Incorporating pragmatic information in the interpretation of L2 Japanese reflexives by Chinese L1 learners

Mari Umeda, Kazue Takeda, Makiko Hirakawa, Michiko Fukuda, Yahiro Hirakawa, John Matthews, Neal Snape

1Gunma Prefectural Women’s University, Japan
2Bunkyo University, Japan
3Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan
4Chuo University, Japan

The present study examines second language (L2) acquisition of Japanese reflexive zibun ‘self’ by Chinese-speaking learners of Japanese. The reflexive zibun allows both local and long-distance (LD) binding interpretations. In a recent analysis (e.g., Kishida, 2011), zibun is categorized into three types: reflexive zibun, which is locally bound as a coargument of its antecedent, empathic zibun, which is bound by the participant the speaker empathizes with the most, and logophoric zibun, bound by a ‘logophoric individual,’ one “whose speech, thoughts, feelings, or general state of consciousness are reported” (Clements, 1975). The interpretations of empathic and logophoric zibun are assumed to be influenced by pragmatic factors. According to the Interface Hypothesis (IH) (Sorace, 2006), L2 grammars are vulnerable to grammatical operations that interface with pragmatic or discourse information. In this study, the interpretations of empathic and logophoric zibun by Chinese-speakers are tested. Chinese also has a reflexive, ziji ‘self,’ that can be bound by a LD antecedent, like Japanese zibun. Thus, Chinese speakers already have knowledge of LD reflexives. The goal of this study is to determine whether they are able to incorporate pragmatic information and interpret empathic and logophoric zibun in a native-like way. The IH predicts that Chinese speakers will have difficulty with these two types of zibun because they need to integrate pragmatic information in order to interpret them. We conducted a preliminary test with 12 advanced Chinese-speaking learners of Japanese and 33 Japanese native speakers using a truth value judgment task. The results showed no significant difference between advanced L2 learners and Japanese native speakers in their interpretations of the two types of zibun (empathic: p = .25 and logophoric p = .16), thus showing that they do not have difficulty using discourse information in their interpretation of a pragmatically-licensed reflexive, calling into question the IH hypothesis.

Keywords: Reflexives, L2 Japanese, the Interface Hypothesis.