Research Seminars on Chinese Linguistics and L2 Chinese

汉语语言学与二语习得研讨会

Easter Term 2019
<4-6pm Fridays, Room 7, FAMES>

The Research Seminars on Chinese Linguistics and Second Language (L2) Chinese are held by the Chinese Linguistics and L2 Chinese research group of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (FAMES), Cambridge. The aims of these seminars are to provide a platform for researchers to discuss recent development in the field, to present their work and to receive feedback from fellow researchers. The seminars are supervised by Dr. Boping Yuan. For more information, please contact Tongkun Liu (TL394@cam.ac.uk).

The seminars in Easter 2019 are arranged as follows. All are welcome.

1. Transfer at initial stages of L3 Mandarin: the acquisition of temporal-aspectual sentence final particles by English-Cantonese bilinguals *by* Guo, Yanyu & Yuan Boping (4-5pm Friday 3rd May)
2. Encoding of anaphoric and associational definiteness in English speakers' L2 Mandarin grammars *by* Xiang, Jingting & Yuan, Boping (5-6pm Friday 3rd May)

3. L3 acquisition of Mandarin sentence-final question particles ba and ne by Cantonese-English bilinguals *by* Guo, Yanyu & Yuan, Boping (4-5pm Friday 24th May)
4. Indefinite NPs as subjects in L2 and L3 Mandarin grammars: Empirical evidence for the sources of transfer in L3A *by* Xiang, Jingting & Yuan, Boping (4-5pm Friday 24th May)

5. A processing problem or a representational problem? L2 acquisition of syntax-semantics interface in the Chinese *ba* construction by English-speaking learners *by* Liu, Tongkun (4-5pm Friday 14th June)
6. Covert subjects and objects resulting from TP ellipsis in English speakers' L2 Chinese: Evidence of the declarative/procedural model *by* Xu, Lilong (5-6pm Friday 14th June)

7. TBC *by* Yuan, Boping (4-6pm Friday 21st June)
8. TBC *by* Guo, Yanyu (5-6pm Friday 21st June)

Please see the abstracts on the following pages

1. Transfer at initial stages of L3 Mandarin: the acquisition of temporal-aspectual sentence final particles by English-Cantonese bilinguals

by **Guo, Yanyu**

Abstract: The study examines the transfer source at the third language (L3) initial stage by examining the acquisition of Mandarin sentence-final particles le, ne and laizhe by Cantonese-English bilinguals. Both Mandarin and Cantonese use sentence final particles to denote temporal-aspectual meanings, while English employs tense/aspect markers to express those meanings. Hence Cantonese is predicted to be the source of transfer in our L3 study on the basis of the Typological Primacy Model (TPM; Rothman, 2010, 2011, 2015) and the Linguistic Proximity Model (LPM; Westergaard et al., 2016). Data from a sentence-picture matching task confirm the prediction that initial transfer is from the structurally/typologically similar language Cantonese and the transfer is facilitative. The results also show that lack of enough evidence in the L3 input can result in unacquirability of a certain particle.

2. Encoding of anaphoric and associational definiteness in English speakers' L2 Mandarin grammars

by **Xiang, Jingting**

Abstract: Research on L2A has extended from a level of principals and parameters to one of features associated with lexical and functional categories (Lardiere, 2009, among others). With a feature-based approach, our empirical study examines how L1 English L2 Mandarin speakers reassemble the [+definite] features in their L2 Mandarin grammars. In Mandarin, an article-less language, the [±definite] features are represented through a more complicated system (than in English) with the support of bare nouns ([±definite]), numerals ([±definite]), classifiers ([-definite]), or demonstratives([+definite]). In order to examine how L1 English L2 Mandarin speakers express different types of definiteness in real time, we conduct a picture-elicited production task with 57 L1 English L2 Mandarin speakers divided into three proficiency groups (17 beginner, 21 intermediate, and 19 advanced) and 22 native Mandarin speakers as a control group. Both tasks contain 16 critical sentences in four conditions of definiteness (i.e. four tokens in each condition), which are anaphoric definiteness in subject/object positions and associational definiteness in subject/object positions.

3. L3 acquisition of Mandarin sentence-final question particles ba and ne by Cantonese-English bilinguals

by **Guo, Yanyu**

Abstract: This study aims to test possible transfer sources at the initial stage of third language (L3) acquisition by examining the acquisition of Mandarin sentence-final particles ba and ne by Cantonese-English bilinguals. Unlike the case in English, which does not employ any sentence final particles (SFPs), in both Mandarin and Cantonese, a statement can be converted into a question by merging an SFP at a sentence final position. Different from ba questions, ne questions cannot be "out-of-blue" questions to initiate a conversation. L1 Factor Hypothesis (Leung, 2005) argues that the transfer source is always the L1, while the Linguistic Proximity Model (LPM; Westergaard et al., 2016) and the Typological Primacy Model (TPM; Rothman, 2010, 2011, 2015) predict that the structurally/typologically closer language should be the transfer source. An offline Acceptability Judgement Task (AJT) and an online Cross-Modal Priming Task (CMPT) were employed. The L1 Factor Hypothesis is rejected as the AJT results on ba and the CMPT results show that the L3 learners' L2 Cantonese plays a facilitative role in L3 acquisition. Our findings support the Linguistic Proximity Model and the Typological Primacy Model that transfer is from a structurally/ typologically closer language, which is Cantonese in the present study.

4. Indefinite NPs as Subjects in L2 and L3 Mandarin Grammars: Empirical Evidence for the Sources of Transfer in L3A

by **Xiang, Jingting**

Abstract: The study of L3 acquisition (L3A) within formal linguistics perspectives is still in its infancy as compared with the decades of development in the study of L2 acquisition (L2A). In recent years, several models in L3 morphosyntax has been proposed, and they argue for different sources of transfer in consideration of L1/L2 status, structural proximity among the triad, processing complexity, construction frequency, etc. (Alonso and Rothman, 2016). However, preliminary agreement, even on the initial stages of L3 development, is yet to be reached.

In our study, we investigate whether L2 and L3 speakers Mandarin process indefinite and definite subjects differently from L1 speakers of Mandarin with a self-paced reading task. As is well-known, in English, the article a marks the [-definite] feature of noun phrases (NPs), while the article the marks the [+definite] one, and both definite and indefinite NPs are perfectly acceptable in subject positions. In contrast, in Mandarin and Cantonese— two article-less languages, definiteness is represented through bare nouns, numerals, classifiers, etc. In both languages, indefinite NPs are generally not allowed in subject or topic positions (Li and Thompson, 1989). Our study will provide empirical evidence for the sources of transfer in L3 acquisition.

5. A processing problem or a representational problem? L2 acquisition of syntax-semantics interface in the Chinese *ba* construction by English-speaking learners

by **Liu, Tongkun**

Abstract: Second language (L2) learners' grammars seem always more or less divergent from the natives' grammar of the same language, even when L2 learners have reached a very advanced proficiency level. Interface Hypothesis (Sorace & Filiaci, 2006; Sorace, 2011) addresses the reason for this phenomenon by arguing that the divergent part of L2 grammars from the native grammar is interfaces where syntax and other cognitive domains (e.g. semantics) interact, and it is interface that can be permanently vulnerable in L2 grammars.

The Mandarin Chinese ba construction is an ideal test ground for this hypothesis. In the *ba* construction [FinP NP1 [Fin' Fin [vP <NP1> [v' BA [VP NP2 [V' V XP]]]]]], *ba* is a phonetically realised little v (Huang, 2007). For the verb, which is syntactically C-commanded by *ba*, it always has [affected, resultative] semantic properties at the same time (Huang et al, 2009; Sun, 2015), otherwise the *ba* construction will be unacceptable. e.g.:
A. Zhangsan ba Lisi da-si-le. (Zhangsan BA Lisi beat-kill-LE) [+affected, +resultative]
B. ?Zhangsan ba Lisi da-rao-le. (Zhangsan BA Lisi beat-disturb-LE) [+affected, -resultative]
C. ?Zhangsan ba Lisi kan-jian-le. (Zhangsan BA Lisi watch-see-LE) [-affected, +resultative]
D. ??Zhangsan ba Lisi mo-fang-le. (Zhangsan BA Lisi model-imitate-LE) [-affected, -resultative]

However, if there is no *ba* in the numeration, then the verb will not be C-commanded by *ba* but raises to v in the above syntax structure, the structure will be realised as a corresponding canonical subject-verb-object Chinese sentence (e.g. Zhangsan mo-fang-le Lisi), in which there is no [affected, resultative] restrictions on the verb at all. This means that the semantic restrictions on the verb only exist when v is filled by *ba* and the verb is directly C-commanded by *ba*, hence a syntax-semantics interface at the verb in the *ba* construction.

This article reports an experimental study on whether English-speaking learners have such syntax-semantics knowledge in their L2 Chinese grammars, and if they are sensitive to the semantic restrictions on the verb in the *ba* construction in on-line sentence processing. An acceptability judgement task (AJT) and a self-paced reading (SPR) task were adopted with stimuli of *ba* sentences such as the above and their corresponding canonical sentences (e.g. Zhangsan mo-fang-le Lisi) as controls. In the SPR task, following up clause were added to the *ba* construction to capture possible spill-over effects. Comprehension questions were also used after each stimulus to make sure participants paid attention to the stimuli. Twenty-four Chinese native speakers and 83 English-

speaking learners from intermediate to very advanced levels participated the experiments. The experiments find that only very advanced learners behaved native-like in the AJT, while advanced and high-intermediate groups showed great optionality in their judgement; intermediate group only had the syntactic knowledge of the *ba* construction but no semantic knowledge on the semantic restrictions. Although very advanced learners behaved native-like in the AJT, they, like other groups, failed to be congruent with the natives' processing patterns of the *ba* construction in the on-line processing SPR task. The results suggest that internal interface properties are hard to acquire by L2 learners but not impossible, and the vulnerability at interfaces seem to be a processing problem rather than a representational problem in L2 grammars.

Sorace, A. & Filiaci, F. 2006. Anaphora resolution in near-native speakers of Italian. Second Language Research 22: 339-368.

Sorace, A. 2011. Pinning down the concept of "interface" in bilingualism. Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism 1: 1-33.

Huang, C.-T. J. 2007. Thematic structures of verbs in Chinese and their syntactic projections. Linguistic Science 6: 3-21.

Huang, C.-T. J., Li, Y.-H. A. & Li, Y. 2009. The syntax of Chinese. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sun, C. 2015. The grammaticalization of the BA construction: cause and effect in a case of specialization. In Wang, W. S-Y. and Sun, C. (eds.) The Oxford handbook of Chinese linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 430-446.

6. Covert Subjects and Objects Resulting from TP Ellipsis in English Speakers' L2 Chinese: Evidence of the Declarative/Procedural Model

by **Xu, Lilong**

Abstract: Subjects are obligatorily overt in English, whereas not only covert subjects but also covert objects are allowed in Chinese. It has recently been argued that the gaps in the subject and object position in an affirmative reply to a Chinese yes-no question should be viewed as the result of movement and TP ellipsis under a verbal identity condition (Simpson, 2014). To affirmatively answer a Chinese yes-no question when the verb in the yes-no question and answer are identical, both the subject and object in the answer can be covert (see example 1 B1); Its counterpart in English is ungrammatical (see example 2). However, when the verb in the answer is not identical to the verb in the question but is synonymous with it, neither the subject nor the object can be covert (see example 1 B2) (see "the verbal identity condition", Holmberg, 2015). This study investigates whether English native speakers who learn Chinese as their second language (L2) show developmental progress in their L2 Chinese covert subjects and objects.

A cross-modal self-paced reading task (SRT) and an acceptability judgement task (AJT) were used. The results of AJT showed that all participant groups rated covert arguments

under the verbal identity condition (like example 1 B1) as being significantly more natural than those under the non-verbal identity condition (like example 1 B2). The results of SPT showed that beginners were not sensitive to errors related to the violation of the verbal identity condition either at the critical regions or at the following regions. However, intermediate learners, advanced learners and Chinese native speakers were sensitive to them and the sensitivity to the violation spilled over to the following two regions. The differences found in beginners ' performance in the on-line and off-line tasks suggest that derivations, such as movement and ellipsis, are not accessible in L2 online processing until intermediate or advanced levels. This finding can be accounted for with the declarative/procedural model (Ullman, 2006).

References:

Holmberg, A. (2015). The syntax of yes and no. Oxford University Press.

Simpson. A. (2014). Verbal answers to yes/no question, focus and ellipsis. Chinese Syntax in a Cross-Linguistic Perspective, 299-333.

Ullman, M. T. (2006). The declarative/procedural model and the shallow structure hypothesis. Applied Psycholinguistics, 27(1), 97-105.

Exemples:

(1) A: Ni   du   baozhi   le-ma?
         you   read   newspaper   Particle [+Q]
      'Did you read the newspaper?'
     B1: Φ   du   Φ   le.
                   read   Particle
     B2: * Φ   kan   Φ   le.
                   read   Particle
       'Yes, I did."
(2) A: Did you read the newspaper?
     B: *Read.
     (Intended meaning: Yes, I did.)

7. TBC by Yuan, Boping

8. TBC by Guo, Yanyu