

The Strategies and Mediating Processes of Learning the Inflectional Morphology in English: A Case Study for Taiwanese English Learners

Authors : Hsiu-Ling Hsu, En-Minh (John) Lan

Abstract : Pronunciation has received more and more language researchers' and teachers' attention because it is important for effective or even successful communication. How to consistently and correctly orally produce verbal morphology, such as English regular past tense inflection, has been a big challenge and troublesome for FL learners. The research aims to explore EFL (English as a foreign language) learners' developmental trajectory of the inflectional morphology, that is, what mediating processes and strategies EFL learners use, to attain native-like prosodic structure of inflectional morphemes (e.g., -ed and -s suffixes) by comparing the differences among EFL learners at different English levels. This research adopted a self-repair analysis and Prosodic Transfer Hypothesis with three developmental stages as a theoretical framework. To answer the research questions, we conducted two experiments, grammatical tense test written production (Experiment 1) and read-aloud oral production (Experiment 2), and recruited 30 participants who were divided into three groups, low-, middle-, and advanced EFL learners. Experiment 1 was conducted to ensure that participants had learned the knowledge of forming the English regular past tense rules and Experiment 2 was carried out to compare the data across FL English learner groups at different English levels. The EFL learners' self-repair data showed at least four interesting findings. First, low achievers were more sensitive to the plural suffix -s than the past tense suffix -ed. Middle achievers exhibited a greater responsiveness to the past tense suffix, while high achievers demonstrated equal sensitivity to both suffixes. Additionally, two strategies used by EFL English learners to produce verbs and nouns with inflectional morphemes were to delete internal syllable and to divide a four-syllable verb (e.g., 'graduated') into two prosodic structures (e.g., 'gradu' and 'ated' or 'gradua' and 'ted'). Third, true vowel epenthesis was found only in the low EFL achievers. Moreover fortition (native-like sound) was observed in the low and middle EFL achievers. These findings and self-repair data disclosed mediating processes between the developmental stages and provided insight on how Taiwan EFL learners attained the adjunction prosodic structures of inflectional Morphemes in English.

Keywords : inflectional morphology, prosodic structure, developmental trajectory, strategies and mediating processes, English as a foreign language

Conference Title : ICPLL 2024 : International Conference on Psycholinguistics and Language Learning

Conference Location : Amsterdam, Netherlands

Conference Dates : August 05-06, 2024