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外语学习中的意识与形式意义匹配

Awareness and Form-Meaning Mapping in
Foreign Language Learning

刘秋芬 著



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内 容 提 要

本书从语言输入与语言输出加工出发,结合认知科学和心理语言学,以跨学科的视角探求并试图揭示制约外语学习者语言学习的根本因素,并通过实证研究的方式对其加以验证,因此本书兼具理论和实践意义。在理论上,本书不仅指出意识对外语学习具有促进作用,同时还证实学习者对形式意义进行匹配的主观意识能在最大程度上促进学习者的语言发展,而本书中提出的外语学习整合模型更是一大理论创新。在实践方面,本书的研究成果有助于提高外语学习者和外语教学工作者对外语学习过程的认识和理解,无论是对外语学习还是外语教学都有相当的启发作用。

本书可供相关领域的学者、研究生等参考使用。

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序

Preface

刘秋芬同志的这本著作以其在上海外国语大学攻读博士学位期间集三年研究成果而做的毕业论文为基础,主要关注外语学习中的意识与形式意义匹配。结合认知科学,心理语言学和二语习得领域内的最新研究成果,该论文在回顾语言输入与语言输出过程对学习者中介语发展影响的基础上,指出无论是语言输入还是语言输出,其对学习者中介语发展的促进作用主要归因于这两个过程引发的句法加工模式。当学习者优先使用的语义加工模式无法帮助他们弥补因相关中介语知识空缺而造成的编码或解码障碍时,学习者不得不转而求助于依赖特定语言形式进行编码或解码的句法加工模式,这一模式迫使学习者给予语言形式以更多的注意力资源,并对其进行更深层次的加工,即更多地关注语言形式与意义的匹配,作者提出正是学习者在语言加工过程中对语言形式和意义的匹配制约着其中介语的发展。而认知科学对注意和意识的研究发现这两个认知因素与学习者对语言输入的滤入和加工处理有着千丝万缕的联系,因此作者进一步探讨了注意和意识在外语学习中的作用以及不同层面的意识对学习者在语言加工过程中进行形式意义匹配的相互关系,并通过实证的方式对其加以验证。

该论文选题恰当,紧跟国外学术界最新发展方向,兼具理论创新性和实践应用价值,在国内相关研究相对缺乏的背景下,该论文系统深入的研究可谓是独树一帜。而在该论文的准备和撰写过程中,作者能够从纷繁复杂的多学科多角度研究中融合总结出自己独特的研究视角,充分展示了她极强的学术研究能力。

总的来说,该论文具有很高的学术价值,它不仅全面阐述了学习者中介语发展的发生机制,深入探讨了其中的制约因素,还结合我国外语学习环境创新性地提出外语学习整合模型,其中不乏自己独到的见解和看法,充分反映了作者牢固扎实的理论功底及勇于创新的科研精神,这种创新科研精神在当今的学术界尤为值得称颂和鼓励。该论文的部分内容已经被《山东外语教学》等国内知名期刊采用发表,这也从一个侧面体现了其研究的重要性。

戴炜栋

前言

Foreword

20 世纪 60 年代二语习得作为一门独立的学科成立以来,先后在行为主义、心灵主义以及互动论等思潮的影响下,着重于描写和解释目标语语言因素、学习者因素和外在环境因素对二语习得的影响和作用,并由此阐发了一系列的理论,其中影响最为深远的当属监控理论、关键期假设和文化适应理论等。毋庸置疑,这些理论从不同侧面深化了我们对二语习得这一领域的认识。

然而随着认知科学的发展和完善,其在二语习得领域的影响也变得无所不在。以体验哲学为基础的认知科学强调语言是人们对现实世界感知体验的基础上主动建构而成的,是主客观互动的结果。在此思想的影响下,二语习得中的学习者不再单纯地被看作是外在语言刺激的被动接收者,他们在中介语发展过程中,尤其是在从语言输入到语言输出过程中的主体地位开始受到越来越多的关注。正是在这样的理论大背景下,笔者利用博士三年时间,在广泛阅读相关领域文献的基础上,结合自身作为一名外语学习者的学习体验,融合形成了自己独到的见解,并最终将其付梓成文,写成此书,并将其奉献给国内同行专家学者,以及感兴趣的语言教师及学生,期待有助于促进大家对二语习得过程的理解和认识,并对他们的研究工作和教学工作带来启发。

本书共分七个章节。其中第一章简要介绍了本书的研究范围、目标及意义。第二章至第四章是本书的理论建构部分,作者分别从二语习得、心理语言学和认知科学等领域出发从不同侧面对语言输入和输出加工进行了系统的梳理和论述,发现尽管表面上看语言理解和语言输出过程相去甚远,但在外语学习环境下,对学习者的中介语发展各具推动力的语言理解和语言输出过程却不乏相似之处。事实上,有助于学习者中介语发展的语言理解和输出过程往往是以失败为导向的,这些过程都促使学习者在语言加工过程中放弃自发的语义加工模式,而采用主要依赖特定语言形式进行语义解码或编码的句法加工模式,致使学习者对语言形式和意义进行匹配。换言之,学习者在对语言加工过程中对语言形式和意义的匹配是制约其中介语发展的关键因素。另一方面,要实现对语言形式和意义的匹配离不开认知因素——注意和意识的参与,

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而当前学术界对于两者,尤其是后者在语言习得过程中的作用存在极大的争议。作者在回顾现有文献的基础上大胆提出相较于注意而言,意识更能促进学习者对语言的深层次加工,而在注意层面的意识和理解层面的意识之间,后者由于其本质是对语言形式和意义匹配的主观感知,因而更有利于语言学习的发生。随后的第五第六章是本书的实证部分,作者利用不同的教学方法分别检验了注意和意识在促进学习者中介语发展中的作用,最后一章在对全书做出总结的基础上为未来的研究指明了方向。

本书的特色在于全面性、创新性及实用性。其全面性体现在本书集多学科研究成果于一体,不是局限于二语习得领域内,而是同时吸收认知科学和心理科学的最新发展,博采众长,在对各领域理论回顾梳理的过程中真正做到了融会贯通,实现了多方位、多角度的分析,不仅深入全面地探讨了语言输入、语言输出在外语学习中的作用,还尝试揭示学习者内在机制,尤其是认知因素——注意和意识——在学习者中介语构建过程中的关键作用,从而全面展示了二语习得的发生机制。而其创新性则表现在作者在第二章提出的外语学习整合模型,结合我国外语学习环境,该模型系统描述了从语言输入到学习者中介语系统再到语言输出的转化过程及其中涉及的认知因素,此外该模型还关注到了语言输出对语言输入加工的调节作用,并详细阐述了学习者在外语学习过程中可能选取的不同路径,这是在结合我国学情基础上对二语习得理论的大胆创新。而本书中的实证研究部分对注意和意识在中介语发展过程中的作用研究同时也为解决当前学术界的意识与外语学习关系之争提供了新的视角和解决方法。

本书虽然是一本学术著作,但却不失其实用性。在书中作者很好地处理了理论与应用之间的关系。以理论建构为主,以实证研究为辅,通过与课堂教学实践的紧密结合,不仅有助于促进外语教师和学习者对外语学习过程的深刻理解,而且为当前的外语教学提供了值得借鉴的教学方法,具有很强的教学指导意义。

由于本书大部分是作者本人的学习和研究心得,尽管在写作过程中作者力求做到最大程度的客观和科学,然而受到个人能力所限可能仍难免存在不足之处,衷心盼望各位专家学者加以指正。

编者
刘秋芬

ABBREVIATIONS

AL: Levels of Awareness
ANOVA: Analysis of Variation
FonF: Focus on Form
FonFs: Focus on Forms
GE: Grammatical Explanation
GJT: Grammaticality Judgment Task
IE: Input Enhancement
IL: Interlanguage
L1: First Language
L2: Second/Foreign Language
PI: Processing Instruction
SLA: Second Language Acquisition
TI: Traditional Instruction
TL: Target Language

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

From a cognitive perspective, the essence of learning lies in the changes in mental representation that occur in the learner's mind. These changes in turn lead to the changes in the learners' observable behavior, which is often measured as an index or evidence of learning. Thus, understanding mental representation and its changes involved in the learning process lies at the very center of all major issues related to learning, including second language acquisition (SLA).

Nan Jiang (2007:1)

It is widely acknowledged that SLA can be viewed essentially as a process of knowledge integration which undergoes constant changes and thus resulting in the restructuring of the learners' interlanguage. During the past decades much insight has been gained on this knowledge integration process with all the theoretical and empirical investigations conducted so far. However, the various models and theories forwarded by researchers from the perspectives such as linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics as well as SLA tend to focus on some specific and isolated aspects of language learning, for example, the role of input or output, and voluminous work has been produced in these regards, while no agreement has been reached on what the essential factors that are at work in fostering that knowledge integration are.

1.1 Clearing the Ground

1.1.1 Input and Output Processing

Even so, there are still some discernable trends in SLA that might provide us a peek at some of the fundamental factors responsible for the knowledge integration

process. According to Jiang (2007), the process of knowledge integration can be examined in terms of three types of linguistic knowledge available to the learner: learner's knowledge about the L1; learner's exposure to input and interaction; and explicit knowledge obtained in the process of instruction or learning. Whereas in the present study only the latter two will be examined under the heading of input processing, given that it is impossible to cover everything in a single book. In addition, output processing which has been proved in many publications to be conducive to language learning will also be probed into. Since the existing researches have mostly identified either input processing or output processing as their point of departure in the effort to tackle the problem of what was integrated into learners' developing IL and how it was integrated into their internal system, both of the two varying strands of thoughts will be subject to scrutiny in search of any underlying similarities in their contribution to the knowledge integration process.

1.1.2 Form-Meaning Mapping

Other than input processing and output processing that are going on inside the learners' mind that count, the characteristics of the language that are to be integrated into the learners' interlanguage (IL) should also be taken into consideration. In his review on what makes learning second-language grammar difficult, DeKeyser (2005) isolated three components of grammatical difficulty: problems of meaning, problems of form and problems of form-meaning mapping. As the form-meaning mapping presents itself as an integration of both form and meaning, it draws on both the form and meaning of the linguistic feature or structure for the mapping to be acquired, and it is assumed to be of particular relevance to the present study.

Specifically speaking, DeKeyser attributed the difficulty in acquiring form-meaning mapping to the lack of transparency which results from redundancy, optionality or opacity. And in the case of English learning, redundancy and opacity stand out as more prominent. To be more exact, redundancy indicates that the form at issue is not semantically necessary because its meaning is also expressed by at least one other element of the sentence, as to be demonstrated in the forthcoming experiment on the present continuous tense, an on-going action can be conveyed by the auxiliary and *-ing* inflections attached to the end of the verb,

adverbials such as *now*, *at the moment* can also help put that message across. With regard to opacity, it is a complex form of problem of low form-meaning correlation. When different forms stand for the same meaning, and the same form stands for different meanings, the correlation between form and meaning tend to be confusing for the learners and hence hard for them to detect. This is exactly the case for -s in English, which can be the third-person singular of the verb and the plural of the noun, while in both cases it has the same three allomorphs. DeKeyser (2005: 9) also stated that instances of morphological irregularity also fall into this category of opacity as they render the form-meaning mapping more opaque and complex. Based on such assumptions, the present continuous tense which has been widely accepted as an easy structure to grasp seems to be much more complex when the irregular forms of the auxiliary and the inflectional changes in the endings of -ing are taken into account.

1. 1.3 Cognitive Notions of Attention and Awareness

As was stated at the very beginning of this chapter that the essence of learning lies in the changes in mental representation that occur in learners' mind, and this actually falls into the scope of cognitive science. Given that it is beyond direct observation as to how those changes occur in mental representations, it might be more preferable to answer the question in an indirect and step-wise way. Prior to the occurrence of any changes in mental representation, some raw materials in the form of incoming linguistic stimuli have to be fed into the internal mechanism for it to operate on. And this type of prior-to-integration research has taken up a large portion of researches in SLA as a result of the up-surfing tendency in the field to appeal to notions such as attention and awareness, especially the former one, because attention controls and reduces the influx of incoming stimuli that supplies learners with the necessary source of knowledge to be integrated. In recent years almost all the dominant theories and studies within the field have incorporated an ingredient of attention, for example: the noticing function of the Output Hypothesis, the mediating role attention plays in Interaction Hypothesis and so on. As a closely related term to attention, awareness has now gradually revealed itself as a self-important factor in accounting for the integration of incoming input into learners' interlanguage.

Drawing on SLA, linguistics and cognitive science, the foregoing discussion

has briefly outlined some factors that are considered to be of particular relevance to the present study, which aims to uncover the rationale underlying successful and efficient language learning. On the whole, the relative pertinence of these factors to the present study will be examined in succession and this will comprise the theoretical framework for the study.

1.2 The Scope of the Present Study

Before the conduction of any empirical investigation, it is necessary to establish a clear understanding of what it is about, that is, foreign language learning. In the field of SLA, distinctions between second and foreign language as well as acquisition and learning have been constantly made reference to.

Although foreign language and second language have been in most cases used synonymously and interchangeably, there is a conceptual difference as expressed in the use of “second” and “foreign”. While second language refers to a non-native language learnt and used within one country, and it usually has official status or a recognized function within a country; the term foreign language is commonly used to refer to a non-native language learnt and used with reference to a speech community outside national or territorial boundaries.

Likewise, acquisition and learning have also been used interchangeably until Krashen (1978, 1981) made the claim that “acquisition” refers to the subconscious process of picking up a language through exposure and “learning” to the conscious process of studying it. According to Krashen, acquisition is analogous to the natural way in which children acquires his first language, while learning is more often associated with language development in formal-school-like settings.

Based on such distinctions, the present study can be subsumed under foreign language learning, since its primary concern is to investigate the underlying rationale for the successful and efficient English learning on the part of Chinese learners. But it is worthwhile to mention that the adoption of the notion foreign language learning here does not necessarily negate the possibility of the occurrence of language acquisition, as learners might occasionally pick up some linguistic data even during classroom instruction whose purpose is to engage learners in the studying of the foreign language. Moreover, as was suggested by R. Ellis (1994), the neutral and superordinate term “second language acquisition” has been widely used in the field to cover both second and foreign language learning and

acquisition, therefore, it is beyond doubt that the theories and models developed to account for second language acquisition can be applied to the study of foreign language learning, though in some cases minor modifications might turn out to be more preferable and appropriate.

1.3 The Goal and Significance of the Present Study

It is widely acknowledged that English education in China has long been troubled by its lack of efficiency. Although learners invest enormous time and effort in English learning, they still fall far short of native speaker competence. Not only the learners but also the teachers are dissatisfied with this situation and it is always on their mind as to how to effect more successful and effective learning and teaching, it is from this practical consideration that the present study originates. Drawing on multidisciplinary researches such as SLA, psycholinguistics, and cognitive science, the present study aims to sort out from the voluminous studies the factors that contribute to successful and effective English learning.

If some insights can be gained in the present study, it might serve to promote English education in China by means of some helpful suggestions. Furthermore, since English education is mostly conducted in the classroom, that is, learners learn English as a subject and have scarce opportunity to apply the language to daily use after class, the exploration into factors that are conducive to successful and effective language learning might provide a better understanding about the learning mechanism in general. In addition, it is hoped that the theoretical review and construction in the present study can serve to push our understanding of foreign language learning to a more advanced level.

1.4 The Format of the Present Study

This book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 offers a panoramic view of the present study by restricting its scope of research to foreign language learning, it also provides a brief overview on the research stances to be taken in the present study and the goal to be achieved.

Chapter 2 begins the theoretical construction of the study by examining studies in SLA of the two central processes of input processing and output processing that are unanimously accepted as conducive to language learning, the

underlying logic of development therein is thus inferred and an integrated model which combines input and output processing is put forward so as to illustrate the routes that foreign language learners might follow in developing their interlanguage.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the explanation of the rationale of speech comprehension and production processes from a psycholinguistic perspective, which reveals the importance of making form-meaning mapping in both processes and in fostering the development of learners' internal system.

Chapter 4 continues the explanation of factors at work in input and output processing from a cognitive perspective. Cognitive notions of attention and awareness are probed into and special emphasis is laid on their respective roles in the conversion of input into intake. What's more, this chapter terminates the theoretical construction which extends from Chapter 2 to Chapter 4 and generates the questions to be investigated in the present study.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 constitute the empirical study which is employed to testify the position adopted from the earlier multidisciplinary, theoretical review and construction. Specifically speaking, Chapter 5 introduces the research questions and the research design in great detail. Chapter 6 presents a statistical analysis of the experimental data with the help of SPSS 16, the results are discussed and possible interpretations of the findings are supplied.

Chapter 7 brings together the major findings of the present study and expands on its theoretical and empirical significance, which is then followed by discussions on its pedagogical relevance and implication. Finally, the limitations of the present study are discussed and suggestions for future research are made.

CHAPTER 2

An Integrated Model of Foreign Language Learning

Multifaceted as SLA is, most would agree that it consists of sets of processes as sketched in Figure 2.1 which was developed by VanPatten (1992) and VanPatten and Cadierno (1993a, 1993b).

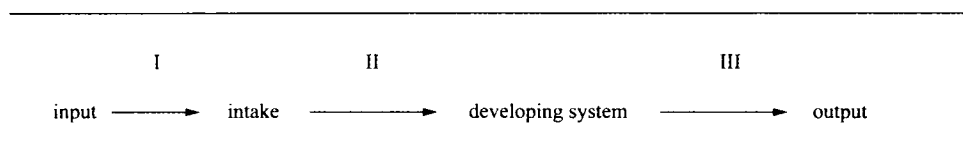


Figure 2.1 VanPatten's (1992) model of second language acquisition and use

There are three distinguishable sets of processes that mediate second language acquisition in the figure above. The first set of processes (I) involves input processing which converts input into intake through initial perception and processing. According to Terrell (1991) and Cadierno (1995) input processing entails those strategies and mechanisms that promote form-meaning connections during comprehension. The second set of processes (II) includes those features of cognitive organizing involved in the assimilation of intake and the restructuring of the developing linguistic system (McLaughlin, 1990; White, 1989). And this is far beyond direct observation and manipulation. Finally, the third set of processes (III) includes the language production processes that act on the acquired L2 system and determine what elements of the developing linguistic system are available at a given point for productive use (Cadierno, 1995). In comparison with the elusiveness of the second set of processes (II), it seems that the first (I) and the third (III) set might serve as better alternatives for researchers to untangle the

complexities involved in SLA. Based on such assumptions, the present chapter will be developed into three sections. The first section will be devoted to a systematic review of studies on input processing in the past thirty odd years, and the underlying logical sequence of development will be unveiled. Then developments in the language production studies will be traced in the second section of the chapter. And in the concluding section a model integrating input and output processing will be proposed, it combines the theoretical developments in SLA with the foreign language context and presents a bold venture in providing a comprehensive description of routes that foreign language learners might take in language learning.

2.1 Input Processing in SLA

2.1.1 Clarifications on Input and Intake

It is advisable that two key concepts, namely input and intake, which stand in close relationship with the forthcoming discussions on input processing, should be clearly defined at the outset.

Input has long been assigned a significant place in L2 research, and its significance is best encapsulated by Gass (1997: 1):

“The concept of input is perhaps the single most important concept of second language acquisition. It is trivial to point out that no individual can learn a second language without input of some sort. In fact, no model of second language acquisition does not avail itself of input in trying to explain how learners create second language grammars.”

In contrast, the term intake, though of great theoretical value, has scarcely been accorded due attention until recent years. Functioning as the mediating process between the target language available to learners as input and the learners' internalized set of L2 rules and strategies for second language development, intake was characterized by Chaudron (1985) as involving three stages: 1) the initial stages of perception of input, 2) the subsequent stages of decoding and encoding of the semantic (communicated) information into long-term memory, and 3) the series of stages by which learners fully integrate and incorporate the linguistic information in input into their developing grammars. Rather than consider intake as a single event or product, Chaudron (1983a, 1985) labeled intake as a complex