Chapter Five

Conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusion of the present study. The main findings of are summarized in Section 5.1, followed by the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research stated in Section 5.2.

5.1 Summary of the Present Study

The major findings of the present study are as follows:

First, our subjects, at the early stage of language acquisition, did not perform significantly differently in their use of *hui zenme* and *zenme hui*. However, mean scores of *zenme hui* was slightly higher than those of *hui zenme*, indicating causal questions were easier than manner questions.

Second, it was found that the agentivity of a subject indeed influenced our preschoolers' performance on *zenme* questions because they performed better on the questions with an agent subject than on a nonagent subject.

Third, the subjects' performances were found to be influenced by genericity. Our children had better abilities in dealing with questions in nogeneric conditions than in the generic conditions. Furthermore, it was found that the genericity effects were significant in the subjects' responses to manner questions.

Fourth, there was a significant difference between our subjects' comprehension and production, showing that the methodological effects were obvious. The subjects aged four to six had better abilities in comprehension than in production of *zenme* questions. Besides, the subjects' fewer occurrences of *zenme hui* was related to the pragmatic function of *zenme hui* and the frequency of *zenme hui*.

Fifth, it was found in the QA Task that the subjects tended to produce more causal questions than manner questions even though they did not use the target

structures *hui zenme* and *zenme hui* in the present study. Besides, manner scenarios yielded most wrong responses, indicating that manner questions were more challenging than causal questions.

Last, it was found that age played an influential role in children's acquisition of *zenme* questions. The elder preschoolers performed better on *hui zenme* and *zenme hui* than the younger ones. Besides, they were not influenced by the agency effects as much as the youngest ones, who showed a significant difference in response to questions with an agent subject and questions with a nonagent subject. The elder children are, the less influential agentivity is. In addition, they performed better on *zenme* questions both in generic and nongeneric conditions than the younger ones.

5.2 Limitations of the Present Study and Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations of the present study and suggestions for future research are as follows:

First of all, due to the time limit and the children's short attention span, only two test items were designed for each category in the present study. In the future research, more test items can be chosen to see if the results are identical to the present findings.

Second, the present study used picture selection as a comprehension task and elicitation as a production. Different from the present study, some previous studies on the acquisition of *wh*-questions, instead of using the picture selection task, adapted the method by which children's comprehension was tested with their answers to the questions based on a few pictures or clips of a video. In spite of the fact that the PI Task may not be easy, those who are interested in the research of manner and causal questions can compare children's performances on different tasks (i.e., picture identification, answering questions, and elicitation) to see if a whole picture of the development of manner and causal questions can be obtained.

Third, genericity includes natural laws and personal habits. However, in the present study, we only examined natural laws, which contain inanimate entities as the subjects. The influence of genericity with respect to personal habits on *zenme* questions can be explored in the future as well. In addition, we only discussed the influence of agent and the nonagent roles on the acquisition of manner and causal questions, the nonagent semantic roles in the hierarchy for the subject position can be examined in future research.

Last, there are three meanings of the *wh*-word *zenme* (i.e., mean, method, and style.) However, we did not further examine our children's performances on each meaning in the present study. Hence, future research may examine children's responses to the three meanings and the unmarked meaning of *zenme*.