

**Topic:** Online processing of classifier information by native and non-native speakers of Chinese

**Date:** August 13, 2015 (Thursday)

**Time:** 10:00am – 11:30am

**Venue:** Rm 101 Fung King Hei Building, CUHK

**Abstract**

Native speakers have been demonstrated to use morphosyntactic information in prenominal modifiers to predict upcoming nouns during online comprehension, while this ability is generally weakened in non-native speakers. This study investigates whether adult learners of Chinese make use of semantics-based classifier information in incremental processing, as observed with other types of morphosyntactic information such as grammatical gender. The form of the Chinese classifier is determined by the semantic features of the noun it modifies, which should make classifiers a more informative cue than gender-marked articles in Indo-European languages in two ways: (i) due to the greater number of classifiers/noun classes, an individual classifier restricts the set of possible subsequent nouns more narrowly; (ii) the classifier-noun association is due not only to statistical co-occurrence, but also carries semantic information. Eye-tracking results suggest that the semantic association between classifier and noun allows non-native speakers to exploit the information predictively, as native speakers do, and the ability is modulated by proficiency in L2.

**Elaine Lau** received her Bachelor's degree in Cognitive Science and MPhil in Linguistics from the University of Hong Kong. She is currently a PhD student (ABD) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and is teaching at the University of Hong Kong. Her research interests focus on the acquisition of syntax and the cognitive mechanisms involved in language acquisition and processing. Recently, her research has extended to different linguistic communities, including second language learners and heritage speakers.