

**Language Acquisition Laboratory
Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages
The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

presents a talk on

Acquisition of Inflectional Morphemes by Japanese EFL Learners

by

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**Venue: Room 210, Teaching Complex at Western Campus (TCW),
The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

Abstract

The variability in L2 learners' production of inflectional morphology is a well-documented phenomenon (Lardiere 1998a, Lardiere 1998b, Ionin & Wexler 2002, White 2003, among others). However, there has been no clear agreement as to the source of such morphological inconsistency, although in the literature L1 effects have been discussed as a key factor affecting L2 performance. In this talk I will discuss the issue of L1 transfer by considering the acquisition of two types of inflectional morpheme /-s/ in the interlanguage grammars of Japanese speaking learners of English, namely, 3rd person singular agreement (3sg) /-s/ and noun plural /-s/. This study is crucial in assessing recent proposals such as the Representational Deficit Hypothesis (Eubank 1994, Hawkins & Chan 1997, Hawkins & Liszka 2003) and the Prosodic Transfer Hypothesis (Goad & White 2004, Goad 2008, White 2004, White 2008a) because the two types of /-s/ have the same phonological shape of different inflection (one on verbs and the other on nouns) in L2, but neither morpheme exists in L1. Furthermore, these morphemes are also contrasted with past tense /-ed/.

Our results indicate that (a) the Japanese EFL learners' production of 3sg /-s/ improves as their English proficiency increases, while their omission rate of past tense /-ed/ does not, (b) the learners' overall omission rates of the two affixes do not differ significantly, but as their proficiency goes up, the omission rate of 3sg /-s/ decreases more than that of plural /-s/, and (c) the acquisition of nominal /-s/ requires more time than that of verbal /-s/ in the case of Japanese speakers. These findings are not quite compatible with either the RDH or the PTH. It appears one particular hypothesis alone cannot provide a plausible account (cf. White 2008b).



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