

Lexical Development by Children of Immigrants

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Abstract

The number of foreign brides increases tremendously in Taiwan. Most of them are from South East Asia, especially Vietnam. On average, one out of the eight newborns has a foreign mother whose native language is not Mandarin. These children thus receive Imited input in Mandarin. It calls for concern whether this will affect their acquisition Mandarin. Mandarin is the common language for communication and the medium of instruction in Taiwan. Limited proficiency in Mandarin will hinder not only personal relationship but also cognitive development.

In this study, we focused on lexical development. We collected spontaneous speech samples from ten 2-6-year-old children of Vietnamese mothers and Taiwanese mothers. A noun bias was observed in the data. All the children produced more nouns than verbs except the Taiwanese two year old, who produced about equal number of nouns and verb (17:18). This supports the universal noun bias hypothesis (Gentner, 1981) and against Tardiff's (1996; 1999) argument for a verb bias for Mandarin speaking children. Younger children (age 2-4) of Vietnamese mothers produced more nouns and verbs than children of Taiwanese mothers of the same age. When they got older (age 5-6), they were exceeded by children of Taiwanese mothers

Fifteen classifiers occurred in children's spontaneous speech. The first one occurred and used more often by children was ge. It was overused with nouns that do not usually occu with ge in adult speech. The earliest use of classifiers was observed at the age of three for both groups. Children of Vietnamese mothers acquired more classifiers than children of

The results show that the lexical development of children of immigrants is not slower than children of Taiwanese mothers as claimed in the literature. Due to the small sample size, the results may not be representative for all the children of immigrants. The differences could be caused by the mother's native language or family support.

Vietnamese is quite similar to Mandarin. It might be more difficult for children of nothers with a different native language. However, the results reveal that the language development of children of immigrants does not have to delay. The successful cases in he present study can provide hopes and good models. The reasons why some are more ccessful than others are worth further investigation

Background

- The number of foreign brides increases tremendously in
- On average, one out of eight newborns has a foreign mother whose native language is not Mandarin.
- . These children thus receive limited input of Mandarin. It calls for concern whether this will affect their acquisition of
- Mandarin is the common language for communication and the medium of instruction in Taiwan.
- ·Limited proficiency in Mandarin will hinder not only personal relationship but also cognitive development.
- ·Children of immigrants were found to use fewer words and less complex sentences and initiated conversations less frequently than their peers, but these studies did not point out their language problems specifically.

The present study provides a record of lexical development of children of Vietnamese parents comparing with children of Mandarin speaking parents.

Participants

- Five children for Vietnamese mothers and five of Taiwanese mothers
- Aged 2-6 years old
- The elicitation task for classifiers
- the same with those whose natural speech sample were collected except two children were replaced by children with the same age and similar background
- . The participants were one year older after the collection of natural speech sample, so they were three four five six and seven years old
- . The adult control group consisted of the native adult Mandarin participants in Kuo (2002)

Methods

- The one-hour spontaneous speech collected one-hour spontaneous conversation between children and their mothers and transcribed with IPA in CHAT format.
- The elicitation task for classifiers-- Twelve pictures were specially designed to elicit the production of shape classifiers in Mandarin Chinese with two or more of the target
- The participants were tested individually at their homes. They were asked to describe pictures provided by the experimenter including naming and counting the items in the

Photo#	Items	Classifier	Cue		2 apples	ge	shape (3D)			4 disks	kmi	shape (3D)
Demo	2 houses	jen	function		5 chemies	ke	shape (3D)	i	Г	3 andio tapes	kmi	shape (3D)
	4 cars	ling	function		1 head of lettuce	ge	shape (3D)	l	Г	I video tape	knai	shape (3D)
Wann up	1 couch	zhang	shape (2D)		1 broccoli	ke	rhape (3D)	l	Г	2 pieces of paper	zhang	shape (2D)
	I chair	zhong.	dupe (2D)		4 chili peppers	tiao	shape (ID)		Г	2 strips of sticky poper	zhang.	dape (2D)
	2 lamps	zhan	function	1	2 long eggplants	tiao	shape (ID)		10	I card	zhong	shape (2D)
1	I round eggplant	ge	shape (3D)		3 carrots	tiao	shape (1D)		Г	2 bookmækers	zhang	shape (2D)
	5 round radishes	ke	dupe (3D)		1 daikon	tiao	shape (ID)		Г	l postcard	zhong.	dispe (2D)
	4 buby carrots	ke	shape (3D)		2 pairs of pants	tiao	shape (ID)		Г	1 picture	zhang	shape (2D)
2	a loaf of bread	tisto	shape (1D)		1 towel	tiao	shape (1D)		Г	1 cloir	zhang	shape (2D)
	3 pieces of bread	pian	dupe (2D)		1 skirt	tiao	shape (ID)		11	l map	zhong.	dispe (2D)
	2 bogels	ge	shape (3D)	1	1 dress	jim	function	l	Г	2 CDs	zhong	shape (2D)
3	2 bananas	gen	dupe (ID)		1 pair of trousers	tiao	shape (ID)		12	1 bed.	zhong.	dispe (2D)
	2 potatoes	ge	shape (3D)		1 pair of short pants	tiao	shape (ID)		Г	1 pillow	ge	shape (2D)
	3 carrots	gen	shape (1D)		1 jucket	jian	function	l	Г	1 quik	tiao	shape (1D)
	l triangle highlighter	ge	dupe (3D)		2 pencils	zhi	shape (ID)		_			
4	2 pears	ge	shape (3D)		2 pens	zhi	shape (ID)					
	3 oranges	ge	shape (3D)		1 mler	zhi	shape (1D)					

Results

- ■Support universal noun bias hypothesis (Gentner, 1981)
- ■against Tardiff's (1996; 1999) argument for a verb bias for Mandarin speaking
- TYPE frequency and TOKEN frequency
- The elicitation task for classifiers
- most frequently used by both groups—ge
- Taiwanese group- shape classifiers
- Vietnamese group produced other variety of classifiers in addition to shape

Results:

Figure 1: Number of nouns and verbs produced by children

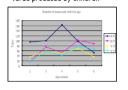


Figure 2: Number of adjectives produced by children

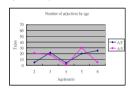


Table 4: Adjectives in the spontaneous speech by children with Vietnamese mothers and Taiwanese mothers

Category Example Vietnamese Taiwanese

Cincaca	Listanpre	· Icuminesc	I da marca
dimension	big	5	9
age	old	0	2
color	red	10	7
value	excellent	13	13
physical property			
form	short	6	2
appearance	colorful	3	6
cleanliness	diity	2	1
sense	loud	4	9
configuration	close	2	0
speed	slow	2	1
wetness	wet	1.	0
human propensity			
mental state	confused	8	9
physical state	thin	1	10
behavior	successful	5	2
other		19	6

Table 2: The mean proportion of nouns in each semantic category in Vietnamese and Taiwanese

Citigary	Transler.	Tirkness	Tolor grows
andred.	hallsty.	20246	50%
omenolites	beg.	4.40%	- 4%
Sood	792	7.58%	1066
hot/gret		5.37%	57%
(ruit	bases	0.90%	135
19666	ted.	2.69%	20%
boy	0.6	7,23%	- 695
stating	(825	1,30%	13%
Daybass or construction	door	1.90%	26
ations	Socie	2.79%	275
color	240	2,276	186
plant	Bower	0.896	186
personal corner		0.60%	- 65
leksblp	meter	7.39%	- 255
district.	200507	0.2190	075
location.	becher	4.5%	425
påme	Table	1.20%	284

Table 3: The mean proportion of verbs in each semantic category in

Canagory	Manage	Vistrameter	Chickenson
words ar vertex	roin	1.4005	- 0
stative vertice	Steep.	32.1590	33.53%
men of this works	Hart	0.20%	6.9796
body function	pee	- 6	1.6096
Incode:	800	22.69%	30.7010
position	es	1.30%	2.18%
nestion.	bite	35,1916	3400
cognition	Store	15.9295	6.01%
perception	CAS.	2.47%	5.9916
essition	Sine	14,7405	5.49%
entimizationism	and the state of t	4.19%	4.556
estal internation	ne di caso	19.04%	2.10%

Table 5: Classifiers in the spontaneous speech by children with Vietnamese mothers and Taiwanese mothers

Classifier	Victorinese	Tajtranese
ge (resind)	26	
treat "incop"	- 4	á
No flower	- 2	- 0
wei 'tuti'	2.	0
Fin 'port'	2	Q
tise "long"	- 3	
syan "bowl"	1	- 0
bian "nide"	1 1	
oung Gerell	1	0
tal 'mechane'	1	.0
dou "axmg"		0
stri repitrust	1.	-4
barbander		- 1
cheng Stind?	- 0	4
hone 'flet'	0	2
oloen.	-53	20
ype.	14	

Table 6: Classifiers elicited from children of Vietnamese mothers and

classifier	Vietnamese	Taiwanese
ge 'round'	212	131
ke 'round'	4	3
zhang 'flat'	9	1
pian 'piece'	4	1
mian 'face'	3	0
zhi 'long'	13	2
tiao 'long'	5	11
gen 'long'	0	9
jian 'clothing	14	0
duo 'flower'	3	0
bao 'bag'	2	0
ben 'book'	2	0
juan 'roll'	2	0
ba 'handle'	2	0
chuan 'string'	1	0
tokens	287	147
types	15	7.

Discussion

- The lexical development of children of Vietnamese and Taiwanese mothers show that the lexical development of children of immigrants is not slower than children of Taiwanese mothers as claimed in the literature.
- ●The study also reveals some phenomena about language acquisition in general:
- Noun bias in spontaneous speech
- The production of classifiers started at three years old for both groups
- First classifier– ge
- Children's acquisition of classifiers is guided by both cognitive principles and frequency
- The first cognitive basis they acquired is shape

Limitations

- •The children in two groups did not match exact age in
- •Due to the small sample size, the results may not be representative for all the children of immigrants

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