

THE ACQUISITION OF RESULTATIVE VERB COMPOUNDS
IN MANDARIN CHINESE¹

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ABSTRACT

Resultative verb compounds (RVCs) in Mandarin appear in a V1-V2 sequence and have three major subtypes—result-state, directional and completive RVCs with different degrees of compositionality depending on the extent to which the compound’s meaning can be derived from the meanings of the component verbs. The derivation of the RVC has been analyzed as a lexical or syntactic process. Previous acquisition studies show that the RVC’s compositionality and event structure are not fully acquired before the age of three. Findings conflict on whether the acquisition process revealed by early RVCs is usage-based or rule-based. We examined longitudinal data from two Mandarin-speaking children and administered a novel verb experiment on 32 children. The lexicalist approach to RVC formation is a better account for our data than the syntactic approach. Our data lend support to rule-based learning of RVCs. Children master the event structure of RVCs and its interaction with aspect gradually. The headedness of the RVC in relation to event structure depends

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on its type: V2 is more salient than V1 for the result-state RVC, while V1 is more salient than V2 for the directional RVC.

KEYWORDS

Acquisition Resultative verb compound Compositionality
Event structure Rule-based learning Aspectual head

1. INTRODUCTION

Resultative constructions are found in a vast number of languages. A typical English resultative construction as shown in (1) expresses a complex event in which an action causes an object to undergo a change of state. Aside from English-type periphrastic resultatives, Mandarin Chinese has lexical resultatives in the form of the resultative verb compound (RVC), also known as “verb-complement compound”, “verb-complement construction”, or “V-V resultative compound”, depending on the theoretical stance of the particular analysis (Chao 1968; Thompson 1973; Li and Thompson 1981; Zhu 1982; Y. Li 1990; Gu 1992; Shi 1998; Huang 2006; among many others). This study investigates how Mandarin-speaking children acquire RVCs. With the acquisition data, we aim to address some theoretical issues in linguistics, and contribute to the understanding of child language acquisition. In this section, we will introduce the properties of RVCs and relevant theoretical issues.

(1) Mary wiped the table clean.

An RVC is composed of two verbal elements, labeled as V1 and V2 in this article. There are three major types of RVCs (Smith 1990; Packard 2001; Gu 2003), namely the result-state, directional, and completive RVCs, schematized and exemplified in (2). The RVC’s meaning can by and large be derived from the meanings of its two components. In (3), for instance, the complex event encoded by *X ca-ganjing Y* ‘X wipe-clean Y’ can be decomposed into a causal subevent of *X ca Y* ‘X wipe Y’ and a result subevent of *Y ganjing* ‘Y being clean’. Following the interpretation of Frege’s principle of compositionality by Dowty (1979, 15) and Larson and Segal (1995, 11), the semantic compositionality of the RVC can be captured

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汉语普通话动补复合动词的习得

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摘要

汉语普通话中的动补复合动词以 V1-V2(动词 1-动词 2)的形式出现, 包括结果状态、趋向和结束动补复合动词这三个主要类别。关于这些复合词的词义是否能够直接从 V1 和 V2 的意义推衍出来, 三类动补复合动词存在程度上的差别, 即在组合性上存在差别。关于动补复合动词的形成, 有分析认为它们是句法生成的, 也有分析认为它们是词汇规则生成的。以往的习得研究显示, 普通话儿童 3 岁前未完全掌握动补复合动词的组合性和事件结构。早期的动补复合动词是基于规则习得的还是基于使用习得的尚无定论。我们跟踪调查了两名普通话幼儿, 并对 32 名儿童进行了假词实验。我们的发现支持动补复合动词是词汇规则生成的而不是句法生成的, 并支持基于规则的习得这一理论假设。儿童是逐步掌握动补复合动词的事件结构以及事件结构与体貌的互动的。动补复合动词事件结构的核心由它们的类别决定: 结果状态动补复合动词的 V2 比 V1 更显著; 而趋向动补复合动词的 V1 比 V2 更显著。

关键词

习得 动补复合动词 组合性 事件结构 基于规则的习得
事件结构的核心