The production of non-canonical orders

In this talk, I will present my ongoing plans to investigate factors influencing the production of non-canonical transitive sentences, i.e. passives and OSV. The discussion will focus primarily in Mandarin Chinese. (1) illustrates the constructions under investigation:

(1) Mandarin Chinese
a.   Active (SVO)
huajia/naozhong   huanxing-le   nanhai
painter/alarm   awake-ASP   boy
'The painter/alarm awakes the boy.'

b. Passive (SOV)
nanhai   bei   huajia/naozhong   huanxing-le
boy   passive   painter/alarm   awake-ASP
'The boy is awaken by the painter/alarm'.

c. Object-fronting (OSV)
nanhai   huajia/naozhong   huanxing-le
boy   painter/alarm   awake-ASP
'The boy, the painter/alarm awakes.'

Animacy will be experimentally manipulated throughout a series of production experiments. Given a literature gap in testing the production of different transitive word orders, it is assumed that syntactic structure in Mandarin Chinese is influenced by animacy through its correlation with conceptual accessibility, such that animate entities tend to be privileged during syntactic processes of production like in other languages, for example, English and German. In addition, there have been studies testing ditransitive structures in Mandarin Chinese, which suggest that the stage of grammatical encoding in the production system is singled-staged, such that functional and positional processing occurs simultaneously (e.g. Cai et al. 2011; Huang et al. 2016). Three production experiments are planned: the first one is a picture description experiment manipulating the ANIMACY of the agent (animate vs. inanimate) like in (1); second, a structural priming experiment, crossing the factors of STRUCTURE (passive vs. OS) and VERB REPETITION, will be performed to tap into the architecture of the grammatical encoding stage; third, a further structural priming experiment, crossing the factors of STRUCTURE and TOPIC STATUS of the patient via questions (general vs. patient-prominent). This manipulation of information structure allows testing the influences of derived accessibility on the production of non-canonical orders, on top of the influences by the inherent accessibility, i.e. animacy.

This series of experiments will also be performed simultanesouly with German and another variety of Chinese, i.e. Cantonese.

References:
Cai, Z., Pickering, M. J.,& Branigan, H. P. (2012). Mapping concepts to syntax: Evidence from structural priming in Mandarin Chinese. Journal of Memory and Language, 66, 833–849.

Huang, J., Pickering, M. J., Yang, J., Wang, S., & Branigan, H. P. (2016). The independence of syntactic processing in Mandarin: Evidence from structural priming. Journal of Memory and Language, 91, 81–98.