The Syntax of Modifiers in Second Language Acquisition

Brief Summary:

Universal hierarchies of modification are found in the PP domain (Stringer, 2005; Stringer et al., in press), as well as with adjectives in the nominal domain (Cinque, 1994, 2010; Laenzlinger, 2005; Scott, 2002; Shlonsky, 2004; Sproat & Shih, 1991); and adverbs in the verbal domain (Cinque, 1999; Larson, 1999; Nilsen, 2004). However, L2 knowledge of such hierarchies has not previously been systematically investigated. This series of projects involves the active participation of graduate students.

Stage 1: The PP domain: The universal hierarchy of P-modifiers in L2A (with Beatrix Burghardt, Hyun-Kyoung Seo and Yi-Ting Wang)

e.g. The helicopter flew \([\text{DEGREE} \{\text{right/straight}\} \ [\text{FLOW} \{\text{on/back}\} \ [\text{TRAJECTORY} \{\text{through/down}\} \ [\text{PP into the valley}]])\].

Experiments with 121 ESL students and 20 native controls, comparison of L2A of English by speakers of Korean, Turkish, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese.

Publications: Stringer, Burghardt, Seo & Wang, 2009, in press; Stringer, in press (‘Moving right along…’); Stringer, in prep (‘Modifying the teaching of modifiers’)

Stage 2: The NP domain: The universal hierarchy of adjectives in L2A (with Jung-Eun Choi, Khanyisile Dlamini, and Cleyera Martin)

e.g. Jane sits on a \([\text{EVALUATIVE} \text{ beautiful} \ [\text{COLOR} \text{ white} \ [\text{MATERIAL} \text{ wooden} \ [\text{DP chair}]])]]\).

Experiments with 204 ESL students and 20 native controls, comparison of L2A of English by speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Turkish.

Data analysis in progress

Stage 3: The VP domain: The universal hierarchy of adverbs in L2A

e.g. He \([\text{MOD:epistemic probably} \ [\text{ASP: terminative no longer} \ [\text{ASP: completive completely} \ [\text{believes her}]])]]\).

In design stage