

The Current State of the Aspect Hypothesis in L1 and L2 Acquisition

Yasuhiro Shirai (University of Pittsburgh)

This talk outlines the current state of the Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen & Shirai, 1994; Shirai & Andersen, 1995), which predicts that learners are strongly influenced by lexical aspect in acquiring tense and aspect markers in L1 and L2; namely, past perfective markers are associated with telic verbs (achievements and accomplishments) while general imperfective markers are associated with atelic verbs (states and activities) and progressive markers with activity verbs. Although there has been a general agreement on this association patterns as a universal tendency (e.g., Shirai, Slobin, & Weist, 1998; Andersen & Shirai, 1994; Shirai, 2009), explanations for these tendencies are still controversial. I will argue that the cases that go against the predicted tendencies—namely, Japanese (Shirai, 1998) and Inuktitut (Swift, 2004) in L1 and Japanese (Ishida, 2004) and Russian (Martelle, 2012) in L2—support the input-based explanation (i.e., the Distributional Bias Hypothesis, Andersen, 1993).