The Acquisition of the English Inflectional -s Morphemes by Young L1 Chinese Speakers

Chan Swee Heng
Wong Bee Eng
Pauline Teo Hwa Ling

Universiti Putra Malaysia
bee@fbm.upm.edu.my
shchan@fbm.upm.edu.my

Abstract

This paper examines the acquisition of the inflectional –s morphemes (the plural marker, genitive marker and third person singular present tense marker) in English by eighteen young ESL learners from two Chinese primary schools. Learners were shown pictures as stimuli, and they were asked to describe the pictures in English. During these sessions, the descriptions by the learners and the conversations between the researcher and the learners were taped and later transcribed. The results of the study indicated that learners exhibited a distinct accuracy order for the morphemes. The learners also exhibited variability and produced overgeneralizations in their L2 utterances. The findings in fact suggested that the acquisition of the –s morpheme was systematic and staged. A discussion on the reasons for the phenomenon then followed and some implications were drawn for the teaching of these forms to young L1 Chinese speakers of L2 English.

Biodata

Chan Swee Heng is an associate professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. She has more than twenty-five year of experience in the teaching of English with interest in writing, discourse studies and language evaluation.

Wong Bee Eng is an associate professor at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. She teaches linguistics courses at the university and her main area of interest is second language acquisition.

Pauline Teo Hwa Ling is a lecturer at Tunku Abdul Rahman College, Kuala Lumpur. She teaches English language proficiency courses at the college.