Simultaneous acquisition of Hong Kong Sign Language and Cantonese: violation of code-blending grammar

Cat H.-M. Fung*, Gladys Tang

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

With strong oralist promotion by the Hong Kong government, the deaf of deaf children receive speech training from early age and later become sign bilinguals. Exposing to two languages simultaneously, HKSL-Cantonese bilingual children have to acquire the conflicting head-directionalities of TP and NegP, namely head-final TP/NegP in HKSL and head-initial TP/NegP in Cantonese. Given that adult code-blended T/Neg allows both Head-Comp and Comp-Head orders (Fung 2012, Fung & Tang 2012), HKSL-Cantonese children also have to deal with bilingual language mixing input.

In this case study, CC, who has severe hearing loss, was born to deaf parents with a deaf younger sibling. Living together with his hearing grandmother, he also receives daily speech input via the use of hearing aids. In addition, the visits of deaf bilingual researchers exposed him to natural HKSL and mixed HKSL-Cantonese with both code-switching and code-blending. Given the dual input of HKSL and Cantonese as well as mixing of these two languages, CC did not only produce monolingual utterances. In the Child HKSL Corpus, CC's longitudinal data from age 2;0 to 6;6 revealed both code-switching and code-blending utterances. Examining TP and NegP, his code-blending utterances followed mostly Cantonese word order in the early stage while HKSL word order did not emerge until age 4;6. Violating the adult code-blending grammar, CC's bilingual utterances before 4;6 revealed his dominant language being Cantonese.

References

1. Fung, Hiu Man Cat. 2012. Code-blending in Early Hong Kong Sign Language: A Case Study. M.Phil thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

2. Fung, H.-M. Cat, and Gladys Tang. 2012. Null Theory and Code-blending in Hong Kong Sign Language. Paper presented at Bilingual and Multilingual Interaction, Bangor University, United Kingdom, 30 March - 1 April.

* cat_cslds@cuhk.edu.hk