Effects of another language on bilinguals’ sentence production and grammatical judgement

Miho Sasaki, Rika Masuda, Itsuko Yamamoto
Keio University, Japan

This study examines how bilinguals are affected by their other language’s grammatical structure when they use one of their languages. Based on the multi-competence view, the grammar that L2 learners acquire is unlikely the same as the grammar of a monolingual native speaker because they already possess the first language grammar and also because the ways of acquiring and using a second language are different (Cook, 2008; Cook & Singleton, 2014). As the total system, therefore, a bilingual’s L1 and L2 must be affected each other and should develop accordingly. The current study aims to investigate various bilinguals’ grammatical knowledge and find out the factors that cause the differences.

30 Japanese users of English participated in sentence production and grammatical judgement tasks. In the sentence production task, two features of English grammar were tested: the position of adverbs of time and preference in use of nouns or verbs. Japanese sentence structure normally has time expressions such as yesterday in the beginning of the sentence, while in English those adverbs usually go in the end position. Participants were asked to write down the sentences. The judgement task in Japanese included some unusual plural forms in the subject such as tori-tachi (birds) and asked if they would judge this sentence odd or ordinary; the judgement task in English included pro-drop, where object pronouns were missing as in Japanese.

The results were analysed along with the LexTALE scores (Broersma & Lemhöfer, 2012), length of stay in English speaking countries, age of acquisition, etc. 10 participants had more than 3 year experiences abroad and those were more sensitive to the pro-dropped English sentences; when compared according to the proficiency level, the high proficiency group used the Japanese adverbial position less. Some factors that can influence acquisition and use of two languages will be discussed.

Keywords: Japanese-English bilinguals, pro-drop, sentence production, Multi-competence.