

**Grammatically Correct vs. Meaningful Chinese**  
**A Study of English-Speaking Students' Learning of CFL**

(A Research Proposal)

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**Abstract**

Every language has a unique system of grammar. Chinese and English belong to two different language families and have different grammatical systems. In Chinese, there is no inflection, which is a striking contrast to English. That is why most English-speaking students who learn Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) at the beginning level think Chinese grammar easy. However, it is the absence of inflection that contributes to the flexibility and complexity of Chinese grammatical system. When CFL students progress to higher level, using Chinese to negotiate meaning in communication, they become aware of the challenges in constructing meaningful narrative texts in Chinese in specific contexts even though they can produce grammatically correct sentences (Chiang, 2002). What challenges do CFL students experience when learning to communicate in meaningful Chinese? What are the pedagogic implications?

Ontologically, I see L2 learning as a process of communication, a form of social activity negotiating meaning in social cultural contexts to realize intentions. Hence, this study will be framed in Activity Theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Schiffrin's (1996) research method of interactional sociolinguistics will be adopted to analyze and interpret the role of contexts of the communicative situation, to understand how students are challenged when they are unfamiliar with the contexts of communication. This study will use interviews, ethnographic observations, and analysis of students' written work as the main data collection methods for the purposes of gaining a better understanding of how students learn to construct meaning in Chinese in specific contexts, generating CFL pedagogical implications.

**References**

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