

**Individual Paper Session 22**  
**Syntax/Morphology**  
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**10:45-11:15am**

**The acquisition of plural marking in Vietnamese learners of English:  
Counterevidence for Processability Theory?**

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Processability Theory (PT) holds that learners develop their ability to speak a second language stepwise, in a strictly ordered sequence of stages (Pienemann 1998, 2003). PT hypothesizes that as human speech processing capacity is limited learners need to build up their ability to process the language incrementally, from simpler rules to more complex rules. Rule complexity is defined within Lexical-Functional Grammar in terms of the need for feature unification and the syntactic level at which unification occurs. For example, plural marking on English nouns is hypothesized to require fewer processing prerequisites when it doesn't require unification with other constituents. An example for plural without unification is the "generic" plural. PT would predict that the plural form *apples* emerges earlier in generic contexts (eg *I like apples*) than in quantified contexts (eg *I have two apples*) because the former require no feature unification whereas the latter require feature unification between the numeral and the noun.

We will present robust cross-sectional evidence from 36 instructed Vietnamese learners of English showing that these learners acquire noun plural marking first in quantified and only later in generic contexts. In discussing this finding we will focus on the learners' mental lexicon. We will argue that the prediction for the generic plural is erroneous (or first language biased) as it is based on the assumption that generic meaning is specified for number at the level of conceptual structure; this is unlikely to be the case. We will argue furthermore that acquisition of plural marking in quantified contexts is a logical first step because in these contexts the plural is normally used referentially and its conceptual transparency is heightened through the presence of the numeral