

**Dugarova, Esuna (2010) *Behaviours of wh-elements in English and Russian learners'*
*L2 Chinese***

PhD thesis abstract:

The present study investigates the behaviours of *wh*-elements in English and Russian speakers' L2 Chinese single and multiple *wh*-questions and aims to find out whether learners are able to attain target-like knowledge of these structures. In single *wh*-questions, English requires *wh*-movement, while Russian requires *wh*-focalisation. Although a *wh*-element generally stays in-situ in Chinese, it can undergo topicalisation on the condition that the *wh*-question in which it occurs is linked with discourse. If a *wh*-topic in Chinese is derived by movement, it should be subject to various syntactic constraints. It is also observed that an intervention effect arises in Chinese *wh*-questions when negative, focusing or quantificational elements precede *wh*-adverbs, while this type of intervention effect is not applicable to English and Russian. In multiple *wh*-questions, only one *wh*-word moves in English, all *wh*-words undergo focus-movement in Russian (except 'why' which is assumed to be generated in ForceP across languages), whereas in Chinese, all *wh*-words remain in their base-generated positions. Furthermore, different *wh*-words do not behave in a uniform manner in subject and object multiple *wh*-questions in the three languages under consideration. A total of 173 English and Russian learners of Chinese from post-beginner to very advanced level, as well as native Chinese speakers, participated in an Acceptability Judgment Task and a Multiple Choice Interpretation Task. The results show that those learners who established topicalisation in their interlanguage grammars of Chinese can successfully acquire Chinese *wh*-topicalisation which involves a syntax-discourse interface. This finding suggests that external interfaces are acquirable in L2 (cf. Tsimpli and Sorace 2006, White 2009b). Furthermore, learners are found to be sensitive to complex NP island, reconstruction and superiority effects, which provides evidence that a *wh*-topic in L2 Chinese is derived by movement rather than base-generation. The results also indicate that English and Russian learners can replicate native Chinese speakers in behaviours of multiple *wh*-questions and in showing sensitivity to intervention effects in their L2 Chinese grammars. However, not all types of *wh*-questions are found to be equally acquirable in L2 Chinese, with an internal mechanism of *wh*-elements and persistent L1 transfer causing residual optionality. Overall, the findings suggest that despite distinct L1s, English and Russian learners are able to arrive at target-like representations in their L2 Chinese, which are constrained by Universal Grammar.