

**Mother's Speech for Child's Intention-reading:
A Cross-linguistic Study of the Deictic Verbs 'Come' and 'Go'**

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This study analyzes spontaneous speech by American and Japanese children and their mothers in terms of young children's intention-reading. English-speaking children start producing the deictic verbs 'come' and 'go' in the early stage of language development. Previous studies focusing on children's production and comprehension of those verbs, however, have reported that the children did not use them in the same way adults do until 5 years or much later (Clark & Garnica, 1974; Tenz, 1980; Macrae, 1976; Winston, 1988). A similar language-developmental phenomenon is found cross-linguistically in Japanese (Okubo, 1967; Iwabuchi & Hatano, 1968; Maeda & Maeda, 1996; Masataka, 1999). Here a question arises naturally. Why does it take so long? What's happening in the young children's language environment?

In a usage-based approach of language acquisition, it is proposed that the learning of language will be critically dependent on factors in the environment that have been shown to affect learning more generally, namely frequency, consistency, and complexity (Tomasello, 2008). Tomasello (2003) claims that the learning process depends crucially on the fundamental skills of joint attention, intention-reading, and cultural learning. There have been, however, few attempts to examine what mothers' speech containing 'come' and 'go' are like in terms of interaction, and whether it is suitable for children's intention-reading.

We analyzed the speech of American mothers, whose children are 1;8 – 4;00, containing 'come' and 'go' in the CHILDES database (MacWhinney, 2000). Also we analyzed the speech of Japanese mothers whose children are aged 1;00 – 3;6 containing 'kuru' and 'iku' which are the Japanese equivalents for 'come' and 'go' in the CHILDES database (MacWhinney, 2000). The meaning of Japanese 'kuru' and 'iku', however, are not quite the same as the English equivalents. The results of the American data show some characteristics of mothers' speech. Firstly, the purpose of movement is indicated in the utterances containing both 'come' and 'go'. Secondly, there is a difference in speech style between 'come' and 'go', when a mother uses 'come', she tends to say more that the child is needed to get to the mother's location (speaker's location) first, then followed by the purpose for the movement. when she uses 'go', the destination of the movement tends not to be uttered.

The results of the Japanese data show that 'kuru', which is the Japanese equivalent of 'come', is used to indicate movement toward the speaker mainly. 'iku', which is the Japanese equivalent of 'go' is mainly used to move away from the present location. The purpose of the movement for either verb is not necessarily uttered. Japanese mothers used a third-person noun as the subject of the utterance more often than American mothers.

From the results of the study, we propose that mother's speech highly correlate with the basic meanings of those verbs in both languages, which helps children's intention-reading, and the mother's speech patterns are suitable for children to acquire the basic meaning of 'come', 'go', 'kuru', and 'iku'.

References

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