant factor of SFPs are children's inherent and intrinsic linguistic knowledge, and do not need to be learned. The role of adult discourse input frequency cannot exceed this principle of acquisition. It can only have a corresponding influence on language acquisition from parts or child individuals.

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