

## Language Developmental Trends of Mandarin-Speaking Preschoolers in Beijing

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**Abstract :** Mandarin, the official language of China, is based on the Beijing dialect and is spoken by more than one billion people from all over the world. To investigate the trends of Mandarin acquisition, 192 preschoolers are recruited by stratified random sampling. They are from 4 different districts in Beijing, 2 schools in each district, with 4 age groups, both genders, and 3 children in each stratum. The children are paired up to conduct semi-structured free play for 30 minutes. Their language output is videotaped, transcribed, and coded for the calculation of Mean Length of Utterance (MLU). Two-way ANOVA showed that the variation of MLU is significantly contributed by age, which is coherent to previous findings of other languages. This first large-scale study to investigate the developmental trend of Mandarin in young children in Beijing provides empirical evidence to the development of standards and curriculum planning for early Mandarin education. Interestingly, the gender effect in the study is insignificant, with boys showing a slightly higher MLU than girls across all age groups and settings, except the 4.5 years same-gender dyads. The societal factors in the Chinese context on parenting and gender bias are worth looking into.

**Keywords :** Beijing, language development, Mandarin, preschoolers

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