

行政院國家科學委員會專題研究計畫 成果報告

幼兒漢語中的重複話語現象：從言談語用的角度分析

計畫類別：個別型計畫

計畫編號：NSC93-2411-H-004-047-

執行期間：93年08月01日至94年07月31日

執行單位：國立政治大學語言學研究所

計畫主持人：黃瓊之

報告類型：精簡報告

處理方式：本計畫可公開查詢

中 華 民 國 94 年 10 月 31 日

Repetition in Mandarin Child Language: A Discourse-Pragmatic Perspective

Chiung-chih Huang
National Chengchi University

摘要

在語言習得的早期階段，幼兒的言談中常含有大量的重複話語，幼兒時常重複對話者對他們所說的話。本研究從言談語用的角度來探討說漢語的幼兒的重複話語現象。語料包括兩個兩歲的幼兒與其母親或父親的自然對話。語料的分析著重在幼兒重複對方話語時所使用的語言形式及語用功能。根據重複話語和模式話語之間的相同度，重複的話語可分成四種形式：(1) 精確重複，(2) 縮減重複，(3) 變更重複，和(4) 擴展重複。研究分析發現不同形式的重複傾向表達不同的溝通功能。這些功能包括模仿、要求、贊成/確認、否定/拒絕、回答問題和闡釋。

關鍵字：重複、溝通功能、語言習得

Abstract

Child discourse at the early stages of language acquisition is extraordinarily repetitive in nature. Children often repeat a large number of utterances addressed to them. The purpose of this study is to investigate repetition in child discourse from a discourse-pragmatic perspective. The data consisted of natural interactions between two Mandarin-speaking two-year-olds and their parents. The conversations between the child-parent dyads were analyzed to investigate the types and functions of children's repetitions. Repetitions were classified into four types according to the faithfulness of the repetitions to the model utterances: (1) Exact repetition, (2) Reduced repetition, (3) Modified repetition, and (4) Expanded repetition. It was found that different types of repetitions tended to serve different communicative functions, including imitations, requests, agreement/confirmation, denial/refusal, answering questions and elaboration.

Key words: repetition, communicative functions, language acquisition

Introduction

Child discourse at the early stages of language acquisition is extraordinarily repetitive in nature. Children often repeat a large number of utterances addressed to them. The role of repetition in language acquisition has been much-discussed in psychology, linguistics, and anthropology.

Previous studies on repetition (often referred to as ‘imitation’) have mostly been concerned with its role in the learning of vocabulary and syntax. The results, however, have been inconsistent. A number of studies have concluded that imitation plays no role or only a limited role in linguistic development. (Moerk, 1977; Stine & Bohannon, 1983; Landahl, Mishra & Gould, 1987; Tager-Flusberg & Calkins, 1990). Other studies, however, have reported that imitation facilitates grammatical and lexical development. (Corrigan, 1980; Snow, 1981, 1983; Kuczaj, 1982; Speidel & Nelson, 1989; Speidel & Herreshoff, 1989; Perez-Pereira, 1994).

It appears that the contradiction concerning the role of imitation in language growth may largely result from methodological differences among the studies, as suggested by Perez-Pereira (1994). That is, different studies have used different definitions of imitation. Some studies adopted a narrower definition of imitation and considered only exact and reduced imitations while others adopted a broader definition and included modified and expanded repetitions as imitations. Studies which analyzed only exact and reduced imitations tended to conclude that imitations do not further linguistic development while the majority of studies that analyzed modified and expanded imitations supported the claim that imitations promote grammatical development.

Another problem with many previous studies on imitation is that they have attempted to deal with language in the absence of communicative intent (Casby, 1986). It has been suggested that imitation may play a more important role in the development of communicative competence than it does in the development of linguistic competence. Some researchers thus made a distinction between imitation and repetition, and suggested that children’s repetition may serve different communicative purposes, with imitation as one of them (Ochs Keenan, 1977; Casby, 1986, Greenfield & Savage-Rumbaugh, 1993, Bennett-Kastor, 1994). In other words, all repetitions are not imitations.

From a pragmatic perspective, Casby (1986) examined the communicative

functions of repetition in the speech data of a child from the age of 2;1 to the age of 3;1. The author classified the functions of repetition into different categories, including requests, statements, performative plays, imitations, and conversational devices. The results demonstrated that while a relatively high frequency of the category of imitation was observed, a large number of child repetitions were reliably classified as serving a communicative act other than imitation. The analysis thus supported the contention that repetition may be used for a variety of communicative function in child language. In addition, discourse profiles were also identified for various communicative functions of repetition.

Ishikawa (1993) addressed the issue of how children used repetition to establish coherence and cohesion. By examining the speech of two-, three-, and four-year olds, the author found developmental differences in establishing coherence at three discourse planes: the ideational structure, the action structure, and the participation framework. At the ideational structure, the children's use of repetition to establish coherence varied both in form and function; at the action structure and the participation framework, the analysis showed how caregivers supplemented the linguistic resources needed by the children to meet communicative demands. The results were taken to indicate a symbiotic relationship between the caregiver and the child, and socialization processes.

Although it has been suggested that repetition may play a more important role in the development of communicative competence than it does in the development of linguistic competence (Casby, 1986), only a few studies are available which investigated the discourse-pragmatic aspects of repetition. In order to capture a more complete picture of the role of repetition in language acquisition, the purpose of this study is to investigate the types and functions of repetition in child discourse from a discourse-pragmatic perspective. A broader definition of repetition was adopted in this present study: repetition can be exact, reduced, modified or expanded (see the Methods section for the definitions). In addition, previous research on repetition in child language has focused primarily on English or other European language speaking children. Little is known about repetition in child Mandarin. This study, which investigated Mandarin-speaking children, may shed new light on the issue and lead to a better understanding of repetition in child discourse.

Methods

Participants and Data

The participants of this study included two Mandarin-speaking two-year-olds. The children were visited in their homes. Natural parent-child conversations were audio- and video- taped to capture both the linguistic data and the contextual information. The collected data were then transcribed using CHAT convention (MacWhinney, 1994). The data analyzed in this study included three hours of recording from each of the children.

Data Analysis

The transcribed data were analyzed to investigate the types and functions of repetitions. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted.

1. Types

Repetitions were classified into four types according to the faithfulness of the repetitions to the model utterances. The categorization follows Perez-Pereira (1994).

- (1) Exact: Reproduction of all the words, or the self-selected target elements of the model utterance, in the same order without any changes or additions.
- (2) Reduced: The reproduction involves omission of functors, morphemes or content words from the utterance or the target part of the utterance.
- (3) Modified: Using part or all of an utterance as a model, the child changes the person of the verb, the pronoun, the order of the elements, or the complement, etc.
- (4) Expanded: One part of the utterance is imitated or repeated and another part is created by the child without a preceding model.

2. Functions

Repetitions of the different types were examined in the conversational discourse to determine their pragmatic functions. The repetitions were examined in relation to their context of use. The context included such things as the speaker's communicative intention, the speaker-hearer relationship, the extralinguistic setting of the utterance, the linguistic setting of the utterance (e.g., prior discourse, topic at hand, etc.), and other areas of background knowledge, such as knowledge of conversational norms and conventions (Keenan, 1977).

Results

In the two children's data, 122 and 118 repetitions were identified respectively. Both children's speech contained all the four types of repetitions (exact, reduced, modified and expanded). However, the majority of the repetitions were reduced

repetitions (48% and 44% respectively).

The analysis of the children's repetitions showed that they expressed various communicative functions. In addition to the function of imitation, repetitions were also used by the children to perform requests, agreement/confirmation, denial/refusal, answering questions and elaboration. It was also found that different types of repetitions tended to serve different communicative functions.

Reduced and Exact Repetitions

The major function of the reduced repetitions was to imitate preceding adult utterances. The children may imitate the parents' utterances after the parents' explicit elicitation. Such imitations often occurred in social routines, in which the parents explicitly taught the children what to say to be socially appropriate,

- 1 *MOT: 要說 -: 聖誕快樂.
- 2 *CHI: 聖誕快樂.

In addition to social routines, another situation in which such explicit instruction often occurred was in object labeling. That is, the children imitated adults' preceding utterances to learn the names of objects.

- 1 *MOT: 這個叫菜菜.
- 2 *CHI: 菜菜.

There was another situation in which the two-year-olds used reduced repetitions to show imitation. That is, when the parents corrected the children's utterances, the children often would imitate the correct versions provided by the parents.

- 1 *CHI: 那是雪人 -: .
- 2 *DAD: 好像是北極熊耶!
- 3 *CHI: 是北極熊.

In addition to imitation, another function expressed by the children's reduced repetitions was to answer the parents' choice questions. In the parents' choice questions, the parents provided alternatives for the children to choose.

- 1 *MOT: 是不知道還是忘記了?

2 *CHI: 忘記了.

As for exact repetition, it was found that the main function of exact repetitions was also to imitate. In these cases, the children's imitations involved complete repetitions of the preceding adult utterances. In such cases, the parents directly demonstrated what the children were expected to say without using instructive expressions.

1 *MOT: 我兩歲.

2 *CHI: 我兩歲.

In addition, the children also used exact repetitions to imitate adults' utterances after adults' correction of the children's prior utterances.

1 *CHI: 濕紙巾洗頭髮.

2 *DAD: 洗髮精.

3 *CHI: 洗髮精.

Beside the function of imitation, it was found that another function of the children's exact repetitions was to show agreement/confirmation of adults' preceding utterances.

1 *CHI: 不能喔?

2 *GAF: 還沒.

3 *CHI: ei.

4 *CHI: 還沒.

Modified and Expanded Repetitions

The children used less modified and expanded repetitions than reduced and exact repetitions in the data. It appears that modified and expanded repetitions were relatively more difficult for the children. In the children's use of modified repetitions, the main communicative function was to answer information questions

1 *MOT: 你要去哪裡騎車車?

2 *CHI: 我要去這邊下面騎車車 -:.

1 *DAD: 你要開車去哪裡呀?

2 *CHI: 我要開去台東.

As for expanded repetitions, it appears that the children used expanded repetitions to serve more sophisticated communicative functions. The analysis showed that the children may use expanded repetitions to repeat adults' preceding utterances and then elaborate on them in their subsequent utterances

1 *DAD: 看到大容了 [% laughs] .

2 *CHI: 大哥哥看到大容了.

1 *GAF: 你跟阿祖說我明天要去美國 .

2 *CHI: 我明天要去美國打鼓#跳舞 .

Concluding Remarks

This study has analyzed how Mandarin-speaking two-year-olds used repetitions to achieve communicative purposes. The findings were consistent with those reported in Casby (1986) in that while most of the children's repetitions functioned as imitations, the children also used repetitions for a variety of other communicative functions. For further research, a larger dataset and a more fine-grained analysis are necessary in order to shed light on the developmental aspect of repetitions in child language.

References

- Bennett-Kastor, T. L. (1994). Repetition in language development: From interaction to cohesion. In Johnstone, B. (1994). *Repetition in discourse: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Casby, M. W. (1985). A pragmatic perspective of repetition in child language. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 15, 2, 127-140.
- Corrigan, R. (1980). Use of repetition to facilitate spontaneous language acquisition. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 9(3), 231-241.
- Greenfield, P. M. & Savage-Rumbaugh, E. S. (1993). Comparing communicative competence in child and chimp: the pragmatics of repetition. *Journal of child language*, 20, 1-26.
- Ishikawa, M. (1993). *A developmental role of allo-repetition in the discourse of nursery school children in Okinawa (Japan)*. Unpublished dissertation, Georgetown University.

- Kuczaj, S. A. (1982). Language play and language acquisition. In H. W. Reese (ed.), *Advances in child development and behavior*, 17. New York: Academic Press.
- Landahl, K. L., Mishra, V. & Gould, H. J. (1987). Imitation in speech development. *Working papers in Linguistics* 3, 151-9, University of Chicago.
- MacWhinney, B. (1994). *The CHILDES project: tools for analyzing talk*, 2nd ed. Hillsdale, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Moerk, E. L. (1977). Processes and products of imitation: additional evidence that imitation is progressive. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 6, 187-202.
- Ochs Kennan, E. (1977). Making it last: Repetition in children's discourse. In S. Ervin-Tripp & C. Mitchell-Kernan (eds.), *Child discourse*. New York: Academic.
- Perez-Pereira, M. (1994). Imitations, repetitions, routines, and the child's analysis of language: insights from the blind. *Journal of Child Language*, 21, 317-337.
- Stine, E. L. & Bohannon, J. L. (1983). Imitations, interactions and language acquisition. *Journal of Child Language* 10, 589-603.
- Snow, K. E. (1981). The uses of imitation. *Journal of Child Language* 8, 205-212.
- Snow, K. E. (1983). Saying it again: the role of expanded and deferred imitations in language acquisition. In K. E. Nelson (ed.), *Children's language*, 4. Hillsdale NJ: Erlbaum.
- Speidel, G. E. & Herreshoff, M. J. (1989). Imitation and the construction of long utterances. In G. E. Speidel & K. E. Nelson (eds), *The many faces of imitation in children*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Speidel, G. E. & Nelson, K. E. (1989). *The many faces of imitation in children*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Tager-Flusberg, H. & Calkins, S. (1990). Does imitation facilitate the acquisition of grammar? Evidence from a study of autistic, Down's syndrome and normal children. *Journal of Child Language* 17, 591-606.