“I sometimes still don’t get my tenses right”: Implications from language processing studies on how we acquire our tense-aspect system

Second language learners sometimes ‘fail’ to add past marking on their verbs, but they tend to do this with certain types of verbs more than others. This bias between tense-aspect marking and verb type is often discussed in terms of asymmetrical relations between ‘grammatical aspect’ and ‘lexical aspect’ in studies on tense-aspect acquisition (e.g. Shirai & Andersen 1995; Bardovi-Harlig 2000). Similar biases have been noted in other languages as well, including Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish (see for example Li & Shirai 2000; Salaberry & Shirai 2002). In this talk, we will review empirical evidence from language processing studies that shed light on the asymmetrical relationship between grammatical aspect and verb type (or lexical aspect). We will focus in particular on the findings of psycholinguistic studies such as Magliano and Schleich (2000), Ferretti, Kutas and McRae (2007) and Yap et al. (2009).

This talk discusses a robust phenomenon in which nominalized constructions frequently extend their functions from referential to non-referential uses. We examine data from a number of Asian languages, and combine both typological and diachronic analyses. Among the non-referential uses often discussed in the literature are the modifying functions, including relativization and adverbialization (e.g. Matisoff 1972; DeLancey 1986; Horie 1998; Genetti et al. 2008; Shibatani & Khaled Awadh 2009). Recent studies have also shown that nominalized constructions sometimes further develop into finite clauses (e.g. DeLancey, to appear; Grunow-Härtsta & Yap 2010). In this talk, we will focus on evidence from Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Tibeto-Burman and Austronesian languages to better understand the mechanisms whereby nominalized constructions frequently also develop into (inter)subjective constructions that encode the speaker’s feelings, attitudes, inferences, perspectives, etc. (which we here refer to as speaker mood or stance).