Chinese L2 Acquisition of The Displacement Ba-construction: Developmental stages, L1 transfer, and pedagogical implications

Abstract: Ba-construction is one of the most frequently used, yet complex syntactic structures in Chinese. Its linguistic complexity and functional specifications present a huge challenge for L2 Chinese learners and Chinese instructors. Hence, Ba-construction has long been one of the hot topics in L2 Chinese empirical studies. These studies yielded some common findings even though they had different theoretical considerations and methodological concentrations. One of the remarkable findings in common was the low production rate of the ba-construction among L2 learners of Chinese, especially at the lower proficiency level (Jin, 1992; Du, 2004, 2010; Wen, 2010, 2012). Low proficiency level learners have a lot of difficulties conceptualizing the function of the ba-construction and developing form-meaning mappings (Wen, 2010, 2012). Another noteworthy finding was that when the learners produced the ba-construction, they made numerous errors in the verbal complement or they completely dropped the verbal complement and left the verb bare in the ba-construction (Jin, 1992; Wen, 2010, 2012). This may be due to the markedness and complexity of the verbal complement. Although a lot of studies have shown robust evidence of the acquisition of the ba-construction and its interlanguage development among L2 learners, some issues remain unclear. The developmental stages and features along the whole course of interlanguage development of the ba-construction are worth exploring. The present study investigates L2 Chinese learner’s acquisition of the displacement ba-construction, which denotes spatial displacement or relocation of the ba-NP. This kind of ba-construction
usually requires a directional verbal complement or a prepositional phrase to specify the locative change of the ba-NP.

We collected the oral data from two production tasks and analyzed the data from a follow-up semi-structured interview to answer the following two research questions:

(1) What developmental stages, if any, do L2 Chinese learners go through in the course of acquiring the displacement ba-construction?

(2) What are the characteristics, if any, of each developmental stage?

The results have shown that learners undergo three developmental stages to acquire the displacement ba-construction: (1) SVO word order + incomplete verbal complements (or bare verbs); (2) SVO word order + complete verbal complements; (3) SOV word order + complete verbal complement (or varied and complex verbal complements). The developmental trajectory of the displacement ba-construction is constrained by L2 processability and so is the L1 transfer. The pedagogical implications of these findings are also discussed.

**Key words:** Chinese as a second language acquisition, the displacement ba-construction, developmental stages, L1 transfer, pedagogical implications
REFERENCES:


