

**L2 Acquisition  
of Chinese Unaccusative Verbs  
by English-speaking Learners**

**英语母语者对汉语  
非宾格动词的第二语言习得研究**

◎薛常明 著



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# **To the memory of my dear mother**

HE Pinying (何品英)

1943–2003

**“We are here like a flower — to bloom  
and die.”**

Jacques Cousteau

## 序

词汇是外语学习和外语使用中最重要的部分，但同时也是让外语学习者最感头疼的事：且不说新单词的学习贯穿于整个外语学习的过程，就是学会正确使用那些已经十分熟悉的单词有时也需要漫长的时间。

非宾格动词就是属于这类易学难掌握的单词。说它容易学，是因为作为不及物动词，它的句法结构简单，主干为主语+动词；说它难掌握，是因为它的句法结构与非作格动词（也是不及物动词）的相同，但句子主语的功能却大相径庭。在非作格动词的句子中，主语是动词动作的执行者，但在非宾格动词的句子中，主语不是动词动作的执行者，且通常具有及物动词宾语的特点。因此，尽管学习者能感觉到非宾格动词的主语并非动作的执行者，但往往错误地把它视为非宾格动词的宾语而在使用中经常用被动语态来表示主语和动词之间的关系，因而造成“过度被动”的现象。另外值得注意的是，对非宾格动词的误用既非局限于初学者，也非局限于操某种特定母语的学习者。大量的研究表明，学习者不论其外语水平高低，也不论其母语属于哪种类型，都会出现误用非宾格动词的现象。

非宾格动词难掌握这一现象引起了广大二语习得研究者的浓厚兴趣，因为解决这一问题对了解语义-句法这一语言界面对二语习得的影响有十分重要的理论意义，同时对外语词汇教学也有一定的现实意义。尽管对非宾格动词习得的研究已有不少，但对产生这一现象的解释长期以来却是众说纷纭，莫衷一是，一直到2001年日本学者Oshita在全面分析相关研究的基础上提出了“非宾格陷阱假设”（*Unaccusativity Trap Hypothesis*），推测出非宾格动词误用的原因，并预测了非宾格动词习得必须经过的三个阶段，这才形成了一个比较全面完整的解释。但是，由于这一假说并非在实证研究的基础上提出的，其有效性究竟如何还需经过实证检验才能作出判断。

薛常明博士的专著对Oshita的“非宾格陷阱假设”进行了检验。据我所知，这是该领域对这一假设进行的第一次实证检验，获得了许多宝

贵的数据,使人们对造成非宾格动词习得困难的复杂因素有了更加全面的认知。具体而言,该研究对非宾格动词习得研究领域主要有以下三点贡献:

第一,针对“非宾格陷阱假设”在利用汉语语料方面的明显不足,对汉语非宾格动词进行了更为深入细致的分析,并以此为基础建立了汉语非宾格动词层级体系。这一体系的重要性在于,它为进行汉语非宾格动词和其他语言非宾格动词之间的跨语言对比提供了坚实的语言学基础。有了这么一个基础,未来在研究不同母语的学习者如何习得汉语非宾格动词时就有可能更全面、更准确地判断学习者的母语与目的语之间的异同,进而根据二语习得理论对学习者的习得困难和习得路径作出更为准确的预测。

第二,针对“非宾格陷阱假设”只对学习者的习得行为作出描述性的预测,但缺乏理论上的解释这一不足,补充了“标记性假说”(Markedness Hypothesis)这一二语习得理论,用于解释假说所预测的习得行为产生的原因,首次从理论的高度对非宾格动词习得的语言认知心理过程进行比较全面的归纳。这一做法的重要意义在于,将研究假说建立在具有心理现实性的二语习得理论基础之上,有助于对所观察到的习得行为进行更为深入的探讨,同时根据调查结果得出的结论也更具有心理现实性。

第三,该专著的实证调查设计规范、严谨,获得的数据有效、可靠,具有较强的说服力,为今后采用理论先行模式的非宾格动词习得实证研究提供了一个良好的范例。这里我想特别指出该实证研究的两个亮点:一是在选择受试者时充分考虑外国人学汉语的特点,采取多项措施以确保受试者的汉语水平有显著的差异,使得观察非宾格动词的发展路径成为可能。在中国要找不同英语水平的受试容易,但要找到不同汉语水平的受试者就困难得多。二是调查工具的设计精细。由于语言理论准备充分,对测试动词的选择十分准确、完整,有助于全面了解汉语非宾格动词习得的情况。

除了理论上的贡献之外,该专著结构严谨、用词准确、行文流畅,虽然用英文撰写,但只要具备一定的相关知识,读起来并不难。总而言之,这是一部学术性和可读性俱佳的学术专著。

2001 年常明在我指导下开始攻读博士学位，其间他经历了慈母突然去世、“非典”期间调查中断等一系列的困难和挫折，其历尽的艰辛非一般的博士生能比，但他凭着坚强的意志，踏踏实实，一步一个脚印，经过四年锲而不舍的努力，终于高质量地完成了博士论文。今天，在这部学术专著即将面世之际，我向常明表示祝贺，并希望他再接再厉，在追求学术的道路上走得更远。

吴旭东

2007 年 5 月 24 日

## Acknowledgements

Once, I imagined a monograph to be the result of a great flash of inspiration: one waited until the Muse tickled, grabbed a pen, tapped into that electric impulse, and wrote furiously. Four years at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies have taught me otherwise. Monographs are not written in solitude, and therefore I'd like to acknowledge some of the people who have shared the role of Muse in the writing of this monograph.

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Deeply indebted to my wife and my son, who have constantly reminded me of the meaning of life.

This monograph is dedicated, with love, to my family and to the memory of my dear mother.

## Abstract

The present study investigates, within the framework of semantics and syntax correspondence, the L2 acquisition of Chinese unaccusative verbs by adult English-speaking learners, which poses a linking problem for theoretical linguists and a learnability problem for L2 learners. The Unaccusative Hypothesis (UH) divides traditional intransitive verbs into two classes: unaccusatives and unergatives. The former takes a D-structure object and no subject, whereas the latter takes a D-structure subject and no object. The distinction between these two classes is a universal phenomenon existing across languages, despite the fact that unaccusativity in different languages may be realized in different ways.

A preliminary reading of the relevant literature reveals that unaccusative verbs have been a source of learning problems for L2 learners from various L1 backgrounds. But the L2 that has been mostly investigated is English and the research designs of most studies are not experimental in nature. As a result, researchers can only base their interpretations for the observed learning outcomes on widely different clues in their particular studies. Oshita (2001) attempted at rectifying the current situation by proposing Unaccusative Trap Hypothesis (UTH), which tries to account for a variety of non-target phenomena observed with L2 acquisition of unaccusatives in a number of different languages. However, UTH is not without problems, especially with respect of the validity of the linguistic evidence from Chinese unaccusatives that has been used to support the claims about the route of development.

To overcome the weaknesses of UTH, a more fine-grained cross-linguistic analysis of unaccusativity was first made, with an emphasis on the similarities and differences of unaccusativity in Eng-

lish and Chinese. In the analysis, “surface” unaccusativity of Chinese was discussed and the diagnostics accepted as reliable ones for Chinese unaccusativity were explored. More importantly, Chinese Unaccusativity Hierarchy was proposed on the basis of the previous studies, which covers seven major subclasses of Chinese unaccusatives, arranged in order of closeness to the core notion of the hierarchy.

Based on the UTH and the acquisitional implications of the cross-linguistic differences for English learners of Chinese, 8 specific predictions were made regarding the development route followed by English-L1 learners in their acquisition of Chinese unaccusatives, which was investigated by a cross-sectional approach using a writing production task and a grammaticality judgement task. Sixty L2 learners of three different levels (*i.e.*, low, intermediate and advanced), together with 20 native speakers of Chinese, participated in the investigation.

The results of the present investigation confirm the basic idea of UTH, which states that the distinction of unaccusatives and unergatives may not exist at early stages of L2 acquisition and that the targetlike grammar becomes attainable only after L2 learners can differentiate correctly unaccusatives from unergatives in their IL lexicon. However, with respect to particular syntactic structures of the typical Chinese unaccusatives, as well as issues concerning Chinese aspect markers and hierarchical order of Chinese unaccusative, *plough-shaped* instead of *U-shaped* developmental patterns are observed. Such factors as elements in target language input (including language learning environment, L1 learners’ knowledge of target language, *e.g.*, Chinese aspect markers), lexical semantic-to-syntactic linking rules, as well as the influence of learner’s L1 play important parts in shaping the developmental route of the present investigation.

## 中文摘要

本专著在语义—句法关联理论的大框架下研究成人英语母语者对汉语非宾格动词的第二语言习得过程。根据非宾格假设,传统意义上的不及物动词可以进一步分为两类:非宾格动词和非作格动词。前者带有深层宾语,但没有深层主语,而后者则只带有深层主语,缺少深层宾语。这种区分是一种跨语言的普遍现象,尽管在不同的语言中非宾格性的实现方式不尽相同。

相关文献表明,不同母语背景的学习者在习得第二语言中的非宾格动词时都会遇到问题。但是前人研究中所涉及的第二语言绝大部分是英语,而且这些研究采用的都是非实证的研究设计。因此,研究者们只能在各自的研究中对所观察到的现象进行推测性的解释。Oshita 试图克服这个弱点,于是在2001年提出了“非宾格陷阱假设”,力图对多种语言非宾格动词习得研究中出现的各种现象进行统一的解释。但是,Oshita的模式也存在问题,特别是他引用来证明习得路径的有关汉语非宾格动词的证据在可靠性方面存在问题。

为了克服“非宾格陷阱假设”的不足,本研究首先对非宾格现象进行了跨语言的详尽分析,重点比较英、汉非宾格动词现象的异同。我们的分析重点讨论了汉语非宾格动词的显性特征以及可以用来区分汉语非宾格动词与非作格动词的可靠的诊断式问题。更重要的是,在前人研究的基础上,本论文第一次提出了汉语非宾格动词的层级结构、汉语非宾格动词的范畴,并且标明了各个非宾格动词的细类在层级结构中的位置。

基于“非宾格陷阱假设”及详尽的语言分析,本论文提出了八个假设,对英语母语者习得汉语非宾格动词的路径做出了预测。本研究采用的是横断研究法,实验工具包括产出性任务(组词成句)和语法判断任务。参加实验的受试者包括60名英美留学生(分为初级、中级和高级三个组别)以及20名汉语母语学习者(福建师大文学院中文专业的学生)。

本研究的实验结果验证了“非宾格陷阱假设”的基本思路:初级学习者在习得非宾格动词时无法正确区分非宾格动词和非作格动词,只有到了高级阶段,在学习者能够正确区分上述两类动词之后,有关非宾格

动词的语法结构才能为学习者习得。但是, 本研究发现, 在有关典型的汉语非宾格动词和体标记的习得路径以及对汉语非宾格动词的习得顺序等方面, 学习者呈现的是一种“犁型”的习得路径, 而不是如“非宾格陷阱假设”预测的“U 型”路径。造成这种现象的因素有三个: 目的语环境下的语言输入、语义联结规则的结构限制及母语迁移。

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