

L2 Acquisition of Tense and Aspect by Cantonese and Mandarin ESL Learners of Different Proficiency Levels

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Abstract : The present study about the acquisition of tense and aspect by Cantonese and Mandarin ESL learners aims to investigate the relationship between knowledge, the role that classroom input plays in the development of that knowledge, and learners' use of the L2 knowledge they acquire (i.e. their performance). Chinese has been argued as a tenseless language and Chinese ESL learners have to acquire the property from scratch. The study of acquisition of tense and aspect is a very fruitful research area in second language acquisition for a number of reasons. First, tense and aspect are notorious for being difficult for Chinese ESL learners. Second, to our knowledge, no studies have been done to compare Cantonese and Mandarin ESL learners and age effects in one single study. Data are now being collected and the findings from this comparison study of tense-aspect acquisition will shed light on both theoretical and pedagogical issues in second language acquisition, and contribute to a better understanding of both theoretical aspect concerning L2 acquisition of tense and aspect, and pedagogy of tense for L2 Chinese ESL learners.

Keywords : aspect, second language acquisition, tense, universal grammar

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