

Xiaojun Wang

CHINESE SYNTACTIC SYSTEM AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

华语语法习得探讨



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ACQUISITION

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PREFACE

Although the history of Chinese language can be traced back to the second millennium in an unbroken tradition, the systematic study of its grammar did not begin until the late nineteenth century. After the publication of the first Chinese grammar *Mǎ Shì Wén Tōng* (马氏文通) by Mǎ Jiàn Zhōng (马建忠) in 1898, Chinese linguists have never stopped studying and debating on Chinese syntactic structures for over one hundred years. Especially in recent decades, along with the development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the questions on how to teach foreign students Chinese grammar based on their acquisition features have become a fast growing subfield of applied linguistics.

The aim of this book is to examine the relation between the teaching of Chinese syntax and the acquisition process by adult learners in order to establish a pedagogical system which would better reflect the nature of Chinese language and better serve the purpose of teaching Chinese grammar as a second language (L2).

Since the development of teaching Chinese as a second language is closely related to the theories in foreign language education, I have attempted to conduct a comparative study on contemporary theories on second language learning and their application to teaching practice in this book. Five categories of which have been identified and examined. Due to the data collected for current theoretical conclusions are mainly drawn

from European languages , it is clear that a more accessible theory to the practice of language teaching has to be complemented by a thorough pedagogical research on different languages.

For this reason, I have tried to provide a Chinese linguistic background through a review of the features of Chinese syntax and three different syntactic analytic systems. A further study of pedagogical Chinese syntax was conducted by investigating the teaching materials and methods introduced in three commonly used Chinese textbooks.

The major theme of this book is to identify adult learners' acquisition features of Chinese syntax and the pedagogical principles for teaching accordingly. To achieve this goal, the surveys were designed to probe the learners' acquisition process, and the analyses of the surveys have been summarized into nine acquisition features by adult learners, and nine pedagogical principles for the Chinese syntax teaching.

It is my hope that this book can build up a bridge to connect the research on Chinese syntax and the practice of teaching Chinese as a L2 from the pedagogical point of view.

During the course of preparing this book, I would like to express my special thanks to Dr. Richard A. Demers of the University of Arizona. His insight, erudition, experience, patience and fine sense of humor are absolutely essential in the development of my interest and my thought. I would also like to thank Dr. Marie C. Chan, Dr. Ronald C. Miao, and Dr. Feng-hsi Liu who have read the entire manuscript and provided me with valuable comments. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the Advisory Committee of the Department of Asian and

Middle Eastern Languages and the professors at Western Michigan University for their inspiration and support. My sincere appreciation is also to all the students for their enthusiastic participation in the studies. I have a special feeling of gratitude to many students who have taken Chinese classes with me at The Beijing Language and Culture University, The University of Arizona, EASLI of Indiana University, and Western Michigan University.

I am indebted to Sinolingua for its generous support. I am also fortunate to have Jia Yinhuai, Zhang Wangxi for their editorial advice. However, none of the individuals or organizations mentioned above is in any way responsible for the errors and general content of this book.

前 言

尽管有文字可考的汉语史可以一直追溯到公元前一千多年,但是对汉语语法的系统研究却直到 19 世纪才开始。从第一部语法专著马建忠的《马氏文通》于 1898 年出版以后,近一百多年来,汉语言学家从未停止过对汉语语法结构的争论与研究。尤其是近些年中,随着汉语作为第二语言教学的发展,如何根据学习者的需要及习得特点来进行汉语语法教学,已成为应用语言学中发展迅速的一个分支。

本书的目的就是试图探讨汉语语法教学与第二语言学习者的习得过程之间的关系,以求建立起一个以外国学生的习得特点为依据的从而能清楚地反映汉语语言特点同时更有效地为汉语作为第二语言教学服务的教学语法系统。

由于汉语作为第二语言的教学发展与外语教学理论密切相关,我在本书中试图对现代比较有影响力的五种外语教学理论及其对教学实践的影响作了一个简要的比较研究。鉴于这些理论的研究数据大多来自印欧语,很明显,这些理论有必要通过对其他语言的教学研究来得到补充和完善。因此,本书不仅对汉语句法的特点和三种常用的分析方法做了初步剖析,也对三套常用的对外汉语教材的句法教学方法进行了调查比较,以期为读者提供一份汉语作为第二语言教学中语法教学部分的背景材料。

本书的主要论题在于研究并归纳总结成年学生对汉语语法的主要习得特点,并在此基础上确定教学的基本原则。为此,我有目的地设计了问卷调查,并对不同学校和不同水平的学生的答卷结果进行分析,总结出成年学生在学习汉语句法过程中的九个习得特点,并有针

对性地提出九条教学原则。

本书希望能够通过这一探索,向读者提供一座旨在把汉语句法研究和汉语作为第二语言的教学实践紧密连接起来的桥梁。

在撰写此书的过程中,我要特别感谢美国亚利桑那大学的 Richard A. Demers 博士。他在这一学术领域中的远见卓识、丰富经验以及高尚的人品都极大地影响了我的研究兴趣和学术观点。我也要感谢 Marie Chan, Ronald Miao 和 Fengshi Liu 等博士在读完全稿以后所提的宝贵建议。我还要向美国西密执安大学东亚中东语言系顾问委员会和有关教授对我的鼓励和支持致谢。除此之外,对我在北京语言学院、美国亚利桑那大学、印第安那大学暑期语言学院和西密大执教期间的学生,我也怀着特殊的感激之情。

最后,我还想对华语教学出版社的支持深表谢意,并庆幸得到了华语教学出版社贾寅淮总编的指导帮助。但是,本书的疏漏谬误之处,概由作者本人负责。

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese language, like other languages around the world, is rule-governed behavior. Someone who knows Chinese must have the knowledge of syntactic rules which is demonstrated by his competence and performance. In other words, Chinese syntax is the network of sentence structural rules by which a Chinese speaker can combine words to form longer units of meaning accurately and systematically. However, there are two basic ways to acquire the syntactic rules: one way is the intuitive acquisition processes where learners do so without being given rules and without having consciously analyzed what they are doing, such as first language acquisition by children; the other way is the conscious learning processes where learners follow given rules devised by language teachers and linguists, such as occurs in second language learning by adults. One of the fundamental problems in the area of teaching Chinese as a second language is to discover the differences between these two types of syntactic acquisition processes. It is the intention of this book to investigate how Chinese syntactic rules are acquired by adult learners, and how they might best be taught based on the investigation and analyses of students' learning processes. This book will integrate different approaches in syntactic analyses and syntactic teaching, especially those related to teaching Chinese to English speaking adults, and work

towards a framework of Chinese pedagogical syntax. In doing so, the discussion will focus on the syntactic acquisition process by adult learners in terms of acquisition features, the influences from the native language, and different teaching methods and learning strategies.

1.1 A Truly Foreign Syntactic System for English Speakers

According to the Modern Language Association (MLA) statistics (Brod, 1988), the enrollment growth rate of Chinese language class is one of the highest in the U.S. in recent years at the college level (with a 29 percent growth between 1983 and 1986), and more than likely this rate will continue to increase in the future. However, Chinese language is still one of the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs) in the U.S., and enrollments in all of the LCTLs only constitute approximately 5-8 percent of the total foreign language enrollments in colleges and universities.

The above figures show that college students in the U.S., on the one hand, are getting more and more interested in Chinese language for political, economic and cultural reasons. On the other hand, most students do not want to take Chinese because it is not only one of the LCTLs, but also a truly foreign language for native English speakers. Based on the degree of learning difficulty, the Foreign Service Institute and the Defense Language Institute have divided various foreign languages into four categories (with 1 being the least difficult to 4 being the most difficult). Chinese is ranked in category 4. This classification indi-

cates that Chinese is much harder for native English speakers to learn when compared with the other foreign languages from category 1 to category 3 (Category 1, the easiest, includes French, German, and Spanish; category 2, Greek, Hindi, Bulgarian; and category 3 Hebrew, Russian, Turkish). In order to reach an adequate level of proficiency, as determined by standardized proficiency tests, students studying Chinese require 175 percent more time than those studying languages in category 1 (Walton, 1992).

Why does Chinese take so much time for English speakers to learn? There are at least three reasons:

- 1) Chinese characters—a non-alphabetic writing system;
- 2) Different linguistic code, such as the syntactic system;
- 3) Different pragmatic usage of sentences in real life situations.

Clearly, Chinese syntax plays an important role in the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language, and is one of the main reasons for the source of learning difficulties. As a truly foreign syntactic system to English speakers, its features have been presented in the ways listed below: First, the sentence structures have been either presented in the tonal alphabet system (such as *pinyin*), or in the Chinese writing system (characters), both of which are entirely alien to English speakers. In addition, the written forms are not related to spoken Chinese according to the learner's viewpoint when he or she compares Chinese with his or her native language. Second, the system is different from English not just in the sentence structures, but also in conceptual schemes. Third, the usage of sentences for interpersonal and intercultural communication

is different from the usage in English. For most English speakers, the differences between the Chinese syntactic system and the English one is much greater than the differences among the Indo-European languages. In other words, English speaking learners are more prepared to acquire a syntactic system of another Indo-European language than Chinese, since they are already members of an Indo-European culture and language and have already been equipped with the framework of English syntactic system which can serve as a universal grammar when they are learning another Indo-European language. The Chinese syntactic system, however, is quite different from that of English. There is little in common between two systems carried over from the learner's knowledge and experience of his native language. When he or she starts to learn Chinese, he or she lacks a great deal of background. Therefore, it is expected that the teaching and learning strategies for Chinese syntax should be different from that used for the teaching of Indo-European languages.

In order to ease adult learners' difficulties in learning Chinese syntax and speed up the whole learning process, it is important to find out what the influences from a learner's syntactic knowledge of his first language are; how to describe the Chinese syntactic system to English speakers; and how the system is acquired, and what the best strategies for teaching and learning are.

1.2 The Place of Teaching Syntax in L2 Acquisition

For nearly ten years in the past, the major argument in the field of

teaching Chinese as a second language has been over “the proficiency movement”. As a reaction to the emphasis on language proficiency, the place of syntax in language instruction has been questioned or ignored.

Historically, the common practice in the field of foreign language teaching had placed an almost exclusive emphasis on grammar, without attention to the development of actual language skills. Learners were taught the structure of the language instead of the ability to communicate in the language. Due to the overemphasis on grammar, the controversy surrounding the status of grammar has been raised in second language pedagogy since the late 1970s.

It is almost universally agreed upon that the ultimate goal for learning a second language is to be able to use it in real life situations. According to this goal, some linguists claim that learners can learn how to communicate by practicing communication, therefore, the “formal accuracy” in the beginning stages should be neither required nor expected (Savignon, 1983). Under the influence and guidance of the proficiency movement, Chinese curriculum, textbooks and tests have been developed with the focus on what a learner can deal with in real life by using Chinese. The learners are often asked to perform tasks, such as banking, shopping, traveling, even at the beginning stage. As a result, the role of syntactic teaching has been downplayed. Some adult learners are able to use broken Chinese to perform tasks in a real life situations after a short time of learning, but ultimately they are rarely able to get beyond the survival level without acquiring a systematic infrastructure.

The proficiency-based approach has been a mainstream in the field

of teaching Chinese as a second language for over one decade, and it has provided some pedagogical insights for many teachers. However, not all of the Chinese teachers share the same opinions, and more and more teachers and learners started to question this approach and its results. Some of them still believe that “formal instruction in grammar can be seen as one key element in producing expert language learners who will develop the independent capacity to gather and assimilate information and skills on their own through contact with native speakers” (Richard, 1993).

It is a fact that formal syntactic instruction cannot only provide learners with a systematical infrastructure, but also prepare them for further learning on their own. Grammar training and functional approach are not mutually exclusive, but mutually interdependent. In order to be able to use the target language in real life situations, it requires not only the skills for situational conversation, but also the competence in the syntactic system. “It is extremely important that students become familiar with the structural properties of languages other than English” (Demers and Farmer, 1991:ix). The early emphasis on grammatical accuracy tends to solve the problems of misunderstanding and misproducing sentences in communication, and reduce survival-terminal cases among many adult learners. This is especially the case, since Chinese syntax is a truly foreign system for English speaking learners; it therefore requires even more attention and formal training. It is important to have a compromise or integrated approach and establish a middle ground between the two extremes. In other words, we need to balance the emphases on