Jackie Chan Language Analysis

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Utterances of Jackie Chan

Chelsea: In that movie-are you supposed to look older?

[aɪ]

1. I don’t know why the director makes me so old.

[bæ]

1. Eh-every morning I makeup, no go back.
2. Too young.

[bæ]

1. Go back, too young.

[wɔ]

1. And when I come to walk, ‘slow down you’re not Jackie Chan’.

[wɔ]

1. I tell you, I have to walk like this.

[əˈraʊn]

1. And when I turn around, ‘No! Slow down.’

Chelsea: Have you ever cried in a movie before?

1. I-I-I-I-I do!
2. But not-not-not in U.S.
3. But in U.S. you’re always \*speaks Mandarin\* one, two, three, four.
4. \*Speaks Mandarin\* you know, those kind of things.
5. I never rece- Always-all those years the script is Hong Kong police, China police, uh Hong Kong CIA, China CIA.
6. Can-can I have something like a \*speaks Mandarin\*
7. Uh something different!
8. Nobody hire me this kinda romance and uh a beach, slow motion, singing song, and kissing.
9. They’re always action, action, jump, stunt.

[lʌnʤ]

1. Then finally I got this a script, I said, ‘Yes. For me is challenge.’

Chelsea: Yeah. And do you do a lot of romantic movies in China? Cuz I don’t see a lot of Chinese movies.

1. No, same thing.
2. I do in comedy, action, but I can-

Chelsea: Is there romance in China?

1. \*Laughs\* Yes!

Chelsea: I’ve been to Shanghai and I did not see you there.

1. That time I was in Beijing.
2. When you’re in Beijing, I’m in Shanghai.

Chelsea: But I liked it!

1. \*Speaks Mandarin\* is uh call you young-young girl.

Chelsea: You did the song-the main theme song. You sang it.

1. Actually, all-all-I’ve been making a films seventy--no is seventy--fifty-seven years.
2. Mostly song in China I sing myself.

Biography

Jackie Chan was born in Hong Kong in 1954. Originally named Chan Kong-sang, it was not until he was in his early twenties that he received the name “Jackie”. From a young age, he practiced kung fu with his father who believed that it would teach his son patience, strength and courage. Chan enrolled in the China Drama Academy when he was 7 years old and remained there for the next 10 years of his life. The academy was a training school for the Peking Opera which meant he learned singing, acrobatics, tumbling, and martial arts. After graduating, demand for the opera was very low so he had to get a job as a stuntman. After a few years of working as a stuntman, the Hong Kong movie industry began to fail and Chan was forced to move to Australia to live with his parents. He was able to find work at a restaurant and also at a construction site, which is where he got his nickname. In 1976, Chan returned to Hong Kong to work for Willie Chan, who became his manager. After making movies with his now trademark humor, his fame in Hong Kong grew. However, it took 10 years for him to become recognized in Hollywood. After making the movie *Rumble* and the movies that quickly followed, he became famous in the States. Now, after working in the movie industry for many years, Jackie Chan is beginning to diversify his acting roles while also working with charities to help children, the elderly and the needy.

Analysis

Overall, Jackie Chan has a very good grasp on the English language. The interview I pulled my data from was about his movie *The Foreigner*. He was being interviewed by Chelsea Handler. Phonology-wise, he had some issues with completing certain words. During sentences #2, 4, and 5, he cut off words like “back” and “walk”. Thus, it is possible that Chan has trouble with the [k] sound. He also switched the allophone [ʌ] to [aɪ] in the word “director” in sentence #7. In addition to these phonologic errors, he also did not complete the word “around” in sentence #7. Additionally, he replaced the allophone [ɛ] with [ʌ] in the word “challenge” in sentence #17. Although Jackie Chan has lived in the United States for many years, he still has a noticeable accent, which can be heard in these phonological ways.

In regards to morphology, there were few errors that I could find. In sentence #15 he dropped the –s morpheme that should have been at the end of the word “hire” and “song”. This also happens in sentence #25 in the word “song”. Other than those instances, Chan had a good understanding of content words but seemed to struggle with function words, as he tended to omit conjunctions, as seen in sentence #16. Chan had no issues with content words, as he was able to answer the interviewer’s questions without hesitation.

Jackie Chan had some difficulty with syntax in the interview. During the interview, he stutters frequently and also switches between English and Mandarin at times. There is a difference in the structure between sentence #1 and sentence #15. The first sentence makes sense and follows grammatical rules for English. However, sentence #15 is missing a preposition and the –s morpheme that would make it grammatically correct. It is only understandable in context. Due to these errors, I would say that Chan’s grasp on syntax is weaker than his grasp on morphology, phonology and semantics.

Finally, for semantics, Chan revealed no errors that I could find. Not only did Chan understand the interviewer’s questions, he showed little to no hesitation in responding with anecdotes and jokes. The only hesitation, if it can be called that, can be seen in the form of the stutter that Chan had at times. However, this seemed to be less of not knowing the words and more of having difficulty getting the words out.

In conclusion, Jackie Chan has a high understanding of the English language and is able to understand and speak it with a high degree of fluency. Phonologically, he had some issues with switching out allophones or dropping allophones at the end of words. In regards to morphology, other than a tendency to omit the –s morpheme and some difficulty with function words, he has a good understanding of morphology. Chan’s weakest area is syntax, as he stuttered frequently throughout the interview, which caused him to sometimes restart his sentences in ways that only made sense in context. Additionally, Chan had few issues with semantics. He knew the meanings of words and was able to joke around with the interviewer. Jackie Chan has lived in the United States for many years and has a high degree of fluency in the English language. However, it is clear that English is not his first language, as he struggles with syntax and phonology. He does seem to be strong in morphology and semantics.

Resources

Chelsea. (2017, October 8). Jackie Chan (Full Interview) | Chelsea | Netflix. [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9UDJh\_bgak&t=71s

The Official Jackie Chan Website Biography. Retrieved from https://www.jackiechan.com/biography.htm.