Research Proposal for the Jiede Empirical Research Grant

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I. Title of the Study

Learning to Express Motion Events in L2 Chinese

II. Theoretical Background and Objectives

The study of the relationship between space and language has been of considerable interest to linguists and psychologists for years (e.g., Bowerman; 1996; Choi & Bowerman, 1991; Hickmann & Robert, 2006; Talmy, 1985, 2000; Slobin, 1998, 2004). These studies have shown that speakers of different languages appear to conceptualize space and motion events in a language-specific manner (Bowerman; 1996; Choi & Bowerman, 1991; Talmy, 1985, 2000; Slobin, 1998, 2004). According to Talmy's (1985, 1991, 2000) binary classification of motion events, languages can be divided into two types depending on how they encode path information of a motion event: satellite-framed and verb-framed. Talmy's typological framework is by now well known and has received empirical support in L1 acquisition. For example, research has shown that the ways children and adults express motion events are strongly affected by the typological properties of their first language (e.g., Berman & Slobin, 1994; Hickman, 2006). At the same time, Talmy's proposal has been modified to include a third type: equipollently-framed languages (Slobin, 2004, 2006). Recently, the question of how L2 learners with typological different L1s and L2s come to express motion events has begun to receive research attention in L2 acquisition, and researchers have mostly concentrated on comparing L1 and L2 production that taps the binary traditional typology (e.g., Cadierno, 2004, 2008; Navarro & Nicholadis, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to expand this line of research by investigating how English-speaking learners of Chinese learn to describe motion events in their L2. Chinese, like English, is traditionally considered to be a satellite-framed language. However, as a serial-verb language, Chinese exhibits different lexicalization patterns from English with respect to path encoding, and thus has been proposed to fit in the third type— equipollently-framed languages (Slobin, 2004, 2006; see also Chen & Guo, 2008). Although Chinese uses post-verbal directional complements (hereafter DCs) to encode a path, a strategy somewhat similar to English verb particles (e.g., *up*, *down*, *out*), Chinese DCs differ from English verb particles in at least three aspects: the variety of DC types that exist in Chinese, the various word order patterns associated with their use, and their typological conceptual-semantic features. Given these subtle L1-L2 differences and similarities, the present study addressed several key questions: Facing the differences and similarities in the ways that Chinese and English adopt to describe motion events, how do English learners of Chinese manage to gradually speak in a target-like manner? Do heritage language learners and foreign language learners exhibit different learning profiles? What are the potential sources of difficulties in learning?

III. Significance of the Study

Chinese language teachers are fully aware of the challenges that DC structures present to L2 learners. However, not much research on the L2 acquisition of DCs has been conducted. Therefore, the present study aims to provide detailed descriptions of the learners' interlanguage development in using spatial morphemes by conducting a large cross-sectional study. The

findings will also address the issues of re-conceptualization and re-categorization in the learning process and identify the sources of challenges. For the field of second language acquisition, the collected information from the third type will contribute to the crosslinguistic research of motion language. For the field of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language, the findings will provide L2 language teachers with better understanding of learners' L2 knowledge and learning needs at different stages of acquiring DCs. Furthermore, the pedagogical implications drawn from the study could be used as a guideline for textbook design and classroom instruction.

IV. Design and Methodology

Research Questions

The following research questions will be investigated:

1. Based on an analysis of interlanguage performance on two elicitation tasks among learners of different proficiency levels, what does L2 Chinese learners' learning process of DCs look like? Specifically, how does the learners' ability to use DCs relate to their overall L2 Chinese proficiency? Do heritage language learners and foreign language learners exhibit different learning profiles?
2. Are the different types of DCs equally difficult for the learners? What could be the factors that make the DCs difficult to acquire?
3. Facing the L1-L2 differences and similarities in typology and in semantics of spatial categorization, how well do the learners manage to express motion events in a target-like manner?

Participants

Eighty L2 Chinese learners and 20 native speakers of Chinese will be invited to participate in this cross-sectional study. As shown in Table 1, the L2 learners will be sampled from two proficiency groups and also classified as being from a heritage or foreign language background.

Table 1. Participant sample

Level	Heritage Language	Foreign Language	All
Intermediate	20	20	40
Advanced	20	20	40
NS baseline	n/a	n/a	20

Note. n/a=not applicable; NS=native speaker

Procedures and Methods of Data Elicitation

Four instruments will be developed and administered in this study (see Table 2). First, given that learners might exhibit different learning profiles due to different backgrounds, a background information questionnaire measuring each learner's prior contact with the Chinese language will be used to differentiate heritage language learners from foreign language learners. Next, a narrative task using wordless picture strips will be designed to elicit data containing information about learners' preferences and strategies in describing a series of motion events. The focus of the narrative task will center on: (1) whether or not the typological feature of Chinese as a serial-verb language influences the learners' use of DCs and (2) how well the

learners encode the deictic paths (i.e., *lai*/*qu*). After participants complete the narrative task, a picture-cued written task (see Appendix A) will be used to probe learners' abilities to generate different types of DCs and their abilities to differentiate the two "up" DCs *shang* and *qi*. Finally, an oral elicited imitation test (Erlam, 2006; Ortega et al., 2002) will be adopted to measure the learners' overall L2 Chinese proficiency in order to accurately place the learners into groups of different proficiency levels.

Table 2. Tasks and procedure

Step	Instrument	Time for completion	Research focus
1.	Background information questionnaire	1 to 2 min.	- Identification of heritage or foreign language background
2.	Narrative task	7 to 12 min.	- Learners' inclination to use DCs - L2 typological influences - Encoding of the deictic paths
3.	Picture-cued written task (Parts I & II, see Appendix A)	12 to 20 min.	- Accuracy for different types of DCs - Differentiation between *shang* & *qi*, the two DCs of upward path
4.	Oral elicited imitation test	8 to 10 min.	- Assessment of learners' L2 Chinese proficiency

Coding Reliability and Analysis

Two raters will work together to code and score all responses, and any disagreements will be resolved by discussion. The learners' narrative data from the narrative task will be dichotomously scored. For each motion verb given in a picture context, three aspects of the use of DCs will be measured: (1) whether or not DC is used (2) whether or not DC is correctly chosen (3) whether or not word order of DC is correctly arranged. Also, the learners' production in the narrative task will be qualitatively examined for influences of L2 typology and for encoding of the deictic paths.

As for the picture-cued written task, the 16 items will be scored on a scale of zero to two for each item. A score of two will be assigned to responses that choose correct DCs and show correct word order. A score of one will be assigned to responses that only show correct choice of DCs, but have non-target-like word order. Zero will be given to responses that have non-target-like DCs or do not use DCs. A two-way ANOVA procedure will then be used to analyze the overall effects of proficiency level (intermediate vs. advanced) and participant background (heritage language vs. foreign language).

V. Preliminary Pilot Findings and Timeline

The design of this study is based on the results of a pilot study that has been conducted previously. From the data collected, interesting typological influences of Chinese as a serial-verb language have been identified. In the learners' data, several foreign language learners mixed more than two different DCs together when describing a single movement, as if they were using a string of verbs to describe a series of events. The dual functions of DCs as path satellites and as

full verbs seemed to mask the syntactic regularities of DCs for some learners. Moreover, among the different DC patterns, it was observed that the L2 learners' ability to grammatically operate a DC structure seemed to unfold following a developmental sequence. Learners first developed competence in producing simple DCs, which represent structures most similar to the learners' L1 English patterns of path encoding. The complex DCs, in which the encoding of the deictic paths is less unfamiliar for the English-speaking learners, was found to be more challenging than the simple DCs. However, these preliminary findings await a large cross-sectional study to confirm the observations, and thereby generate more reliable and comprehensive analysis.

I plan to pilot test the instruments in May, 2009 and finish data collection before September. Analysis and coding of the data will be completed by the end of October. Upon completion of this study, I will submit it to the refereed journal *Language Learning* for consideration for publication.

VI. Estimated Expenses

I am applying for the Jiede Empirical Research Grant to support this large-scale project. Due to the comprehensive nature of the study, I will need financial support for the following expenses:

(ITEMIZE THE BUDGET HERE)

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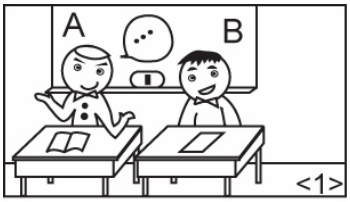
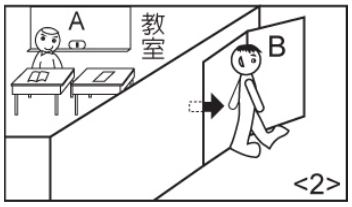
Appendix A. Picture-Cued Written Task

Part I

Instruction: You will see 8 sets of sequential pictures describing different kinds of **physical movement**. Each set of pictures comes with a brief explanation. When you are responding to the questions, **pretend you were A** in each situation. Your job is to describe B's movement **from A's perspective** and complete the sentences in Chinese. You will start with **B** as the subject and use the **designated verb**. If there are **location** or **object nouns** specified in the pictures (shown in Chinese), remember to include the nouns in your sentences.

Sample





Cue:教室(classroom)

Picture <1>
A and B were talking to each other in the classroom.

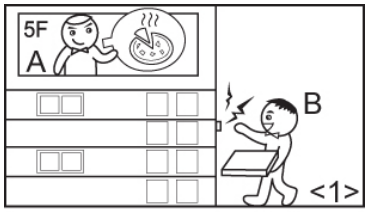
Picture <2>
Later, A saw B…
Q: If you were A, what would you say to describe B's movement?

B_____(use 走)。

Part II

Instruction: You will see 8 sets of sequential pictures describing different kinds of **requests**. Each set of pictures comes with a brief explanation. When you are responding to the questions, **pretend you were A** in each situation. Your job is to describe B's movement **from A's perspective** and complete the sentences in Chinese. You will start with **請** (please…) and **use the designated verb**. If there are **location** or **object nouns** specified in the pictures (shown in Chinese), remember to include the nouns in your sentences.

Sample



Cue:披薩(pizza)

Picture <1>
A lived in an apartment and had just ordered a pizza. When B was at the building door, A was too lazy to get the pizza.

Picture <2>
So, A told B…
Q: If you were A, what would you say to ask for B's help?

請_____(use 送)。