

Zhao, Yang (2006) *Causativity in Chinese and its representations in English, Japanese and Korean speakers' L2 Chinese grammars*

PhD thesis abstract:

Chinese does not allow causative alternating unaccusative verbs or object-Experiencer psych verbs. It employs analytical causative (headed by *shi* 'make'), resultative (headed by *de*) and compound causative (with an activity predicate V_1 and a result predicate V_2 forming a V_1 - V_2 compound) constructions to represent causativity. The present study explores syntactic and semantic properties of these verbs and constructions within the generative framework. It is proposed that Chinese unaccusative verbs and psych verbs involve a single VP and that Chinese resultative and compound causative constructions involve a functional category AspP. An empirical study is conducted to look into the mental representations of these Chinese verbs and constructions in English-, Japanese- and Korean-speaking learners' L2 Chinese grammars. The aim of the research is to find out whether L1 transfer persists in L2 Chinese and whether L2 learners can acquire the functional AspP involved in Chinese resultative and compound causative constructions. The experiment consists of a cloze test, a production test, an acceptability judgment test and a comprehension test. It involves 55 English speakers, 56 Japanese speakers, 73 Korean speakers and 28 native Chinese as controls. Both developmental patterns and variations between different language groups are examined to see whether L2 Chinese learners can acquire native-like mental representations of the structures examined and whether L2 groups from different L1s show any variation in their L2 Chinese mental representations. The results suggest that L2 Chinese learners are more likely to make causative errors with Chinese unaccusative verbs than with psych verbs and that compound causative constructions are more difficult to acquire than resultative constructions in L2 acquisition of Chinese. It is concluded that L1 transfer does not happen everywhere and that functional categories unavailable in the learners' L1s can be properly represented in L2 Chinese grammars.