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## **Comparing child first and adult second language learners regarding reference to person**

**Vortrag am 15.12.10 um 18 Uhr c.t.  
Raum D 209, LMU Hauptgebäude**

Referring to animate entities in discourse is one of the things that language users crucially have to acquire in order to be able to achieve their communicative goals. And although underlying systematicities are very similar across languages, the actual linguistic means used to refer can vary considerably. In this paper, I will discuss data from Chinese, French, German and English children learning their mother tongue (previous project in collaboration with Maya Hickmann), and Chinese adults learning English, French or German as a second language.

The European languages have an article system in common that allows speakers to make distinctions of the type specific non-specific and given versus new. The Chinese language does not have articles, and the above distinctions therefore have to be expressed otherwise. When analyzing the L1 data, we found that native speakers of Chinese mainly use position (word order) to indicate these distinctions, in combination with the use of classifiers.

Chinese learners of a European L2 therefore have concepts that correspond to the given new distinction and the specific non-specific distinction, and they have to learn the specific linguistic means (slightly different in each of the three target languages) in order to be able to express these concepts.

The present paper shows how child L1 learners and adult L2 learners encounter similar and different problems in achieving their communicative intent.