

Acquisition of Present Perfect by Advanced Cantonese Learners of English

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Abstract

The project seeks to investigate the acquisition of English tense and aspect system by advanced Cantonese learners of English. It focuses on the role of lexical aspect of verbs and possible Cantonese influence on the learning of English as a second language, with particular reference to English present perfect. The temporal system between Chinese and English is very different. English temporality is a combination of three tenses and two aspects, while scholars in general believe that Chinese is a tenseless language. Previous researches had highlighted the importance of lexical aspects on acquisition of English present perfect. However, not a lot of researches were conducted in Hong Kong.

My present study aims to examine the use of present perfect by second language learners in relation to first language influence and the inherent semantic aspectual property of verbs. It aims at addressing one main issue: whether advanced Cantonese learners of English are under L1 influence in their use of English present perfect. It is hypothesized that Cantonese aspectual marker –zo and the temporal adverbial ‘already’ would affect learners’ use of present perfect. In addition, it is anticipated that lexical semantics still plays a role on their usage as well. A translation task and a story narrative task are designed. The experiment has yielded interesting findings. I hope that it could lead to more investigation and discussion on this currently under-explored topic.

Reflection on the capstone project

Working on the capstone project is certainly a very enjoyable process. It could be tough at first and the schedule was really packed. Yet the hard work certainly paid off. Witnessing the completion of the project is extremely satisfying. I have learnt to be a more humble learner of English who is willing to take up challenges.

When I tell people I am an English major, their immediate response would always be ‘Shakespeare?’. Yet for me, I am more interested in English Linguistics. Linguistics introduces you to a field of unconscious knowledge about language and unveils

mysteries laid in human communication system. Through different courses, I have gained insights into many aspects of human language. It has sharpened my awareness towards various linguistics phenomena. More importantly, it reminds me to pay attention to every single detail in life and make insightful observations.