UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Cross-Linguistic Influence and Developmental Patterns in Reflexive Pronoun Use Among Monolingual, Bilingual, and Trilingual Children

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7xs6k5h2

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 47(0)

Authors

Chen, Yue
Shang, Mengyao
Mai, Ziyin

Publication Date

2025

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Cross-Linguistic Influence and Developmental Patterns in Reflexive Pronoun Use Among Monolingual, Bilingual, and Trilingual Children

Yue Chen
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States

Mengyao Shang
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, NT, Hong Kong

Ziyin Mai
Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

Abstract

Chinese employs compound reflexives (e.g., ta-ziji) adhering to local binding principles, and bare reflexives (ziji) exhibiting syntactic and semantic flexibility (e.g., logophoric, intensifier, generic pronoun, (Wang & Pan, 2021), whereas English reflexives primarily function as locally bound anaphors but permit extended logophoric/intensifier uses in long-distance contexts (Charnavel, 2019). Previous studies show that monolingual Mandarin children achieve adult-like local and long-distance interpretations by age four (Li, 2024), while English monolinguals master reflexives by five (Chien & Wexler, 1990). This study examines 5,299 reflexive utterances from 476 monolingual, bilingual, and trilingual children (1;0–6;9) and caregivers across 19 CHILDES corpora. Results show Chinese bare reflexives emerge earliest (1;7), followed by Chinese compound reflexives (1;11) and English reflexives (2;4). Chinese reflexives are used as local anaphoric quite late (2;6), possibly attributed to low frequency in input (< .005%). Multilingual children acquiring English alongside Chinese exhibit English-like local-binding preferences in their Chinese bare reflexives.

In D. Barner, N.R. Bramley, A. Ruggeri and C.M. Walker (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 47th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society* ©2025 the author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).