Abstract

In this study, an experiment was conducted to investigate the effect of classifiers in perceived similarity of paired Chinese sentences. Twenty-seven native Cantonese speaks from the Chinese University of Hong Kong participated in this experiment. They were required to judge the similarity between paired Chinese sentences with the structure "quantifier + classifier + adjective + noun", with differences in quantifier and/or classifier and/or adjective. Reaction times and errors of judgment were recorded. At first, no significant effect of classifiers was found in both reaction times and errors of judgment. Later, the types of pairing of the classifiers were further split into the "Similar Pairing Type" and "Different Pairing Type" according to the association of meanings between the two classifiers. The effect of "classifier type" was significant in both RTs and ERs. This implied the association of meanings of classifiers in two sentences would affect perception. As classifiers are not universal in all languages, the investigation of effect of classifiers in perception served as a preliminary support of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis.