

Expressing Reciprocal in Taiwan Sign Language (TSL)

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The prototypical reciprocal situation are defined as a context in which there are two participants, A and B, and the relation in which A stands to B is the same as that in which B stands to A (Lichtenberk 1985). Research on the topic of reciprocal constructions in spoken languages has pointed out six means of encoding reciprocity in spoken languages, syntactic marking, morphological marking, clitics and clitics-like markers, reciprocal markers on other than the predicate constituents, non-reciprocal and reciprocal markers with a tendency to co-occur always or frequently, and reciprocal markers dependent on the number of the reciprocants (Nedjalkov & Geniesiene 2007). As for sign language, German Sign Language (DGS), American Sign Language (ASL) and Indo-Pakistani Sign Language (IPSL) have received attention. None research on reciprocal constructions is done in Taiwan Sign Language (TSL). Therefore, the goal of this paper is to examine how the reciprocal situations are expressed in TSL.

Two informants are participating in this study. One is a fifty-year-old male and another is a twenty five-year-old female. Both of them were born in a deaf family, and acquired Taiwan Sign Language at home and at the school called Tainan Deaf School. The data collection procedures follow three steps: collecting data, checking data completeness, converting data into ready-used format for analyzing process.

Seven strategies of encoding the reciprocal function in Taiwan Sign Language are observed in the collecting data, which are (1) the employment of reciprocal adverb *hu-xiang* ‘mutually’, (2) the employment of verb *yi-yang* ‘same’, (3) the employment of verb *zhuan-lai-zhuan-qu* ‘turn back and forth’, (4) the reduplication of verb, (5) the use of left-handed & right-handed agreement strategy with plain verb, (6) conversion and feature copy onto the nondominant hand with one-handed agreement verbs, and (7) conversion of movement or orientation with two-handed agreement verbs. The example of strategy (8) is demonstrated as the following. Strategies 1 to 4 apply to both plain verbs and agreement verbs. Strategy 5 only works for plain verbs, and Strategy 6 and 7 are used for agreement verbs. Moreover, the comparison between reciprocal constructions in DGS, IPSL and TSL are made in this study.

References

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L2 Acquisition of Mandarin classifiers: How distinct are classifier-language learners from non-classifier language learners?

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The classifier system in Mandarin Chinese makes the language comparable to other classifier languages such as Japanese and Korean (e.g. Yamamoto [2003] on the acquisition of numeral classifiers among Japanese children) but distinct from non-classifier languages such as English and French. This in turn bears important implications on second language acquisition (SLA). As reviewed by Zhao (2011), the classifier system constitutes one of the core areas of examination in the study of Mandarin Chinese as a second language (L2). Numerous SLA studies have been conducted, with particular attention to the extent to which L2 classifier acquisition will conform to the Numeral Classifier Accessibility Hierarchy (NCAH) (e.g., Hansen & Chen, 2001) or the degree in which the availability or unavailability of a classifier system in a learner’s first language (L1) will interact with the acquisition of a second language which is a classifier language (e.g., Liang, 2008).

It is against this background that a small-scale corpus-based analysis of the use of classifiers in L2 Chinese was conducted, with the aim of answering the following key research question:

To what extent are classifier-language learners of Mandarin Chinese different from their non-classifier-language counterparts in the use of classifiers in L2 Mandarin?

Written output from two groups of intermediate learners of Mandarin Chinese, whose first languages fall into ‘classifier languages’ (e.g., Japanese and Korean) and ‘non-classifier languages’ (e.g., English and French), was compared. Two major types of classifier in Mandarin Chinese, namely sortal classifiers and mensural classifiers, together with their sub-types, were examined, with particular attention to four variables: (i) the overall frequency of use of classifiers, (ii) the frequency of occurrence of each classifier, (iii) the extent to which the usage (both target-like and non-target-like) conforms to the NCAH,

and (iv) the potential role of the availability of a classifier system in a learner's L1. The overall patterns observed were also compared with the written output of a group of Mandarin native speakers. The analysis of the written output in terms of target and non-target usage discerned both similarities and differences in the use of the two broad types of classifiers and their subtypes (e.g., overuse and misuse of the generic classifier *ge* and underuse of specific classifiers). Such use of classifiers in the learners' output is considered to be largely related to factors including the semantic features of the classifiers, the structural features of the nominal phrases where the classifiers appear, and the availability of the classifier system in the learners' L1s. Pedagogical suggestions are also made at the end of the paper on handling the specific differences of the two types of learners.

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Medial glides in Mandopop: Do they rhyme or do they not?

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Introduction: The affiliation of medial glides in Mandarin has been controversial in contemporary theories, which fit all segments into either onset or rhyme positions. While rhyme corpora were shown to be useful in discovering syllable structures in other languages (see e.g. Katz 2008 for English), Chinese linguists have not yet taken advantage of corpus tools in studying the status of medial glides in Mandarin syllable structures.

To fill this gap in the study of Mandarin rhymes, a corpus of rhymes in contemporary Mandarin pop songs was built. Whether the medial glides participate in the rhyming patterns was investigated. If medial glides participate in rhyming patterns in contemporary Mandarin pop songs, “half-rhyme” pairs such as [tan]~[twan] would not rhyme, since they differ by a medial glide. In this case, such glides should be analyzed as part of the rhyme (Wang & Chang 2001, Li 2009). Alternatively, if medial glides are not part of the rhyming patterns, and [tan]~[twan] rhymes in Mandarin pop songs, such glides should be analyzed as a part of the onset (Bao 1990, Duanmu 2007) or an individual unit between the onset and the rhyme (Lin 1989, van de Weijer & Zhang 2008).

Methods: The corpus comprises lyrics from 120 number-one songs from the weekly China Music Chart (中国歌曲排行榜) between 2009 and 2011. Repeated lyrics in each song were removed to avoid any potential biases. Syllables at the end of each line of the lyrics were paired up with the final syllable at the following line. 2196 syllable pairs were formed. Based on the frequencies of the individual syllables, the observed and expected frequencies of the syllable pairs were calculated as well. When two Mandarin syllables rhyme (e.g. [tan]~[t^han]), they should occur one after another in pop song lyrics more frequently than by chance. In other words, the observed frequencies for rhyme pairs in songs would be much higher than expected. Thus, if the rhyming process in Mandarin do not involve medial glides, syllable pairs should rhyme if they differ by their medial glides only (e.g. [tan]~[twan]). Therefore, if such “half-rhyme” pairs occur more often than expected, medial glides should be excluded from the rhyme position in Mandarin.

Results and implication: All 28 “half-rhyme” pairs in Mandarin appear more frequently than expected, from 3.95 to 25.96 times more. Paired t-test confirms that such differences between the observed and expected frequency are statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$). This suggests that medial glides do not participate in the rhyming processes in contemporary Mandarin pop songs. As a result, we have solid evidence against affiliating the medial glides with the Mandarin rhymes (contra Wang & Chang 2001, Li 2009). Future studies of Mandarin syllables should focus on whether the medial glides belong to the onset position, or forms a distinct unit between onset and rhyme.