The Mandarin potential complement construction is a language specific structure. This is different from most of the languages in the world including English where modal notions are expressed by modal verbs and auxiliaries. It is a syntactic construction used to convey potential possibility in Mandarin and Cantonese. The various behaviors of the modal expressions in these three languages, i.e., English, Cantonese and Mandarin, raise interesting questions in second language acquisition research. The present study aims to explore how Cantonese speaking learners and English speaking learners process the Mandarin potential complement construction. Acceptability judgment test and corpus study were conducted to examine typical learning difficulties and essential acquisition patterns in the course of acquiring the Mandarin potential complement construction.

Given that the Mandarin potential complement construction is less marked than the Cantonese counterpart, but more marked than English modal expressions, I hypothesized that Cantonese speaking learners would have more native-like performance than English speaking learners. Surprisingly, this hypothesis was not completely confirmed in the present study. I will spell out the subjects’ performance from the perspectives of language transfer theory, markedness theory and subset principle theory.
可能補語構式(the potential complement construction)是漢語特有的壹種語言現象，用來表達潛在的可能性。情態表達的方式在普通話、英文和粵語中各不相同，基於這三種語言之上的可能補語習得研究對於進壹步了解普通話作為第二語言的習得規律很有意義。本文主要研究以粵語為母語的中高級普通話習得者和以英文為母語的中高級普通話習得者對於普通話可能補語構式的習得情況，同時探討習得者母語對可能補語構式習得的具體影響，最終對普通話可能補語構式三項核心特征的習得進行難度等級劃分。本文以接受程度判斷測試為主要研究方法獲取數據，同時輔以語料庫數據作為補充論證。

鑒於普通話可能補語構式的標記性程度不及粵語可能補語構式，但又高於英文中的可能性情態表達的標記性程度，本文推斷：和以英文為母語的普通話習得者相比，以粵語為母語的普通話習得者將在控制測試和自然語料庫中有更好的表現。但是，這個假說並沒有在本文的研究中得到全面的肯定。本文將結合語言遷移、標記性理論、子集原則理論以及其他相關二語習得理論，以期解釋被試的語言測試表現並分析語料庫中的數據特征。
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