

ARTICLE

The acquisition of the semantics of Japanese numeral classifiers: The methodological value of nonsense

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Abstract

This study examined the acquisition of numeral classifiers in 120 monolingual Japanese children. Previous research has argued that the complex semantic system underlying classifiers is late acquired. Thus, we set out to determine the age at which Japanese children are able to extend the semantic properties of classifiers to novel items/situations. Participants completed a comprehension task with a mouse-tracking extension and a production task with nonce and familiar items. While the comprehension results showed ceiling effects on familiar and nonce items, age significantly modulated a difference in accuracy between familiar and nonce items in the production task. The findings suggest that the acquisition of the underlying semantic system is acquired much earlier than previously argued. Previously attested issues with Japanese classifier production in young(er) children are more likely to reflect accessing difficulties than indexing the underlying grammatical competence of the classifier system.

Keywords: distributional cues; embodiment; verb learning; Japanese; classifier; acquisition

1. Introduction

Children begin to use language to categorize and count items in their environment early in their development. To do so, most languages only require combining nouns with numerals to construct numeral noun phrases (e.g., ‘three lions’). However, some languages such as Japanese, Chinese, and Korean have special expressions accompanying the numerals to categorize items that they quantify (e.g., Japanese: *san too no raion* ‘three CL-GEN lion’). These are called NUMERAL CLASSIFIERS. Numeral classifiers behave similarly to collective nouns, which comprise an open class of words that quantifies mass unit (e.g., herd of cattle, flock of birds). Although much work has examined children’s acquisition of classifiers, there is little consensus as to HOW and WHEN children acquire their syntactic patterns and the corresponding semantic system. In order to ensure that children can assign meanings to a classifier (e.g., *too* categorizes large animals) – rather than merely

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Acquisition Of Japanese

Masahiro Hara



Acquisition Of Japanese:

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Fundamentals of Japanese Grammar Yuki Johnson,2007-12-31 This extensive and thorough explanation of crucial Japanese grammar in English is the culmination of years of teaching and research Informed by the work of eminent linguist Susumu Kuno **Fundamentals of Japanese Grammar** is designed for students who have studied basic Japanese grammar and wish to better organize their knowledge and expand it in greater depth and at a higher level Its organization presents a holistic picture of Japanese grammar for the benefit of learners and is distinctive in that grammar items are reorganized in terms of specific grammatical categories such as particles te form compounds dictionary form compounds stem form compounds passive constructions conditional sentences and so forth The author offers a thorough discussion of various pragmatic constraints illustrated with sample sentences dialogues and essays that aid in understanding the structure and use of the language from a cultural perspective Given its comprehensive treatment this accessible grammar will appeal to anyone involved or interested in the Japanese language It will be especially effective as a text in courses on Japanese linguistics and pedagogical syntax and a valuable source of Japanese grammar for linguists and educators as well as researchers in Japan related fields *The Acquisition of Japanese Pronouns [microform]* Yoshiko Suzuki,1985 **Japanese Law of Nationality** Japan,1915

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