

### Individual Paper Session 3

#### Syntax

Tuesday, July 4

10:00-10:30am

### UG constrained interlanguage: L2A of Mandarin classifiers by English-speaking learners

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A Mandarin classifier (M-classifier) is obligatory in a nominal phrase containing a numeral. However, it is not the case in English although English has some measure words (e.g. piece), which are superficially like M-classifiers. The mass/count distinction is encoded in M-classifiers, which thus select only countable nouns as complements. Two more associated syntactic properties are identified: non-suffixation of the modification marker "DE" and non-modification (e.g. adjectives).

In contrast to functional M-classifiers, Mandarin measure words do not select countable nouns as complements and can be attached with "DE" and modified by adjectives. Likewise, English measure words can be modified by adjectives and followed by mass and count nouns. It is thus concluded that the classifier projection (CIP) is instantiated in Mandarin, but not in English.

Results of an acceptability judgment task, which involves 80 English-speaking learners (E-L2ers) at four proficiency levels, show that CIP is successfully projected in the L2 Mandarin grammars of E-L2ers at the high-intermediate and advanced stages. It is argued that the successful projection of CIP implicates the full access to UG in L2 acquisition.

First, Mandarin numeral phrases like "numeral+Cl+count noun" do not inform E-L2ers that Mandarin classifiers cannot be used optionally, modified by adjectives, suffixed with *-de*, and followed by mass nouns. Second, due to the surface similarity between Mandarin classifiers and measure words, indirect negative evidence alone is ambiguous and does not seem to be salient enough to trigger the projection of CIP. Third, direct negative evidence is unavailable to E-L2ers given that the distinction between M-classifiers and measure words is neither stated in Mandarin textbooks nor instructed. Finally, E-L2ers cannot resort to their L1 due to the unavailability of CIP in English. Hence, it is suggested that UG is implicated in E-L2ers' acquisition of M-classifiers.