The acquisition of Cantonese sentence-final particles by a Mandarin-speaking child: from monolingual to bilingual

Wu Yuqi[1abc], Deng Xiangjun[2d], Stephen Matthews[3ac], Virginia Yip[1abc]

[1] Chinese University of Hong Kong; [2] Shenzhen University; [3] University of Hong Kong;

[a] Childhood Bilingualism Research Centre; [b] CUHK-PKU-UST Joint Research Centre for Language and Human Complexity;

[c] University of Cambridge-CUHK Joint Laboratory for Bilingualism; [d] Research Center for Language and Cognition

Introduction

- **Sentence final particles (SFPs)** are an important functional category in spoken Mandarin and Cantonese appearing in the final position of a sentence encoding a variety of semantic, pragmatic, discourse functions and illocutionary force.

➢ Similarities & differences of SFPs in Cantonese & Mandarin

- Overlap in both pronunciation & functions to some extent
- Quantity: 30 basic forms (Matthews & Yip, 2011)
  vs. 7 or 8 basic forms (Ding 1961; Li & Thompson 1981; Cheung 1998; Chu 1998)
  → pose special challenges to L2 learners
- Mandarin speakers use fewer SFPs in conversation than Cantonese speakers (Alleton 1981)
- SFP clusters:
  Cantonese: 2 to 4 particles (Matthews & Yip, 2011)
  Mandarin: 2 particles (Zhu 1982; Zhang 2010)

➢ Criteria for categorization of SFPs in this study

	Criteria for categorization	Mandarin SFPs	Cantonese SFPs
1	Similar pronunciation, Similar functions	*a* 啊	*aa3* 啊
		lo 咯	*lo1* 囉
2	Similar pronunciation, Different functions	*la* 啦	*laa1* 啦
3	Different pronunciation, Similar functions	*ba* 吧	*laa1* 啦
			gwaa3 啩
		bei 呗	*lo1* 囉
		ya 呀	*aa3* 啊
		ne 呢	*le1* 呢
		le 了	*laa3* 喇
4	No corresponding counterparts	NA	*wo3* 喎 *tim1* 添
5	SFP clusters	*le ba* 了吧 *de ne* 的呢	*lei4 gaa3* 嚟啫 *ge3 laa1 ma3* 嘅啦嘛 *tim1 ge3 laa3 bo3* 添嘅喇嘸

Research Questions

- What are the non-target SFPs produced by the child?
- Is there any cross-linguistic influence from Mandarin to Cantonese?

Methodology

- ***Tong***: born and raised in Shenzhen, PRC, exposed to Mandarin from birth. Exposed to Cantonese since 3;3 in HK kindergarten
- Longitudinal study:
  L1 Mandarin: Tong Corpus (Deng & Yip, in press)
  Corpus website: http://cbrchk.org/the-tong-corpus/

  L2 Cantonese: Tong Corpus (Wu 2016) - 9-month video & audio recording at weekly or bi-weekly intervals

Background information of the subject				
Child	Age span of the corpus study		No. of Sessions	MLU
Tong	Mandarin	1;7-3;4	22	1.64-4.59
		4;3-5;0	12	-
	Cantonese	4;3-5;0	12	1.73-3.61

- Data analysis:

1) Transcription
2) Using Commands in CLAN to extract spontaneous utterances with SFPs
3) Categorizing the extracted utterances based on the functions of the SFPs
4) Non-target SFPs

Results

- ***Target-like Cantonese SFPs:***
- 14 types: *aa3, laa3, gaa3, ge2, ne1, lo1, aa4, lu3, ge3, aa1, gaa4, aak1, laa4, laa1*

- ***Non-target-like Cantonese SFPs:***
- *ba, bei, ya, ma*

Tong's production of non-target SFPs in obligatory contexts		
SFPs	Tokens	Proportion in all non-target SFPs
ba	25	64.10%
ya	7	17.95%
bei	4	10.26%
ma	3	7.69%
Total	39	100%

- *ba* 吧: highest proportion of inappropriate use in the child's Cantonese SFPs.
- Mandarin *ba* 吧 is a SFP that has no phonological counterparts in Cantonese, but is similar in function to two Cantonese SFPs.

➢ *ba* 吧 - *laa1* 啦: "invitation/requests" 4 tokens
- gwaa3 啩: "uncertainty of the speaker" 21 tokens

(1) Mandarin *ba* in place of *gwaa3*

- No *gwaa3* 啩 was found in the child's production.

INV: 你 覺得 佢 係 男仔 車 定
lei5 gok3dak1 keoi5 hai6 laam4zai2 ce1 ding6
you think he is boy car or
女仔 車 啊?
leoi2zai2 ce1 aa3
girl car SFP
"Do you think it is a boy car or a girl car?"

CHI: 男仔 吧?
naam4zai2 ba
boy SFP
"It is a boy car, I guess?" (Tong 4;5)

(2) Mandarin *ba* in place of Cantonese *laa1*

- The child's target use of *laa1* 啦 emerged at the age of 4;11.

INV: 你 教 姐姐 玩 吖, 好 唔 好 啊?
lei5 gaau3 ze4ze4 waan2 aa1 hou2 m4 hou2 aa3
you teach sister play SFP good not good SFP
"You teach me how to play it, okay?"

CHI: 你 睇 說明書 吧.
lei5 tai2 syut3ming4syu1 ba
you read Instructions SFP
"Have a look at the instructions." (Tong 4;8)

➢ *lo1* 囉 *-bei* 呗 – "obviousness"
-lo 咯 – "emphasis of new situation; affirmation"

(2) Mandarin *bei* in place of Cantonese *lo1*

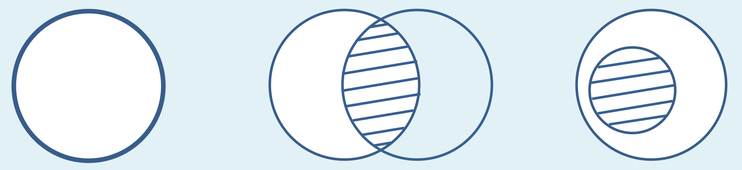
- The child consistently used Mandarin *bei* 呗 in place of *lo1* 囉 before the age of 4;11.

INV: 冇 啊? 咁 點算 呢?
mou5 aa4 gam2 dim2syun3 le1
no SFP then what-to-do SFP
"No? Then what should we do?"

CHI: 自己 拼 呗.
zi6gei2 ping3 bei
self piece-together SFP
"We could piece them together by ourselves." (Tong 4;11)

Discussion

- Non-target uses of SFPs found in the child's Cantonese all fall into the group of Cantonese SFPs that have Mandarin counterparts in functions but differ in pronunciation.
- However, even within this group, the production rate of the target Cantonese SFP is different.



Complete overlap **Partial overlap** **Inclusive overlap**

- *Complete overlap*: no (detectable) transfer in this group, except for the pair *ya* & *aa3* (phonological transfer)
- *Partial overlap*: direct transfer found from Mandarin to the child's Cantonese; not until the last two recordings, the target use began to emerge
- *Inclusive overlap*: most persistent errors found in the child, target use not attested in our recordings

Relationship	SFP pairs	
	Mandarin SFPs	Cantonese SFPs
1. Complete overlap	*ne* 呢	*le1* 呢
	le 了	*laa3* 喇
	ya 呀	*aa3* 啊
2. Partial overlap	*ba* 吧	*laa1* 啦
	bei 呗	*lo1* 囉
3. Inclusive overlap	*ma* 吗	*me1* 咩
	ba 吧	*gwaa3* 啩

- Cantonese SFPs without any counterparts in Mandarin: relatively well mastered, e.g., *ge2* 嘅, but many are still missing in our data
- SFP clusters in both languages developed relatively late due to their greater complexity. They are likely to be mastered after the individual SFPs are mastered.

Conclusion

- In the domain of SFPs, overlap in either pronunciation or functions between the two languages opens the door for cross-linguistic influence, posing a challenge for the child and making the acquisition process lag behind.
- In particular, overlap in the functions of two SFPs poses more difficulties in the child's acquisition process.
- The nature of the overlap is an essential factor for the strength of cross-linguistic influence:
  Inclusive overlap > Partial overlap > Complete overlap
- High frequency of individual SFPs in L1 Mandarin is also a factor in CLI.

References

- Alleton, V. (1981). Final particles and expression of modality in modern Chinese. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics,* 9(1), 91-115.
- Chu, C. C. (1998). A discourse grammar of Mandarin Chinese. New York: Peter Lang.
- Deng, X., & Yip, V. (in press). A multimedia corpus of child Mandarin: the Tong Corpus. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*.
- Ding, S. S. (1961). *Xiandai hanyu yufa jianghua* (Modern Chinese Grammar). Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Li, C. N., & Thompson, S. A. (1981). *Mandarin Chinese: A functional reference grammar*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Matthews, S., & Yip, V. (2011). *Cantonese: a comprehensive grammar (2nd edn)*. London: Routledge.
- Wu, Y. (2016). *The acquisition of Cantonese sentence-final particles by a Mandarin-speaking child: from monolingual to bilingual* (Unpublished master's thesis). Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.
- Zhang, B. (2010). *Xiandai hanyu miaoxie yufa* (Descriptive grammar of modern Chinese). Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- Zhu, D. (1982). *Yufa Jiangyi* (The Mandarin Chinese grammar). Beijing: The Commercial Press.

Contact Information

wuyuqi612@gmail.com

兒童雙語研究中心 Childhood Bilingualism Research Centre

Chinese University of Hong Kong-Peking University-University System of Taiwan Joint Research Centre for Language and Human Complexity
香港中文大學-北京大學-台灣大學聯合系統 語言與人類複雜系統聯合研究中心

University of Cambridge-Chinese University of Hong Kong Joint Laboratory for Bilingualism
劍橋大學-香港中文大學 聯合雙語研究中心

深圳大學-语言与认知研究中心 Research Centre for Language and Cognition (RCLC)