

## **ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION:** Acquisition of English Morphosyntax: Evidence from a Chinese-speaking Child

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This thesis aims to examine the development of morphosyntax with longitudinal English production from Diany, a Mandarin-speaking child, starting from the second week Diany arrived in the U.S.A. (age 4;9). The study is particularly interested in whether Diany's acquisition of verbal morphemes and verb movement supports relevant hypotheses in the literature.

In generative linguistics, there are two important lines of interests in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) that address the "long-standing debate on the nature of syntactic representation in SLA" (Haznedar & Gavruseva, 2008:5). One line examines the relationship between morphological development and syntactic representations, namely, whether absence of surface morphology entails absence of the syntactic representation. A recently influential proposal is that there is dissociation between overt morphology and abstract syntax, as suggested by the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (MSIH) (Lardeire, 1998a, 1998b, 2007; Haznedar & Schwartz, 1997; Prevost & White, 2000). The second important line, more relevant to child L2 research, focuses on the comparison of child L2 (cL2) acquisition with child first language (cL1) and adult L2 (aL2) acquisition in the domains of morphology and syntax. On the observation that attainment in cL2 is superior to aL2, Schwartz (1992, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) proposes the "Domain by Age Model (DAM)", arguing that in the realm of syntax, cL2 acquisition is (more)

like aL2 acquisition, but that in the realm of inflectional morphology, cL2 is (more) like L1 acquisition (2003a, p.47).

With regard to the first line of interest, whether there is a relationship between the acquisition of morphology and syntax, the data from our subject show that the development of the two domains is independent of each other. The morphemes and verb raising are acquired at their own paces, supporting the MSIH. The comparison of Diany's morphosyntactic development with L1 children and adult L2 learners whose native language is Chinese suggests that Diany's English morphological development is more similar to that of adult SLA holding the same L1, and the verb raising in negative utterances and questions is parallel with both L1 children and L2 adults. This is inconsistent with the DAM which proposes that L2 children assemble L1 children in morpheme acquisition, but are similar to L2 adults in syntactic development. In the thesis, we also argue for the presence of L1 influence and age effect in the Mandarin-speaking child's L2 English.