Title of paper
Analyzing Syntactic Complexity of Chinese L2 Writing: What Unit and What Else?

Significance of the study
There has been a shortage of research on L2 Chinese writing assessment since the late 80s (Ke, 2012). In addition, the T-unit (Hunt, 1970) for measuring syntactic complexity of European languages is questionable when applied to Chinese L2 written products, because Chinese is typologically different from European languages. This paper compares the applications of the T-unit and the Terminal Topic-comment Unit (TTCU) (Jin, 2007) on measuring L2 Chinese learners’ written syntactic complexity; it also looks at the cohesion of the data as an illumination of the structural sophistication, which also contributes to the syntactic complexity. Results yield implications for further research on L2 Chinese writing assessment and facilitate the holistic rating process of written products.

Theoretical background
Test takers’ written performances are usually measured on three major dimensions, namely Complexity, Accuracy and Fluency (CAF). When it comes to complexity, especially syntactic complexity, defining a unit for numerical measure becomes more difficult because complexity is described with a certain level of ambiguity in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Jin (2007) introduced a unit specifically for measuring Chinese syntactic complexity. However, quantifiable measurement may not be enough for capturing the qualities of learners’ writing. Research studies have revealed that cohesion also highly correlates with the quality of L2 writing in both Chinese and English (Jin, 1999; Norment, 1994). The studies of L2 Chinese writing assessment, therefore, need to analyze multiple factors rather than maintaining a single perspective.

Research procedure
Intermediate- and Advanced-level Chinese L2 learners’ written essays are elicited by a variety of tasks and analyzed in terms of (1) Length and Amount of utterances, clauses, T-units and TTCUs, and (2) Density of cohesive devices. Each piece of writing is also holistically rated by 3 experienced Chinese L2 instructors. The relationships among T-units, TTCUs, the cohesive devices, and the holistic scores of the data are calculated and compared.
**Major findings**

Preliminary analysis shows that unit measurement and cohesion analysis are both indicators of written products’ overall qualities; and the use of TTCUs for measuring syntactic complexity is different from that of T-unit in assessing learners’ writing performances.

**References**


