

中国英语学习者虚拟语气习得研究

A Study on the Acquisition of Subjunctive Mood
for Chinese EFL Learners

杨密 著

虚拟语气

SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD



中央编译出版社
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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

中国英语学习者虚拟语气习得研究 / 杨密著. —北京:
中央编译出版社, 2015. 6
ISBN 978-7-5117-2721-3

I. ①中… II. ①杨… III. ①英语—语法—语言学
习—研究 IV. ①H314

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2015)第 142709 号

中国英语学习者虚拟语气习得研究

出 版 人: 刘明清

出版统筹: 董 巍

责任编辑: 岑 红

责任印制: 尹 珺

出版发行: 中央编译出版社

地 址: 北京西城区车公庄大街乙 5 号鸿儒大厦 B 座(100044)

电 话: (010) 52612345(总编室) (010) 52612331(编辑室)
(010) 52612316(发行部) (010) 52612317(网络销售)
(010) 52612346(馆配部) (010) 66509618(读者服务部)

传 真: (010) 66515838

经 销: 全国新华书店

印 刷: 郑州泰宏印刷有限公司

开 本: 710 毫米×1010 毫米 1/16

字 数: 450 千字

印 张: 14

版 次: 2015 年 7 月第 1 版第 1 次印刷

定 价: 42.00 元

网 址: www.cctphone.com

邮 箱: cctp@cctphone.com

新浪微博: @中央编译出版社

微 信: 中央编译出版社(ID: cctphone)

淘宝店铺: 中央编译出版社直销店(<http://shop108367160.taobao.com>)

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摘 要

纵观国内近年来基于学习者语料库的研究成果发现,目前研究主流是学习者与本族语者的对比研究和基于语料库的失误分析,但是本文作者发现基于语料库对英语虚拟语气进行的研究很少,以本族语者语料库和学习者语料库为基础,对虚拟语气的习得进行对比分析的研究几乎为零。然而,此类型的研究非常必要。长久以来,语法习得是国内第二语言学习者的薄弱环节,而虚拟语气尤为甚之。因此本文作者选取虚拟语气为研究对象,以期对科学合理的虚拟语气习得及其教学方法有一定的参考和启示作用。

本研究采用语料库的研究方法,从英国本族语者作文语料库(LOCNESS)和中国学习者英语语料库(CLEC)中选取真实语料为研究对象,以中介语理论为基础,运用对比分析及失误分析的主要理论,进行定性分析和定量描述。本研究分为四个步骤:第一,选取研究对象,使用 WordSmith 检索 CLEC 和 LOCNESS 中含有虚拟语气的语料,然后进行人工选取和排除;第二,将从两个语料库中检索的数据分别进行频率标准化并对结果作对比分析;第三,分析中国英语学习者虚拟语气的使用障碍并对其进行分类研究;第四,提出相应的教学对策——任务型语言教学法,并通过一项长达两年四个学期的教学实验来验证其在英语虚拟语气的教学中的科学性和有效性。

本研究采用 WordSmith Tools 检索软件和 SPSS 统计分析软件。

本研究主要有两方面的发现。首先,在虚拟语气的使用上,中国英语学习者和英国本族语者相比存在显著差异;语际因素、语内因素以及诱导因素都是导致使用障碍的因素。其次,本研究通过长达两年的教学实践来验证任务型语言教学法在英语虚拟语气的教学中的可行性和有效性,以期对英语教师的日常英语语法教学有所启示。

本研究虽取得了一些关于虚拟语气的发现,但还有很多局限和不足。所选语料主要源于有一定英语学习基础的学习者,缺少英语初学者的相关语料,因此本研究得出的数据还有待更多相关研究的验证。

关键词: 学习者语料库; 虚拟语气; 任务型语言教学法

Abstract

Reviewing on domestic researches over recent years, the comparative study between the learners' language and native speakers' language, as well as the corpus-based error analysis (EA), is the dominance in the research field. However, the author of this dissertation found that there were very few researches conducted on the English Subjunctive Mood (SM) based on the native speakers' corpus and the learners' corpus. In addition, the contrastive analysis (CA) on SM is almost a blank space. Nevertheless, such kind of research is quite necessary. Acquisition of grammar has ever been a weak point for domestic English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly the acquisition of the SM. Accordingly, the author picks out this grammatical item to carry out her research, hoping to find a scientific and reasonable approach to learning and teaching it.

Corpus-based research method was adopted in this study. The objects were selected from the LOCNESS (Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays) and the CLEC (Chinese Learner English Corpus) respectively. Based on the theories of interlanguage, EA and CA, the author conducted the research, quantitatively and qualitatively. This study was conducted by four steps. Firstly, with the help of WordSmith, the author made retrieval from the LOCNESS and CLEC concerning the SM, then manual selection and elimination were made. Secondly, the collected data was normalized and a comparative study was followed. The third step was to analyze the errors committed by Chinese EFL learners and the possible causes. In the fourth step, the author put forward the countermeasures—Task-based Language Teaching Approach (TBLTA) for Chinese EFL learners to overcome the obstacle in the use of SM. It was proved by a four-semester teaching experiment

that the TBLTA was scientific and effective compared with the traditional PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) approach in terms of instruction of the SM.

WordSmith Tools and SPSS were employed to ensure the reliability of the data.

There are two main findings: Firstly, concerning the application of SM, there is a significant difference between Chinese EFL learners and native speakers; interlingual factors, intralingual factors and induced factors all contributed to the obstacles in the use of SM. Secondly, the feasibility and effectiveness of the TBLTA in the instruction of SM were proved, having some inspiration for the everyday English teaching.

Some findings have been obtained about SM. However, there are some limitations in both objective and subjective aspects. The content of the learner corpus was concerned only with the mid-level learners' written production, lacking the beginners' corpus. Therefore, the data gotten in the study needs more further studies to support.

Key words: learner corpus; SM; TBLTA

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The systematic study of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) started at the end of 1960s. The main goal of SLA research is to uncover the principles that govern the process of learning a foreign/second language. As this process is mental and therefore not directly observable, many linguists, in their attempts to theorize about language learning, usually take advantage of the following sources of evidence: (1) the data from the learner's natural performance; (2) the learner's self-report through introspection; (3) language tests designed specifically for the research purposes; and (4) the linguists' own experience and intuition (Li, 1999: 1). It is held by many linguists that study of learner language could provide better illustration of what goes on in the process of learner language development and what is involved in the very process of language production.

Since the concept "interlanguage" became the very important theory in SLA (Selinker, 1972), the Second Language Learners' (SLL) Interlanguage Developmental Pattern (IDP) has been the hot topic in the field. However, this problem has been solved satisfactorily neither in theory nor in practice. R. Ellis (1999: 74) divided the IDP researches into two modes. One is for the purpose of exploring the developmental order about the characteristics/structures of the Target Language (TL), in other words, which grammatical item or language structure is acquired earlier or later in SLA; the other one is aimed for the developmental sequence that SLL experience in the process of acquiring TL. Early in 1970s, scholars began to study SLL acquiring sequence of the grammatical structure



(Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974; Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974; Larsen-Freeman, 1975, 1976; Krashen & Scarcella, 1978). According to these researches, Krashen (1977) put forward the Natural Order Hypothesis (NOH). These researches made great progress; meanwhile, much critical sounds also were heard, especially on the research methodology. Lightbown (2002) has pointed out the common weak points—difficulty in replication, too small sample area, the conclusion mainly depending on qualitative analysis but not on quantitative analysis, and so on.

Because of the limits, research of developmental pattern can hardly be made much further and deeper. At the end of 1980s, with the fast development of the computers' hardware and software, building and studying corpus has been the new field of applied linguistics and at the same time it provided new research method and notion for studying developmental pattern and regulation. The learner corpora provide greater access for the SLA and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) researchers to the totality of the learner's performance, provided that larger corpora involving more media (both written and spoken) and greater learner variables are made available and controllable. Much insight can be obtained from the data of both quantity and quality that has never been made available ever before. Long before the term "corpus linguistic" appeared in the early 1980s (Leech, 1992: 105), corpus-based approach had a long history. In the 1930s – 1940s, under the influence of behaviorism and positivism, American structural linguists, represented by Bloomfield, took to set the rigid approach of collecting and analyzing real language material as a great part of science of language, but in the 1950s, the approach met severe criticism by the Transformational-Generative Grammar School, represented by Chomsky, who firmly believed that the task of linguistics is the study on the learner's language competence but not the language performance and the best research subject is the language intuition by the native speaker, no matter in which method, the collected data is biased (McEnery & Wilson, 2001: 5 – 13).

Quirk, opposed the opinion, who emphasizes the importance of the "naturalness"

of the data, and set up new corpus linguistics. He once cited Aldous Huxley's words, "Our most precise theory, most detailed description, is only the very rough and unreasonable simplification of the facts. Each very basic and simple case of the facts is extremely complex." (Xie, 1996: 28). In 1959, Quirk announced the plan of "The Survey of English Usage" (SEU). Although the data collected at that time can not be read by computer, Quirk and other linguists published *Modern English Grammar* and *English Grammar* in 1972 and 1985, which are the authoritative works. This is the earliest proof of the function of corpus-based approach. It is their hard work that make corpus researches still keep alive and be widely accepted even under the pressure of Mentalism.

The building of a batch of influential corpus, such as Collins Birmingham University International Language Database (COBUILD), Longman, British National Corpus (BNC), International Corpus of English (ICE) and a large number of research results based on the corpus, like the paper, monograph, etc. made important corpus research in academic circles, and gradually developed into an emerging discipline—corpus linguistics (Yu, 2009: 2-3).

Corpus linguistics research in our country began in the mid-1980s. The first domestic corpus is Jiao Da English for Science and Technology (JDEST). It provided database for teaching outline of college English and vocabulary statistics and made a positive contribution to our foreign language teaching. Furthermore, the pioneer of corpus, Yang Huizhong, proposed ideas and principles of corpus processing technology and technical vocabulary also profoundly affected the later construction and research of corpus (Li, 2003). Since the 1980s, computer learner corpora have been developed, such as the Longman Learners' Corpus, the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) Learner Corpus, the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC), and other learner corpora in Taiwan and Japan.

After the 1990s, learner corpus research in China has come to the establishment and research of corpus-based road, domestically and successively built multiple



learner corpora, such as CLEC, COLSEC (College Learners' Spoken English Corpus), SWECCL, SECOPETS. Foreign scholars use the corpus to carry out a large number of Chinese English learners' interlanguage study, which has achieved fruitful results (Zheng, 2011).

The learner corpus to test language output is given priority to, besides Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners (WECCL). The data of the materials are from large-scale nation-wide examinations. Within CLEC, the main source is the composition part of CET (College English Test); COLSEC from the CET Band Four and Band Six test materials. Such examination by using unified proposition, unified organization way, well guarantees the credibility and comparability of the corpus. The coverage scale of corpus has the very good representative. According to the different language level or grade as a standard collection of synchronic corpus, and use of the corpus, the domestic scholars carried out a horizontal contrast or error analysis aided by computer or contrastive studies on interlanguage both at home and abroad.

1.2 Significance of the Present Study

Generally speaking, the acquisition of grammatical items is always regarded as the difficult part for Chinese EFL learners. The author of this thesis has noticed through her own teaching experience as a university English teacher for more than 14 years that the acquisition and the use of English Subjunctive Mood (SM) is a very hard nut to crack for Chinese EFL learners and an important grammatical item, which appears in various types of domestic national English examinations, such as CET Band Four, Band Six and Postgraduate Entrance Examination, etc. Many studies revealed that the misuse of SM occupies a large proportion of the grammatical errors committed by SLL. Therefore, conducting an in-depth investigation into the acquisition and the use of English SM is of great significance, aiming to shed light on the scientific and rational acquisition and giving some constructive suggestions on the countermeasures of learning and

teaching method of SM.

A number of researches have been made on the origin, structures and functions of SM, yet the empirical researches on this grammatical item are few and far from enough. With the aid of corpus, the author of the thesis explored how the Chinese EFL learners acquired this grammatical item.

The purpose of this corpus-based comparative study in the first part of the dissertation of the Chinese EFL learners from the perspective of SLA, which is conducted on the basis of the CLEC and the LOCNESS, is to:

- (1) investigate the acquisition of SM by Chinese EFL learners;
- (2) study the use differences of SM by native speakers and non-native speakers and the possible interpretation for these differences;
- (3) emphasize the classification and analysis of errors committed on the SM, with the purpose to help the SLLs to find out the problems in the acquisition process and to analyze the possible causes for the errors, which will be illustrative and contributory to the learning and teaching in China;
- (4) discuss the countermeasures of learning and teaching of SM for Chinese EFL learners.

In the second part of the thesis the author put forward her countermeasures for Chinese EFL learners to overcome the obstacle in the use of SM—Task-based Language Teaching Approach (TBLTA). And on the basis of the analysis of the previous traditional grammatical teaching methods (i. e., the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method and the Communicative Language Teaching Method), and with the help of a four-semester teaching experiment, in which the TBLTA was applied to the Test Group (TG) while the traditional PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) teaching methods were applied to the Reference Group (RG), the author testified the effectiveness of the TBLTA in the instruction of the English SM. The results from such a long-time teaching experiment indicated that the TBLTA was quite effective in terms of the instruction of the English SM.



1.3 Research Motivations

The following considerations are the very basic motivations for the research:

Firstly, language researchers and teachers attach more and more importance to the learner language. In 1972, Selinker coined the term “interlanguage” to refer to the unique linguistic system that is somewhere between the learner’s first language (L1) and second language (L2). The interlanguage is significant in the following areas:

(1) Interlanguage throws light on how the learner’s hypotheses are formulated in terms of the target language and the mother tongue, which helps the teachers to become aware of the students’ problems and to decide at which stage some particular elements of the target language could be introduced for its greatest benefit.

(2) Error analysis gives feedback to the teachers, who on the basis of the feedback will assess learning and decide the priorities in the teaching plan.

(3) The study of interlanguage can provide data for the realistic prediction about learning and teaching.

(4) The study of interlanguage is of implication to teacher training, in which the teachers should be made aware of the varieties of the learner language and consider the ways in which they can make their teaching more facilitative (Richards & Sampson, 1984).

Secondly, the recent rapid development in learner corpora provides great possibilities and potentials for better description and understanding of language learning. The Computer Learner Corpus (CLC) takes advantage of computer’s capacity for fast, accurate, and complex analysis; the extensive information about language use is found in large collections of natural texts from multiple registers; the rich descriptions and various comparisons and contrasts are based on native language and learner language, on learner languages by learners of different proficiency or cultural backgrounds and between learner languages by learners of