

**Liang, George (2006) *Nominal phrases in English and Japanese speakers' L2 Mandarin Grammars***

**PhD thesis abstract:**

This thesis aims to examine the extent to which native languages (L1) influence interlanguage development and whether there exists a direct link between the suppliance of appropriate morphemes and the presence of their syntactic properties in interlanguage grammars. To answer these questions, this thesis investigates adult second language (L2) acquisition of Mandarin nominal phrases by Japanese and English learners. Four nominal properties shared by Mandarin and Japanese are the classifier projection (CIP), the incompatibility of the numeral-classifier phrase with the plural marker, adjectival possessives and the co-occurrence of determinative elements, all of which differentiate these two languages from English. This study involves 80 Japanese learners and 80 English learners (placed at four proficiency levels) and 20 Mandarin native speakers as controls. Two data-collecting tasks are employed in this study: an acceptability judgment task for the four Mandarin nominal properties and a fill-in-the-blank task for the semantic selection of Mandarin classifiers.

Our results from the acceptability judgment task suggest that L1 transfer is not absolute in L2 Mandarin. More specifically, Japanese learners only transfer adjectival possessives, but not CIP and the co-occurrence of determinative elements, to their initial L2 Mandarin. This absence of L1 transfer of CIP and the co-occurrence of determinative elements is likely to be due to the markedness in terms of the implicational universal. Intriguingly, it is found that CIP and its associated syntactic specifications are gradually developed in English and Japanese learners' L2 Mandarin. Initially, English and Japanese measure words are incorrectly used to accommodate classifiers, and then CIP is projected without any syntactic specifications. Subsequently, the syntactic specifications of CIP are gradually specified. However, the incompatibility of the numeral-classifier phrase with the plural marker is still underspecified in English and Japanese learners' advanced L2 Mandarin. Remarkably, our results from the fill-in-the-blank task demonstrate that English and Japanese learners' failure to use semantically appropriate Mandarin classifiers does not hinder the presence of CIP and its syntactic specifications in their L2 Mandarin, which suggests that there is no direct link between these two. Moreover, the rarity of the positive evidence is argued to play a crucial role in English and Japanese L2ers' acquisition of the co-occurrence of determinative elements, which highlights the importance of input frequency in L2 acquisition. It is also believed to be responsible for a discrepancy observed in English learners' acquisition of two adjectival possessive constructions in Mandarin.