

陕西省社会科学基金项目(09K019)  
陕西师范大学优秀著作出版基金

资助

Second Language Acquisition  
of English Articles at the Interfaces

语言接口视角下的英语冠词  
二语习得研究

韦 理 著



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北 京

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

语言接口视角下的英语冠词二语习得研究 = Second language acquisition of English articles at the interfaces: 英文 / 韦理著. — 北京: 科学出版社, 2013.12

ISBN 978-7-03-039422-4

I. ①语… II. ①韦… III. ①英语-冠词-研究 IV. ①H314.2

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2013) 第 309952 号

责任编辑: 阎 莉 / 责任校对: 郭瑞芝

责任印制: 钱玉芬 / 封面设计: 无极书装

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北京东黄城根北街 16 号

邮政编码: 100717

<http://www.sciencep.com>

双青印刷厂印刷

科学出版社发行 各地新华书店经销

\*

2013 年 12 月第 一 版 开本: A5 (890 × 1240)

2013 年 12 月第一次印刷 印张: 9 5/8

字数: 400 000

定价: 58.00 元

(如有印装质量问题, 我社负责调换)

# 前 言

心智语言构造的接口条件观是当代生成语言学研究的重要发展,也是目前基于生成语法理论二语习得研究的核心问题。本书在当代生成语言学最简方案框架下,从语言接口视角出发,考察了中国学习者对英语冠词的习得,重点探讨了语言模块与认知模块之间的交互作用对二语英语冠词使用的影响。

英语冠词系统是第二语言习得中的一个难点。迄今已有不少研究从句法、语义或音系等层面,对冠词省略和误用进行了探讨。但这些研究很少涉及句法、语义特征和语境因素之间的交互作用对冠词习得可能造成的影响。英语冠词的使用涉及句法、语义和语用知识,探讨这些不同层面的知识在二语习得过程中的交互作用及其对二语冠词使用的影响,将有助于揭示造成二语变异性的深层原因。另外,以往研究也很少涉及母语为无冠词语言的限定性特征对二语冠词习得的影响。汉语虽然没有冠词,但其指示代词“这/那”具有限定语义特征,数量词“一”具有非限定语义特征,这些特征对二语接口习得是否会产生影响以及如何影响?对这一问题的回答有助于了解一语在二语接口中的作用。

为了深入探讨语言模块与认知模块的交互作用以及一语可能产生的影响,本研究聚焦语言接口复杂性与一语的交互作用对二语冠词习得的影响。据此,本研究将回答两个主要研究问题:1)一语特征对英语冠词习得是否有影响?2)语言的多模块复杂性是否影响英语冠词习得?

为了回答上述问题,本研究开展了四项实验。实验1主要考察一语语义特征如何影响二语初始状态冠词的习得。10名初级英语水平受试完成了一项强制选择提取任务。结果表明,母语的限定性特征对学习者的区分英语冠词的限定性有一定作用,但母语限定特征对英语冠词习得的作用不如非限定特征大。实验显示,受试对不定冠词 *a* 的习得明显好于定冠词 *the*,说明母语数量词“一”正向迁移作用大于指示代词,因为前者与不定冠词在语义上更为接近。

实验2主要考察中国学习者使用冠词时是否在限定性和特指性特征之间波动。40名中、高级英语水平受试和10名本族语者完成了与实验1相同的任务。结果表明,学习者没有在“冠词选择参数”的两个值之间波动,而是成功地设置了冠词的限定性语义特征,而特指性语义特征对冠词的选择影响不大。此外,学习者对限定性语义特征的习得受到二语水平的制约,中级组与本族语者在限定性语义特征的表达上存在显著差异,而高级组与本族语者无显著差异。研究表明,一语语义特征和二语输入的共同作用促进了学习者对限定性这一句法语义内部接口的习得。

实验3考察:1)英语冠词习得困难是句法损伤还是由接口困难造成;2)不同语用语境如何影响学习者对定冠词的习得。40名中、高级英语水平受试和10名本族语者完成了另一项强制选择提取任务。结果表明,单数名词前冠词使用正确率显著高于复数名词和不可数名词。复数和不可数是有标记范畴,单数是无标记范畴,有标记范畴句法特征更为复杂。在限定复数和不可数名词语境中,语境复杂性和句法特征复杂性的交互作用加重了二语者的信息加工负荷,影响了定冠词的正确使用。在非限定复数和不可数名词语境中,复杂的句法特征与语义特征的交互作用也影响了二语者的加工效率。由此可见,无论是内部接口还是外部接口,计算复杂性都会影响冠词的正确使用。

实验4考察:1)英语类指冠词习得的内、外部接口有何差异;2)一语语义特征和类指表达方式对英语类指冠词的习得有何影响。40名中、高级英语水平受试和10名本族语者完成了与实验3相同的强制选择提取任务,64名中、高级英语水平受试完成了一项单句翻译任务。结果表明,受试对内部接口的光杆复数类指习得明显好于对多接口的限定和不定单数类指的习得。此外,母语数量词“一”的语义特征和“光杆名词”表类指的方式对英语类指冠词的习得均有一定程度影响。该结果说明,外部接口或多接口比内部接口更难习得,多接口信息的加工与一语负迁移的交互作用增加了二语者的运算负荷,降低了二语加工效率,从而导致类指冠词使用的变异性。

本书从接口视角探讨了语言模块与非语言模块如何交互作用并影响英语冠词的二语习得。研究发现,1)一语语义特征的正迁移作用有助于二语者区分限定和非限定特征,而一语的负迁移作用则干扰了二语者对

限定和不定单数类指冠词的习得；2) 英语冠词所涉及的外部接口或多接口的交互作用导致接口计算复杂性，影响了二语学习者英语冠词的正确使用；3) 语言接口计算复杂性与一语的交互作用是造成二语学习者英语冠词习得随意性和不稳定性的主要原因。本研究结果为语言接口理论在语言和语言习得领域的应用提供了理论依据和实证支持，具有重要的理论和现实意义。

## Abstract

The interface-conditioned view of mental linguistic architecture is an important development in recent generative theory, and also a focus in second language acquisition research in the generative approach. Under the framework of the Minimalist Program, the book probes the L2 acquisition of English articles by Chinese-speaking learners, in particular the influence of the interaction of linguistic and cognitive modules on L2 article use from the perspective of linguistic interfaces.

The English article system is regarded as a difficulty in L2 acquisition. So far a number of studies have been conducted to reveal reasons underlying omission and substitution errors of English articles from the perspective of syntax, semantics or phonology. However, few of these studies touched the possible effect of the interaction of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features on the acquisition of articles. The correct use of English articles involves the integration of the knowledge of syntax, semantics and pragmatics, the study of which will help to reveal the underlying reason of L2 variability. Besides, previous studies seldom focused on the effect of definiteness from article-less L1s on the L2 acquisition of English articles. Chinese has no articles, but its demonstrative pronouns *zhei/nei* "this/that" have the definite feature, and its numeral *yi* "one" has the indefinite feature. Whether and how these features will influence the L2 acquisition at the interfaces is an important question, the answer to which will help understand the role of the L1 at the L2 interfaces.

The study is therefore aimed at investigating the influence of the interaction of the complexity of linguistic interfaces and the L1 on the

L2 acquisition of English articles. Four experiments are carried out to answer the following research questions: 1) Do L1 features affect L2 performance? 2) Does the complexity of multiple linguistic domains affect L2 performance?

Experiment 1 employed a forced choice elicitation task to investigate the influence of L1 semantic features on the L2 acquisition of English articles at the initial state in a sample of 10 Chinese-speaking beginners. Results show that the definiteness feature from the L1 had an effect on the acquisition of the definiteness feature of English articles; however, the influence of the indefinite feature was greater than that of the definite feature.

Experiment 2 employed the same task as Experiment 1 to determine whether Chinese-speaking learners of English will fluctuate between definiteness and specificity in a sample of 40 learners and 10 native speakers. Results indicate that the learners did not fluctuate between the two features of the Article Choice Parameter (ACP); instead, they could successfully set definiteness while specificity had little influence on article choice. Besides, L2 proficiency was a factor in the acquisition of definiteness; there was no significant difference between the advanced group and the native controls. Therefore, the interaction of L1 semantic features and input facilitates the acquisition of definiteness at the internal interface.

Experiment 3 adopted another forced choice elicitation task to examine: 1) whether the difficulty in L2 acquisition of English articles is due to syntactic deficit or interface difficulties; 2) how different pragmatic contexts will influence the acquisition of the definite article. 40 Chinese-speaking learners and 10 native speakers participated in the experiment. Results show that the use of articles before the singular noun was better than that before the plural and mass nouns. In the definite plural and mass noun contexts, the interaction of the complex pragmatic contexts and the complex syntactic features

greatly increased the learners' information processing load. In the indefinite plural and mass noun contexts, the interaction of the complex syntactic features and the semantic feature also influenced the L2 processing efficiency. Therefore, computational complexity will influence L2 article use at both the internal and external interfaces.

Experiment 4 adopted the same task as Experiment 3 and also a sentence translation task to investigate: 1) whether there are acquisition differences at the internal and external interfaces; 2) whether L1 semantic features and generic expression will influence L2 acquisition of English generic articles. 40 Chinese-speaking learners completed the two tasks and another 24 learners completed the sentence translation task. Results indicate that the acquisition of the bare plural generic was better than that of the definite and indefinite singular generics. The former one involves the internal interface while the latter two involve the external or multiple interfaces. Besides, the semantic feature of *yi* "one" and the generic expression in the L1 inhibited the acquisition of English generic articles. Therefore, the acquisition at the external or multiple interfaces is harder than that at the internal interface, due to the fact that the interaction of the processing at the multiple interfaces and the negative transfer of the L1 increases the computational load which decreases processing efficiency, thus leading to L2 variability.

In conclusion, the present study has found that: 1) the positive transfer of L1 semantic features has helped the L2 learner to differentiate the definite and specific features while the negative transfer of the L1 interferes in the acquisition of the definite and indefinite generic articles; 2) the external or multiple interfaces the articles involve lead to computational complexity which greatly influences L2 article use; 3) the interaction of computational complexity at linguistic interfaces and the L1 is the major reason underlying optionality in L2 article acquisition.

## List of Abbreviations

|           |                                       |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| ACP       | Article Choice Parameter              |
| Adv       | advanced speakers                     |
| $\pm$ arg | $\pm$ argument                        |
| CI        | conceptual-intentional                |
| Cl        | Classifier                            |
| CIP       | Classifier Phrase                     |
| CP        | Complementizer Phrase                 |
| CS        | the computational system              |
| D         | derivation                            |
| D(ET)     | Determiner                            |
| DP        | Determiner Phrase                     |
| Def       | Definiteness                          |
| DemP      | Demonstrative Phrase                  |
| EFL       | English as a foreign language         |
| FFFH      | Failed Functional Features Hypothesis |
| FH        | Fluctuation Hypothesis                |
| FLA       | first language acquisition            |
| H         | Hypothesis                            |
| H         | hearer                                |

|       |                                       |
|-------|---------------------------------------|
| HK    | Hearer Knowledge                      |
| IH    | Interface Hypothesis                  |
| IL    | interlanguage                         |
| Int   | intermediate speakers                 |
| IP    | Inflection Phrase                     |
| KP    | Classifier Phrase                     |
| LD    | left-dislocation                      |
| LF    | Logical Form                          |
| L1    | first language                        |
| L2    | second language                       |
| MISH  | Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis |
| MP    | Minimalist Program                    |
| n     | number of participants                |
| N     | Noun                                  |
| NP    | Noun Phrase                           |
| NMP   | Nominal Mapping Parameter             |
| NS    | Native Control Speakers               |
| NSP   | Null Subject Parameter                |
| Num   | Number                                |
| NumP  | Number Phrase                         |
| NumeP | Numeral Phrase                        |
| OPH   | Overt Parametrization Hypothesis      |

|            |                                      |
|------------|--------------------------------------|
| OQPT       | Oxford Quick Placement Test          |
| PF         | Phonological Form                    |
| PL         | Plural                               |
| PLD        | Primary Linguistic Data              |
| POS        | the poverty of the stimulus          |
| P&P        | the principles and parameters theory |
| $\pm$ pred | $\pm$ predicate                      |
| P-set      | pragmatic set                        |
| PTH        | Prosodic Transfer Hypothesis         |
| Q          | quantifier                           |
| QP         | Quantifier Phrase                    |
| $\pm$ R    | $\pm$ referential                    |
| RC         | relative clause                      |
| RD         | right-dislocation                    |
| RDH        | Representational Deficit Hypothesis  |
| S          | speaker                              |
| SFP        | sentence-final particle              |
| SLA        | second language acquisition          |
| SM         | sensorimotor                         |
| SMT        | Strong Minimalist Thesis             |
| $\pm$ spec | $\pm$ specific                       |
| spec       | specifier                            |

|          |                   |
|----------|-------------------|
| SR       | Speaker Referent  |
| SV       | subject-verb      |
| <i>t</i> | trace             |
| T(ns)    | Tense             |
| TP       | Tense Phrase      |
| u        | unvalued          |
| U        | use               |
| UG       | Universal Grammar |
| VP       | Verb Phrase       |
| VS       | verb-subject      |

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