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Syntactic Features of
the English Interlanguage
of Learners of English as
a Second Language

张铭润 著

英语学习者 的中介语 句法特征

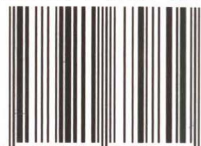


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本书论述了语言类型学的‘蕴含共性’在二语习得领域的实证性研究，其中包括Greenberg (1963) 的疑问句构成语序、Keenan 和 Comrie (1977) 的定语从句构成可及性层级以及Hawkins(1999) 基于加工动因的蕴含共性模式。研究结果显示，语言类型学的许多蕴含共性模式对英语中介语的句法特征具有解释作用。本书适合英语语言学和二语习得研究者、英语教师、硕士和博士研究生使用。

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Abstract

This study investigates syntactic features of the English interlanguage of adult ESL learners. The theoretical framework underlying the present study is mainly based on theories of linguistic typology and universals, particularly those of Hawkins (1999). Implicational universals such as the word order of interrogative question formation (Greenberg 1963), the Accessibility Hierarchy regarding relative clause formation (Keenan and Comrie 1977) and a number of processing-motivated implicational hierarchies/hypotheses in terms of filler-gap domains (Hawkins 1999) were examined in the study in order to test the extent to which the syntactic features of the English interlanguage of ESL learners can support the predictions made by these typological universals.

Data for the study was collected from about sixty international students studying at Monash University English Language Centre via a collection of written essays from the subjects as well as a number of tasks including a conversation (comprising an interview and a role-play), elicited repetition, sentence combination and grammaticality judgment. Data collection was carried out among learners of different language-speaking backgrounds at different proficiency levels. Results of the study show that the syntactic features studied in the subjects' English interlanguage predominantly support the implicational universals under examination regardless of the English proficiency levels and first languages of the subjects, lending support to the implicational universals as valid predictors for the phenomena of second language acquisition. More significantly, the processing-motivated explanation for the implicational universals in terms of filler-gap domains (Hawkins 1999) provides a unifying account, which can address adequately both the regularities and irregularities of the interlanguage syntactic features under study.

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Abbreviations

Det = determiner
DO = direct object
ESL = English as a second language
GEN = genitive/possessor noun phrase
IO = indirect object
L1 = first language
L2 = second language
N = noun
NP = noun phrase
OBL = oblique object
OCOMP = object of comparison
Prep = preposition
PP = prepositional phrase
RC (Rel) = relative clause
SLA = second language acquisition
SU = subject
V = verb
VP = verb phrase

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Introduction

1.1. Research Questions

The present research is a study of syntactic features in the interlanguage of ESL learners from the perspective of linguistic typology. The overall purpose of the research is to determine to what extent syntactic features of the interlanguage of ESL learners can be shown to reflect some of the language universals such as implicational universals and grammatical hierarchies found in the linguistic typology. Put more specifically, the research is to investigate which syntactic features in the interlanguage development of ESL learners in a second language setting are in accordance with the patterns of typological universals and which are not and why. The research aims to provide a framework for describing and explaining the features of interlanguage development of ESL learners; however, implications for linguistic typology will also be addressed. The research questions for the study are:

- 1) How are adult ESL learners developing their interlanguage at the syntactic level?
- 2) Are there any syntactic features in the interlanguage of ESL learners that reflect the typological universals reported in the literature of typology?
- 3) Are there any syntactic features in the interlanguage of ESL learners that violate the constraints of typological universals?

1.2. Underlying Theoretical Framework—Typological Approach and Universals

Modern linguistics sees a number of different schools of thought addressing the fundamental question, “What is a possible human language?”; among them are two major approaches — Generative Grammar and Language Typology, both of which are engaged in uncovering the universality of language. Though the two approaches share some commonalities in trying to delimit the universal constraints on language structure (particularly at the syntactic level) and to reach the abstraction of universals, they are diametrically opposed to each other in their basic underlying assumptions and methodologies.

The generative approach represented by Noam Chomsky and his fellow researchers claims that all human beings are genetically endowed with an innate language faculty. This faculty contains a 'Universal Grammar' (UG) that enables the child to learn rapidly any complex and mature grammatical system in the world and the core of this innate UG must be embedded in any human language. Under this rationalist view of language, the universality of language is deductively sought within only a limited number of languages such as English. The UG thus formulated is consistently explained in terms of the abstract formal constructs of syntactic structures in line with its formalist autonomy thesis (independent of semantic and functional considerations) no matter what evolutionary phase it is in (e. g. Chomsky 1965, 1981a and 1993 representing the classical generative approach, principles-and-parameters approach and minimalist approach respectively).

In contrast, the typological approach represented by Joseph Greenberg and subsequent researchers holds that the universality of languages can only be discovered through the comparative examination of a large variety of world languages. Thus formulated crosslinguistic generalisations represent universal constraints on human language which could otherwise be missed through examining a single language or a few languages. Accordingly, empirical methods are applied in sampling a variety of languages, universal patterns and constraints discovered in the crosslinguistic data focus on surface form and meaning, and explanations sought for the universals are multidimensional including language-external factors such as functional factors as well as language-internal factors such as structural and diachronic factors.

There has been some increased interest in integrating typology into generative grammatical theory (Greenberg 1991b; Fukui 1995), despite the fact that there have been some attacks on the typological approach to universals by generativists (e. g. Coopmans 1983, 1984). Hawkins (1988b) and Greenberg (1991b) argue that the two approaches are complementary, each having its own strengths. Shibatani and Bynon (1995) further suggest that these two approaches are converging in the sense that the typological assumptions have influenced the significant shift in the orientation of UG to the 'principles-and-parameters' approach, which in turn has had a greater impact on typological studies dealing with entirely unrelated languages. In fact, the typological approach is argued by Hawkins (1988b) to have certain advantages over the generative approach in documenting large scale variation across numerous languages, revealing crosslinguistic patterns therein and identifying interacting explanatory principles behind those patterns. In view of the nature of the present study, in which syntactic features of the interlanguage of ESL learners from different language speaking backgrounds are under examination, the typological approach to universals is adopted as the basic theoretical framework that underlies the present study.

Modern syntactic typology is taken to represent the tradition of crosslinguis-

tic study of morphosyntactic^① properties beginning with Greenberg's word order universals and continued largely by American linguists (Croft 1995), hence often referred to as the Greenbergian linguistic typology (Croft 1995; Song 2001). Since Greenberg's original work on word order, typologists have developed four basic types of typological universals — implicational universals, markedness, grammatical hierarchies, and prototypes.

An *implicational universal* is a fundamental type of universal characteristic of most typological research. It captures a pattern of co-occurrence regularities between two language parameters in the form "If a language has P, then it also has Q". Another important type of typological generalisation is *markedness*, which "is a property of a grammatical category such that it displays one or more of a cluster of grammatical asymmetries cross-linguistically" (Croft 1995: 106). It is different from the Prague school notion of markedness in that the former is a crosslinguistic generalisation applicable to function as well as form and with an emphasis on behavioural and frequency criteria. A *grammatical hierarchy* characterises a pattern of crosslinguistic variation in the form of ranking of members within the same grammatical category. It is more complex than the former two in that it can be derived from a chain of implicational universals or it can be seen as a series of markedness patterns in which relative rather than absolute values of markedness are adopted. A typological *prototype* is "an ideal example of a category" (Whaley 1997: 289), which characterises a pattern of crosslinguistic variation in the form of a cluster of grammatical values defined in other categories. An 'ideal' grammatical form should possess all these grammatical values, hence prototypical, while a grammatical form lacking one or more of these grammatical values is prototypically marked or even loses its category membership.

As can be seen, these types of universals do not stand alone all by themselves; rather they are interrelated to one another. For instance, markedness underlies the various grammatical hierarchies and prototypes and their interactions, and the marked-unmarked relationship of singular and plural can be captured in the implicational universal: "If the plural is expressed by the absence of a morpheme, then so is the singular." (Croft 1990: Chapters 4-6)

The major crosslinguistic patterns and their interactions have been applied widely by typologists to address a range of morphosyntactic phenomena across languages. In word order typology, emphasis has moved from simple implicational universals which prove to be very effective in capturing patterns of word order in Greenberg (1963), to more complex and exceptionless implicational universals such as Hawkins (1983) and statistically significant implicational universals such as Dryer (1992). The issue of morpheme order is also dealt with in light of implicational universals (Hawkins and Gilligan 1988). Markedness patterns can be found in various grammatical categories, including

① 'Morphosyntactic' instead of 'syntactic' is used here because of the blurred division between morphology and syntax in modern syntactic typological studies (Croft 1995: 85).

hierarchies (Greenberg 1966) and prototypes (Croft 1990). For instance, in discussing the distinction between direct-indirect object system and primary-secondary object system, Dryer (1986) shows that direct and primary objects are less marked than indirect and secondary objects by the frequency as well as structural and behavioral criteria of markedness. In comparing the relative clause forming strategies used by a number of languages, Keenan and Comrie (1977) formulate a grammatical relations hierarchy of relativisation, i. e. 'accessibility hierarchy' (AH: subject < direct object < indirect object < oblique); in the hierarchy, all languages must be able to relativise subjects, all the possible relativised NP positions in a language should be contiguous, but languages vary at different cut-off positions down the hierarchy. Hopper and Thompson's (1980) study of transitivity is a well-known application of prototype analysis to grammatical categories across grammars. They propose a set of prototypical transitive features across related grammatical categories; typologically, these features are all concerned with the transitivity of a clause, but a particular language has conventionalised a particular set of features that affect the transitivity of a clause.

Similarly, in the present study, some other typological universals as well as the implicational universal regarding question acquisition order and the accessibility hierarchy regarding relative clause formation are examined and the interlanguage data are addressed in terms of these typological universals and their interactions.

The crosslinguistic patterns as well as the basic typological universals discovered from the studies of the world's languages have formed the typological proper of defining and limiting possible variation in human languages. However, these typological universals are in large part observational and descriptive, and are therefore low-level generalisations; but they provide the data that a theory of language must account for. With the discovery of universal patterns across languages, typologists have been seeking higher-level generalisations, i. e. deeper principles that underlie the universals, from either internal language system or considerations outside of the language system. Since the 1970s, modern syntactic typology has evolved into a functional-typological approach as a theory of grammar, which seeks deeper principles from external motivations to account for crosslinguistic patterns (Croft 1990, 1995).

Externally motivated explanations for observed universals have been sought in related areas of functions such as economy, iconicity, discourse, perception-cognition and processing. The economic motivation or 'economy' is an important principle that the more frequently used expressions tend to have fewer morphemes. This motivation pervades grammatical expression and offers a plausible explanation for most markedness patterns and some other aspects of grammar and typology (Haiman 1985). The iconic motivation or 'iconicity' is another important principle that the form of linguistic expressions reflects in some way the real-world structure of experience. This semantically-oriented account of grammatical structure is sought in isomorphism (one form, one

meaning) (Haiman 1980, 1985) and the relations between conceptual distance and linguistic distance (Givón 1980; Haiman 1985; Bybee 1985). A discourse-based external explanation is the communicative motivation, the principle that language is capable of expressing all the conceptual structures via some grammatical means. This motivation underlies the typological conspiracies, in which logically independent grammatical processes 'conspire' differently in different languages to achieve the same effect (Croft 1995). A conspiracy is observed in some languages (e.g. Bantu languages: only subjects and objects can be relativised) by Givón (1979) between accessibility of NP relativisation and 'promotion' of noun phrases lower in the AH such as oblique object to a higher position such as object; in these languages, virtually any noun phrase can be relativised in the light of conspiracy. The perceptual-cognitive motivation is particularly exemplified in the area of lexical semantics (Whaley 1997). The implicational hierarchy of basic colour terms in language (white-black > green-yellow > blue > brown) proposed by Berlin and Kay (1969) shows that there exist universal constraints on the types of possible basic color lexicons. These constraints are perception-grounded arising from the structure and function of the visual system (Kay and McDaniel 1978).

Finally, the processing motivation is one of the most important principles that have been used to account for crosslinguistic patterns. The fundamental assumption of this principle is that all humans share similar processing constraints which lead them to avoid structures that are hard to understand and produce and to favour structures that facilitate rapid comprehension and production, and that consequently, these processing constraints are imposed on the structure of their grammars. The processing-motivated explanation underlies Dryer's Branching Direction Theory (1992) and particularly a series of works of Hawkins. Hawkins (1985, 1988) appeals to processing evidence and principles in psycholinguistics in addressing crosslinguistic regularities regarding suffixation preference and co-occurrence of affixation and basic word orders. Later, Hawkins (1990, 1993, 1994) develops a global principle — the Early Immediate Constituents (EIC) as a major processing principle in his parsing theory of word order universals. Recently, Hawkins (1999) has furthered his processing explanation for crosslinguistic patterns in terms of filler-gap dependencies. The EIC and Hawkins' (1999) recent processing account can be regarded as both internally- and externally-motivated explanations, i.e. explanations that incorporate insights from generative grammar as well as from psycholinguistics.

To conclude, the functionally-oriented typological approach to universals is "an 'approach' to the study of language that contrasts with prior approaches, such as American structuralism and generative grammar. In this definition, typology is an approach to linguistic theorizing, or more precisely a methodology of linguistic analysis (Croft 1995: 86). Based on this typological approach in general and Hawkins (1999) in particular, the present study is a test of the applicability of some implicational universals and hierarchies in terms of filler-gap

dependencies in second language acquisition. Validating the adopted theoretical framework for the research is a detailed literature review in Chapter Two.

1.3. Typological Approach and Second Language Acquisition

1.3.1. Typological Approach in Second Language Acquisition

It is argued by some typologists that the typological approach, which is viable in investigating linguistic universals across languages, should also hold for language acquisition. Hawkins holds that implicational universals for diachronic as well as synchronic predictions should be manifested in language acquisition prediction as well; “in language acquisition as in historical change, the consequent may be acquired first, or both may be acquired simultaneously, and all that we can rule out is the acquisition of the antecedent prior to the consequent, since there are no language of this type currently attested.” (1990: 99) Comrie has made the statement that, apart from the investigation of a wide range of primary languages, “Another area where one can study spontaneous innovation is in child language. . . Similarly, one could study the acquisition of a second language, to see if any universals are mirrored in its acquisition process, especially in cases where those universals are not the subject of direct evidence in either the native language or the target language.” (1981: 222)

Eckman describes the viability of the approach in SLA on two grounds: “First, its claims about SLA are readily testable. And second, it defines a fruitful program of research.” (1993: 64) By the ‘testability’ of the approach, the universal generalizations formulated as implicational statements can be tested empirically on secondary languages including interlanguages, and can be accounted for by “Whatever linguistic theory ultimately proves defensible” (Eckman 1993: 65). And by the ‘fruitfulness’ of the approach, “The intent of typological generalizations is to characterize the range of possible variation in human languages” and “an obvious relationship can be stated between typological generalizations and the explanation of facts about secondary languages” (Eckman 1993: 66). Concerning secondary-language acquisition, typological universals are claimed to be employed to make predictions about degree of difficulty (Eckman 1977), language transfer (Gass 1979), and order of acquisition (Hyltenstam 1984) with respect to various target structures. From within an essentially Chomskyan approach, Yip and Matthews (1995) also make an attempt to include typological issues such as topic-prominence into theories of interlanguage.

Eckman (1991) postulated the interlanguage structural conformity hypothesis (ISCH) stating that the universal generalizations that hold for the primary languages also hold for interlanguages. The ISCH was tested against two principles of interlanguage phonetic structure, the fricative-stop principle and the