

Is there any similarity in the use of mimetics between L1 and L2 Japanese?

One question frequently raised by researchers is whether a second language is acquired in similar ways to the first. With respect to Japanese mimetics, the literature suggests that there is a difference. Mimetics appear early in L1, and children seem to develop relatively accurate knowledge quickly (Miyata, 1995; Tsujimura 2005). In contrast, L2 learners seem to have trouble acquiring the appropriate meanings of mimetics (e.g., Ariga, 2007; Nakaishi et al., 2011). Furthermore, because of the prevalence of mimetics in Japanese, discussions about them in L2 tend to center round pedagogical issues (e.g., Mikami, 2006). Given that studies have typically investigated the ability of adult learners to understand or explain the *meanings* of mimetics (e.g., Ariga, 2007; Iwasaki, Vinson & Vgliooco, 2007; Sakai et al., 2012), research about their actual *use* by L2 learners of Japanese seems limited (but see Iwasaki, 2008). Questions such as at what stage learners actually start using mimetics, what kind of mimetics appear first and in what context mimetics are used still need investigation. Therefore the present study investigates the use of mimetics by a single learner, adopting a story-telling method. The data were collected at three time points over four years using the same stimulus, a wordless picture book, on each occasion. The data were gathered when the learner had been studying Japanese for 6 months (outside Japan), one year (including a 6-month stay in Japan) and 4 years (mostly outside Japan), respectively. Because we were interested in the context in which mimetics were used, we analyzed both linguistic and gestural information. Native-speaker data were used as a baseline and Tsujimura's (2005) analysis of the L1 acquisition of mimetics served for the L1-L2 comparison. The results confirm that mimetics do not appear early in L2. However, despite the limited sample size, the learner's use of mimetics showed some similarity with L1 acquirers in that a mimetic plus a light verb ('suru') appeared frequently. This contrasted sharply with the native baseline, where mimetics appeared mostly as modifiers of lexical verbs. In addition, the learner used unconventional mimetics to describe some situation-specific manner or sound whose meanings can be best understood by a combination of linguistic and gestural information and the learner's L1. We will discuss the implications of our findings for the pragmatic functions of mimetics in language acquisition and their 'innovative nature' (Tsujimura, 2005), and their integration with various aspect of language/language use.

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