

Difficulty with grammatical case-marking in Japanese children with SLI

Purpose: It is not yet clear whether or not children with specific language impairment (SLI) experience difficulty with case-marking (Clahsen, 1991; Eisenbeiss et al., 2005; Leonard et al., 2014; Lukács et al., 2010; Rothweiler, et al., 2010). Japanese case is generally expressed overtly with case-markers (postpositional particles) that follow noun phrases. For this reason, Japanese with its use of case-markers would allow us to examine whether or not case-marking is in fact problematic for such children. It has been previously suggested that Japanese children with SLI experience difficulty with grammatical case-marking (nominative, accusative, and dative) (Fukuda et al., 2007; Ito et al., 2009; Murao et al., 2012). However, the number of participants in these previous studies was limited: three in Fukuda et al. (2007), one in Ito et al. (2009), and two in Murao et al. (2012). The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not a larger group of Japanese children with SLI would in fact experience difficulty with grammatical case-marking.

Method: The participants were 14 Japanese children with SLI (aged 7;7 to

11;4) and 29 typically developing (TD) children (aged 8;11 to 9;11). The children with SLI were all attending speech and hearing classes in elementary school due to a reported delay in language development. They showed a limitation in their language ability which could not be attributed to problems of hearing, neurological status, nonverbal intelligence, or other known factors. A sentence completion task was used. Each stimulus consisted of a picture and an incomplete corresponding sentence which described the event represented in the picture. Each stimulus sentence had two blanks which had to be filled in with the corresponding grammatical case-marker. The participants were asked to complete the sentences by filling in these blanks with the appropriate case-marker orthographically. Stimulus sentences consisted of both active and passive sentences. Word order was either canonical or scrambled. Thus, four types of sentences were used: 1) active/canonical, 2) active/scrambled, 3) passive/canonical, and 4) passive/scrambled. There were 4 sentences of each type.

Results: The mean percent correct of case-marking in the total number of stimulus sentences was 37.1% in the 14 children with SLI (ranging from 12.5% to 56.3%). In contrast, it was 82.5% in the TD children (ranged from

62.5% to 100.0%). The difference in the percent correct of case-marking between the SLI and TD children was significant ($t(41)=11.13, p<.01$).

Discussion: The results of this study reveal that Japanese children with SLI do in fact experience difficulty with grammatical case-marking, as suggested by Fukuda et al. (2007), Ito et al. (2009), and Murao et al. (2012). These results seem to converge with the findings of Clahsen (1991), Leonard et al. (2014) and Rothweiler et al. (2010), however, they differ from those of Eisenbesiss et al. (2005) and Lukáks et al. (2010). In order to examine whether or not all children with SLI experience difficulty with grammatical case-marking, further studies are needed.

Conclusion: Japanese children with SLI experience difficulty with grammatical case-marking.

References

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