

THE ACQUISITION OF MANDARIN CLASSIFIERS

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This preliminary study aimed to explain the acquisition of 13 Mandarin classifiers in Chinese preschool children in Malaysia. They were 'ge', 'ben', 'li', 'zhang', 'liang', 'tiao', 'zhi', 'ba', 'kuai', 'pian', 'juan', 'he', and 'ke'. The children's comprehension of these classifiers was tested in order to obtain the acquisition pattern. 40 subjects aged from three to six years old were used in this study. These children were divided into four age groups (3;0 – 3;11, 4;0 – 4;11, 5;0 – 5;11, 6;0 – 6;11). Each group consisted of five females and five males. The objectives of this study were to determine the age of emergence, the age of stabilization and the order of acquisition. The findings revealed that the age of emergence for most of the classifiers was the age of three while the age of stabilization was at four to five years old. The order of acquisition was: 'ben', 'liang', 'li', 'zhi', 'tiao', 'ba', 'zhang', 'he', 'ke', 'kuai', 'juan', 'ge' and 'pian'. The order of acquisition was concurrent with the implicational order of the acquisition of shape or dimension concept. The classifiers that involved objects with 3-dimensional were acquired first before the classifiers that were used for objects that are 1-dimensional. The classifiers that were used for 2-dimensional objects were acquired much later. However, the exception to this was the acquisition of the classifiers 'ge' – as it was not stabilized among the pre-school children.

Tan, L.K. 2004. The Acquisition of Mandarin Classifiers. Bachelor of Speech Science Thesis. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.