

## Relativisers and animacy in L2 English

We argue that intermediate Chinese, Russian and German learners of L2 English fail to acquire the properties of “that” as a relativiser. Rather, they expand the use of an underspecified subordinator to apparent relative clauses (Rcs) relying predominately on the wh-strategy for relativisation.

A set of 8,760 sentences containing an RC were drawn from a parsed<sup>1</sup> subcorpus of EFCAMDAT (EF Cambridge Open Language Database) of intermediate learners (CEFR B1) from Brazil, Mexico, Italy, Russia, China and Germany. “That”-Rcs by Russians, Chinese and German learners (henceforth, RCGs) differ from Rcs by “Romance” learners (Brazilians, Mexicans and Italians):

- (i) RCGs use fewer “that”-Rcs than Romance learners. There is no native language effect in the overall rate of RC production (unlike Schachter 1974). However, only 30% of Rcs by RCG are introduced by “that”, against 70% by Romance learners.
- (ii) RCGs avoid animate heads in “that”-RCs (“women that work in this office ...”), a statistically significant difference from Romance learners.
- (iii) Chinese learners do not use nested “that” relatives, unlike Brazilians with 15% nested Rcs (e.g. “a girl with his father that played with an instrument to take money that people that listend to pay in Paris”).

We assume that Romance learners draw from the RC complementiser in their L1 using “that” as a relative clause subordinator (hence the nested relatives, no animacy restriction and higher production rates). By contrast, RCGs cannot draw from their L1 as they lack an English-style RC complementiser. We hypothesize that they use “that” as a general subordinator rather than a relativiser: hence the absence of nested structures and overuse of the wh-strategy for relativisation. Relativisation of animate nouns triggers the wh-strategy because of ---we speculate---the salience of animacy as a feature that learners express through the wh-pronoun.

We formalise these ideas by assuming absence of a +Rel feature for “that” used by Chinese, Germans and Russians. We further show evidence for underspecification for wh-pronouns coming from non-target headless Rcs like “wins who get most points”.

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<sup>1</sup>The subcorpus was parsed with C&C Combinatory Categorical Grammar (Clark and Curran 2007).