

## **Grammatical Categorization of Nouns and Verbs in Mandarin-Learning Infants**

Zhang Zhao  
Nankai university

Shi Rushen  
University of Quebec

Li Aijun  
Chinese Academy of Social Science

We examined early grammatical categorization in Mandarin. Mandarin-learning 20-month-olds participated in a preferential looking study. Familiarization sentences contained rare noun-verb ambi-categorical words, which were used as nouns for one group of infants and verbs for another group. The words adjacent to the targets were function words. All infants were tested with new sentences containing the same targets used as nouns versus verbs. The contextual content words were familiar infant-directed words in Experiment 1 but unfamiliar words in Experiment 2. Results showed that the noun familiarization group in both experiments discriminated the test trials, i.e., they categorized the targets as nouns. The verb familiarization group did not discriminate the test trials even when the contextual content words were familiar. These results demonstrate that Mandarin-learning infants begin grammatical categorization during the second year of life, as do European-language-learning infants. Furthermore, their categorization is abstract, without relying on the meaning of contextual words.

[This paper was published in The 38th Boston University Conference on Language Development]