

A Pilot Study on Chinese-speaking Children's Interpretation of the Reflexive ziji

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Abstract

This paper reports a pilot study on Chinese-speaking children's interpretation of the reflexive *ziji*, using the picture identification task. The goal of the study is to investigate whether children's interpretation of *ziji* is determined by syntactic knowledge or semantic knowledge. The participants were 45 children of three age groups (3-, 4, and 5-year-olds) and 15 adults. The results show that children were sensitive to the syntactic structures. They preferred the c-commanding antecedent for *ziji*. However, c-command is not a strict condition that cannot be violated, since children accepted the adjunct antecedent under the animacy effect. On the other hand, locality is not a hard condition on the interpretation of the reflexives as claimed in the previous studies of Chinese-speaking children's acquisition of reflexives since it can be relativized by the animacy effect. The results indicate that children's interpretation of *ziji* is determined by syntactic as well as semantic knowledge.

Keywords: reflexive interpretation; syntactic structure; animacy effect