

Title of Project:

Effects of Task Complexity on Chinese EFL Learners' L2 Oral Performance:
A Complex Dynamic Systems Theory Perspective

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Project Summary:

The proposed study aims to investigate the effects of task complexity on Chinese EFL learners' L2 oral performance on the Test for English Majors (TEM) Band 8. Task complexity is identified with two resource-directing variables, +/- causal reasoning and +/-perspective-taking, in the Triadic Componential Framework (Robinson, 2005, 2011). Three monological tasks in the spoken corpus of TEM Band 8 in Spoken and Written Corpus of Chinese Learners (2.0) are categorized into low-level, intermediate-level, and high-level along a continuum of task complexity.

The significance of the proposed study is four-fold. First, as a departure from prior research mainly focusing on testing predictions from two prevailing cognitive-psycholinguistic claims (i.e., Trade-off Hypothesis and Cognition Hypothesis), this study adopts a Complex Dynamic Systems Theory perspective to examine the interplay between the micro context of task complexity and the linguistic features of L2 spoken language. Second, in contrast to many task-based studies limited in small sample size, this study utilizes a larger-scale learner corpus data to investigate the interface of corpus linguistics, task complexity, and language testing. Third, this study attempts to use natural language processing tools, specifically TAALED, TAALEC, and TAASSC, to investigate the oral syntactic and lexical features under different task complexity conditions with a wide range of global and specific measures to connect task-based research, corpus linguistics, and natural language processing. Fourth, the present study aims to advance our understanding of how the manipulation of task complexity in language testing may affect L2 learners' language performance and facilitate interlanguage development and assessment.