

The Acquisition of Lexical Tone in Various Contexts

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Abstract

More than half of the world's languages are tone languages, but the acquisition of lexical tone by children is much less well understood compared to the acquisition of consonants and vowels. Early studies show that children have acquired lexical tones by the age of two years, well ahead of their acquisition of segments. Some recent studies revisited tone acquisition in Mandarin and Cantonese and found that tone acquisition is more protracted than previously thought. Besides, many studies demonstrated cross-linguistic influence in bilingual acquisition of segments, but little is known about the acquisition of lexical tone in a bilingual context. Tone sandhi involves higher order, sometimes very complex, phonological alternations of lexical tone, however, children's acquisition of complex tone sandhi remains largely unexplored. This talk will address the above interesting issues by discussing Cantonese lexical tone acquisition in monolingual and bilingual contexts, and children's acquisition of the famous tone-sandhi circle in Xiamen Southern Min.

Key words

Lexical tone, Mandarin, Cantonese, Xiamen Southern Min

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