Second language semasiology SLS:
The case of the Mandarin sentence final particle \textit{吧} \textit{ba}

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Main points of discussion…

- Semasiology in historical linguistics
- Second language semasiology SLS
- The sentence final \textit{吧} \textit{ba} as a case study of SLS
- Conclusions

Semasiology

- Semasiology regards the formation of polysemies and usages of a construction through time, that is:
  
  Given the form–meaning pair \( L \) (lexeme) what changes did meaning \( M \) of \( L \) undergo? (Geeraerts, 1997).

Examples of semasiological change

- The polysemy of \textit{as long as}:
  
  ‘equal in length’ \textrightarrow ‘equal in time’ \textrightarrow ‘provided that’.

- The polysemy of \textit{even}:
  
  ‘evenly’ \textrightarrow ‘unexpected member of set of alternatives’.

  (cf. Traugott & Dasher 2002:25; see also Brinton & Traugott, 2005).

Semasiology


  \[
  L \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{Form} \\ M_1 \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow L \rightarrow \begin{bmatrix} \text{Form} \\ M_1 + M_2 \end{bmatrix}
  \]

  - Unidirectional clines of change are observed cross-linguistically (i.e. Briton & Traugott 2005; Traugott & Trousdale 2013; Tantucci 2013, 2015)

The semasiology of \textit{干嘛} \textit{ganma}:

- Composed by the verb \textit{干} \textit{găn} ‘to do’ and the end-sentence emphatic modal particle \textit{嘛} \textit{ma} (cf. Lù, 1999; Shen, 2003; Qiang, 2007, 2008):

  \[
  \text{你来京干嘛} \quad \text{găn me?}
  \text{you come Beijing do} \quad \text{what/INT-PART^11}
  \text{‘What are you doing here in Beijing?’}
  \]

  (Qing 1644-1911 – Guānchāng xiànxìngji [PKU-CCL])
The semasiology of 干嘛 ganma

- During the 民国 Mínguó period (1912–1949), 干嘛 starts to appear in a preverbal position with a new rhetorical interrogative function: Why would you P?

The semasiology of 干嘛 ganma

- Since the 1950s, 干嘛 starts to appear in declarative sentences (before then it could only be used in interrogatives) and with first person (generally plural) pronouns:

What about the SLA of 干嘛?

- From the new 1.200.000 tokens corpus of L2 Mandarin Chinese CLC (cf. Brezina & Xu forthcoming), 初级 chūjí ‘beginners’ section:

What about the SLS of 干嘛?

- The aim of a SLS of 干嘛 would then to see if a unidirectional cline of acquisition of My and Mz can be observed in subsequent 中级 zhōngjí ‘intermediate’ and 高级 gāojí ‘advanced’ stages.

- If not, why?

The case study of the sentence-final particle 吧 ba

- The sentence-final 吧 ba is described either as a ‘marker of uncertainty’ (Shie 1991), to ‘solicit agreement’ (Li & Thompson 1981; Xu 2007).

- Lan (2004) proposes a cline of grammaticalization from a main verb function, to one of a perfect, to the the one of a mood marker.

- In Qi (2002) the mood development of 吧 ba goes from
directive —> (neg.) interrogative —> DM function.
Usages of 吧 ba: natives vs 初级 chūjí ‘beginners’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>directive</th>
<th>(neg.) interrog.</th>
<th>epistemic</th>
<th>DM</th>
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<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

DM function yet to be acquired

Conclusions

- The new usage-based approach of SLS aims at discovering cognitive similarities and mismatches between historical language innovation and second language acquisition (SLA).
- SLS is statistically measurable and can give important clues as to whether both language-specific and universal clines of language acquisition can be observed and generalized.

References