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Second Language Acquisition of English Articles:  
An Emergentist Perspective

语言涌现视角下的英语冠词二语习得研究

杨 梅 著



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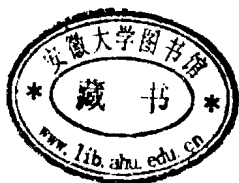
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联系电话: 010-6403 0529 电子邮箱: yanli@mail.sciencep.com

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## 序

杨梅这本书，是研究中国人学英语冠词的专著，选题格外有意义，因为探讨了国人学英语的一大难题。在我国，学英语多年的人大概都有冠词难学的感叹。按理，冠词是不该难学的。它是英语中出现频率最高的词类，表达的词义也不算复杂，而且只有三种极易辨别的基本形式：定冠词、不定冠词和不用冠词（或称零冠词）。然而，这区区几个小词，连英语达到极高水平的外语使用者也难保用起来不会出错。这到底是怎么回事呢？带着这个困惑读这本专著，我们是有所期盼的。

冠词，顾名思义，可解读为帽子词，专戴在名词头上，是名词的附着物。帽子虽然只有三顶，用起来却犯难了。第一大难是，配合冠词使用的名词，数量多得惊人，即使把他们分类，仅细类就有不少。名词有抽象的，有具体的，有可数的，有不可数的，有动词转换过来的，有多词合成的，等等。此外，名词所表达的语义头绪繁杂，而冠词的使用是与语义密切相关的。名词有这么多个类别，有这么多的语义，帽子该怎样配戴才合适呢？哪些名词该戴？哪些不该戴？什么情况下戴？什么时候不戴？既然冠词形简义明，那就是名词这“头”太怪异了，帽子不易配送。由此看来，冠词的难学，是难在名词类别上，难在名词的复杂多义上，难在三顶帽子选配到种类繁多的“头”上。

国人学冠词还有其他难处。例如，冠词这顶帽子，汉语名词不需要，但这并不意味着，汉语就没有表达冠词一些意义的对应手段，而完全对应的情况极少。在这点上，两种语言的差别异常显著，自然会冒出来干扰我们学习英语。而已有母语扎根的大脑，很不喜欢外来语言，总是设法排斥它，除非外语硬是挤了进来，练就了自身的强势。在我们中国人的眼里，省略冠词是不该影响意思表达的，汉语没有冠词不也照样能够用来顺畅表达意思嘛。冠词实在是有些多余，多余的东西不易派上用场。此外，我们常把冠词视为一个独立的词类，与其他词类（如名词、动词）并列，本来冠词与名词相伴如影随形，拆分开来，学习难度就可能变大了。

所有上述造成冠词难学的因素，有的属于英语名词特征，有的始于母语干扰，有的归于大脑认知，有的源于语义分类。多因素的共同作用

使得学习冠词的难度膨胀起来。令人奇怪的是，在我们看来很难学好的冠词，到了英语本族语说话者那里，学起来并不见难，用起来也少见出错。他们生下来也得要学的呀！这个现象值得研究，或许是解惑冠词学习的一个出路。不管怎么说，成功总有成功的道理，把英语本族语者学习成功的道理弄明白了，回头再看看外语学习过程，相互对比，定有启发，光把眼睛盯在外语学习者身上是不够的。

正因难学，英语冠词才引起了第二语言学习研究者的广泛研究兴趣，多年来第二语言学习的学术期刊上常见冠词习得论文发表，足见冠词学习问题相当惹眼。对冠词的研究似乎没有终点，总有新的问题要探讨，原因之一是我们对语言的认识总在深化，语言学理论的研究进展影响研究冠词习得的角度。特别是近年来，第二语言习得研究的视角和观念发生了重大转变，给冠词习得研究增添了新的动力。包括认知语言学、功能语言学、涌现论、连结论、复杂适应性系统论等理论聚集在基于使用的语言学的大旗下，改变着人们研究第二语言习得的观念。伴随观念的转变，有研究者跳出剥离语言学习变量开展研究的传统模式，开始关注多变量的交互作用对二语习得的影响。杨梅这本专著所涉及的研究课题就是在这样的背景下开展的。

杨梅采用涌现论的语言习得观，提出英语冠词习得过程是一个复杂适应系统，受到包括语义特征和语境因素在内的各种要素的影响。冠词的习得是这些因素交互影响、共同作用的结果。这一思路与多因素导致冠词难学吻合，为破解国人学习冠词的困境迈出了可喜的一步。为了验证自己的观点，作者把研究的焦点放在语义子系统和语境子系统的交互作用上，观察两者的交互如何影响冠词学习。为此，她开展了一系列实证研究，发现语义特征、语境因素、学习者背景知识的交互作用导致了英语冠词替代误用的产生。这一开创性的发现进一步揭示了冠词难学的原因，检验了基于使用语言学的有效性，丰富了二语习得理论，对英语冠词教学和学习也有启示。年轻学者的成就令人鼓舞，很乐意向从事语言和语言习得研究的学者和研究生推荐这部学术著作。

广东外语外贸大学

王初明

2011年10月

# 前言

对语言和语言习得涌现特征的关注是近年来二语习得研究思潮的一个重大发展,持语言涌现论观点的研究者们倡导根据各类非句法因素间的交互作用来解释语言和语言习得问题。以此为理论基础,本书主要探讨英语冠词语义特征和与之相关的语境因素内部和相互间在不同层面的交互作用及其对二语学习者冠词选用和习得的影响。

英语冠词的第二语言习得一直是外语教育研究者们关注的话题。对相关文献的回顾显示,传统研究主要从语义和语篇角度入手分别揭示导致冠词误用的语义和语境因素,对这些因素间的交互作用却重视不够,更忽略了这种交互对英语冠词选用可能造成的影响。本书作者在语言涌现论观点启示下提出,影响英语冠词二语习得的众多因素(elements)和主体(agents)形成一个复杂系统,英语冠词的二语选用和习得是来自不同子系统的各类主客体要素相互影响和共同作用的结果。

为了详细探究不同要素的交互特性及其对二语学习者冠词选用和习得的影响,本研究聚焦于冠词语义特征子系统和与之相关的语境因素子系统,具体研究问题包括:(1)中国学习者如何理解英语冠词的语义特征?各种语义特征如何交互作用影响学习者掌握英语冠词语义知识?(2)中国学习者是否知道如何根据相关语境因素判断英语冠词语义特征?各种语境因素如何交互作用影响学习者语境敏感度?(3)语义特征和语境因素如何交互作用影响中国学习者英语冠词选用?

本书作者设计并开展了两项实验:强制选择性产出和可接受程度判断。两个实验分别从语言产出和语言理解方面收集相关数据。实验1主要考察:(1)特指性(specificity)语义特征如何影响中国学习者正确认识英语冠词在有定性(definiteness)基础上区分the和a(n)的语义特点;(2)语境因素如ESK(explicitly stated knowledge,明确陈述知识)和背景知识如何影响学习者对有定无定特征的判断;(3)前述语义特征和语境因素之间的交互作用如何影响冠词选用。55名中级英语水平受试及14名本

族语者参加了实验 1 的强制选择测试及冠词选用原因的书面调查, 结果表明, 特指性语义特征和语境因素 ESK 共同显著影响冠词选用, 而且学习者对特指性语义特征过度依赖。此外, 学习者对决定有定无定语义值的单一性 (uniqueness) 特征足够敏感, 但背景知识的缺乏会导致单一性特征判断错误, 由此产生的对冠词选用的影响大于 ESK。

实验 2 主要考察: (1) 在语言理解中, 学习者对英语冠词特指性和有定性语义特征的敏感程度是否与语言产出时有所不同; (2) 不同的语境因素如何影响学习者对名词短语单一性特征的判断; (3) 蕴含性 (partitivity) 语义特征对学习者的正确认识英语冠词语义特征的影响。65 名中级英语水平受试和 27 名本族语者参加了实验 2 的可接受程度判断测试, 结果表明, 特指性语义特征和蕴含性语义特征对英语冠词理解均有一定程度影响, 但特指性语义特征对英语冠词理解的影响不如对冠词产出的影响大。进一步调查 12 名较低水平受试的结果显示, 特指性语义特征影响冠词理解的强度受二语水平制约, 低水平受试更容易因为特指性特征的不同而错误接受冠词误用。此外, 受试在不同语境条件下对单一性特征的判断有差异, 既显示出其对语境特征的不同敏感程度, 又突出了语境因素对语义特征判断的影响。

本研究的主要发现可以归纳为英语冠词选用和习得的交互阐释, 即: (1) 英语冠词所涉的各种语义特征交互作用并影响二语学习者正确习得英语冠词语义知识; (2) 和语义特征相关的语境因素交互作用并影响二语学习者对语境效用的敏感程度; (3) 英语冠词语义特征和相关语境因素交互作用并影响二语冠词选用和习得。

本书在语言涌现观框架内分析第二语言习得的具体问题, 探讨了英语冠词习得的涌现特征, 揭示了交互这一重要的认知机理在英语冠词二语习得中的作用, 有助于二语习得理论的进一步发展。在此基础上, 书中详细分析了二语学习者英语冠词替代型误用产生的原因, 指出英语冠词教学不仅应关注语义特征分析和语境敏感度训练, 更要重视语义和语境因素的交互特性及其对冠词选用的影响。

# Abstract

Substitution errors of L2-English articles, by which is meant that L2 learners substitute *the* for *a(n)* in indefinite NP contexts or substitute *a(n)* for *the* in definite NP contexts, have been found frequent in L2 article uses. Over the past three decades or so, a multitude of studies has been conducted to reveal reasons underlying such errors, focusing on either semantic features of English articles or contextual factors related to English article uses. However, a close examination of the semantic and pragmatic analyses of English articles shows that there is actually a complex interactional relationship between semantic features of English articles and relevant contextual factors in determining the selection between *the* and *a(n)*. In order to have a good understanding and explanation of substitution errors of L2-English articles, it is necessary to explore L2 article choices and acquisition in light of such relationship.

This study is therefore aimed at investigating whether and how interactions of semantic features of English articles and relevant contextual factors influence L2-English article choices and acquisition. The emergentist view on interaction is introduced as the theoretical framework for analysis. Under this framework, it is proposed that the process of L2-English article acquisition is a complex system, in which there are different subsystems composing of various agents and elements. It is the interaction of agents and elements in different subsystems, as well as the interaction of these subsystems with each other, that lead to the emergence of L2 article choices and acquisition. Given that it is impossible to exhaust interactions of all agents and elements in a single study like the present one, the main focus is on examining interactions involved in the subsystem of semantic features and of



contextual factors.

Tasks collecting both production and comprehension data are utilized to seek for answers to the following key research questions: (1) what is Chinese-speaking L2-English learners' knowledge of semantic features related to English articles? How is such knowledge influenced by interaction of different semantic features? (2) Are Chinese-speaking L2-English learners sensitive to the effects of different contextual factors on the computation of semantic features of English articles? How does interaction of different contextual factors influence L2 learners' sensitivity to such contextual effects? (3) How does interaction of semantic features of English articles with relevant contextual factors influence Chinese-speaking L2-English learners' article choices?

Study 1 employed a forced elicitation task and a written interview task to investigate the influence of interactions of semantic features and contextual factors on L2-English article production in a sample of 55 Chinese-speaking L2-English learners and 14 native speakers. Results of Study 1 show that (1) the combination of specificity (one of the semantic features related to English articles) and ESK (one of the contextual factors) significantly influenced L2 article choices; (2) the L2 learners over-dependended on specificity to determine article choices; (3) the influence of background knowledge (another contextual factor) was greater than that of ESK in determining L2 article choices.

Study 2 adopted an Acceptability Judgment Task to examine the influence of interactions of semantic features and contextual factors on L2-English article interpretation in a sample of 65 L2-English learners and 27 native speakers. Results of Study 2 show that (1) the L2 learners' computation of the uniqueness of referents differed with contexts; (2) the semantic feature of partitivity influenced the L2 learners' sensitivity to definiteness; (3) the L2 learners were more sensitive to the

importance of definiteness in distinguishing *the* and *a(n)* and less influenced by specificity in English article comprehension than in production.

Major findings of the present study are summarized as *the Interaction Account* of L2 article choices and acquisition, which states: (1) the interaction of semantic features of English articles influences L2 learners' semantic knowledge of English articles; (2) the interaction of different contextual factors influences L2 learners' context-sensitivity in their computation of semantic features of English articles; (3) the interaction of semantic features of English articles with relevant contextual factors influences L2 article choices and acquisition. These findings demonstrate how L2-English article choices and acquisition as one of the linguistic phenomena can best be explained with reference to the interaction of both agents and elements, providing empirical evidence for the emergentist approach to language acquisition. Pedagogically, the findings identify the interaction of different non-grammatical factors as one of the major causes of substitution errors of L2-English article choices, accentuating interaction in L2-English article instruction and learning.

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# List of Abbreviations

ACP	Article Choice Parameter
DP	determiner phrases
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ESL	English as Second Language
ESK	explicitly stated knowledge
FH	the Fluctuation Hypothesis
HK	hearer knowledge
L1	the first language
L2	the second language
LBH	Language Bioprogramme Hypothesis
NMET	National Matriculation Entrance Test
NP	noun phrases
PP	preposition phrases
P-set	pragmatically limited sets
SR	specific referent
UG	Universal Grammar

# Contents

序 .....	i
前言 .....	iii
Abstract .....	v
Acknowledgements .....	ix
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
1.1 Goals of research .....	1
1.2 Research background .....	3
1.3 Key research questions .....	10
1.4 Organization of the book .....	11
Chapter 2 Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis of English Articles: An Overview .....	14
2.1 Introduction .....	14
2.2 Semantic analysis of English articles .....	15
2.2.1 Definiteness and English articles .....	16
2.2.2 Specificity and English articles .....	24
2.2.3 Semantic complexity of English articles .....	30
2.3 Pragmatic analysis of English articles .....	32
2.3.1 The context-driven nature of semantic features .....	33
2.3.2 P-sets (Hawkins, 1978, 1991) .....	38
2.3.3 Relationship between semantic features and contextual factors ..	42
2.4 Summary .....	44
Chapter 3 L1 and L2 Acquisition of English Articles: A Critical Review .....	46
3.1 Introduction .....	46

3.2	Tasks facilitating the acquisition of English articles.....	47
3.3	L1 developmental studies .....	49
3.3.1	Maratsos's (1976) egocentricity account.....	50
3.3.2	Wexler's Lack of Maximality Presupposition account .....	52
3.3.3	The specific/non-specific effect account .....	55
3.4	Studies of L2-English article acquisition .....	60
3.4.1	<i>Semantic Wheel</i> and the classification of NP types.....	60
3.4.2	L2 article acquisition studies under the Bickertonian framework .....	62
3.4.3	Jarvis's (2002) study from a discourse perspective .....	65
3.4.4	<i>Fluctuation Hypothesis</i> and <i>Syntactic Misanalysis Account</i> .....	68
3.5	Comments on previous research.....	75
3.6	Summary .....	78
<b>Chapter 4 Interaction and L2-English Article Acquisition:</b>		
	<b>Questions and Hypotheses.....</b>	<b>80</b>
4.1	Introduction .....	80
4.2	Interaction under the emergentist framework .....	81
4.2.1	Emergentism in SLA .....	82
4.2.2	Interaction: importance and ignorance.....	86
4.2.3	Outlining the interactions to be studied.....	89
4.3	Exploring interaction in detail.....	91
4.3.1	Interaction of different semantic features .....	92
4.3.2	Interaction of different contextual factors .....	94
4.3.3	Interaction of semantic features with contextual factors.....	98
4.4	Research questions and hypotheses .....	113
4.5	Summary .....	116
<b>Chapter 5 Study 1: Elicited Production.....</b>		<b>117</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	117



5.2	Predictions.....	118
5.3	Methodology.....	122
5.3.1	Participants .....	122
5.3.2	Materials and procedures.....	122
5.3.3	Data coding procedures .....	128
5.4	Results.....	130
5.4.1	The forced elicitation task .....	130
5.4.2	The written interview .....	137
5.5	Discussion .....	150
5.5.1	The role of specificity in L2 article choices.....	150
5.5.2	Different effects of contextual factors .....	157
5.5.3	Interaction of semantic features with contextual factors.....	160
5.6	Summary .....	163
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Study 2: Acceptability Judgment.....</b>	<b>165</b>
6.1	Introduction .....	165
6.2	Background and predictions.....	166
6.2.1	Background .....	166
6.2.2	Predictions about uniqueness.....	167
6.2.3	Predictions about hearer knowledge .....	170
6.2.4	Predictions about specificity .....	171
6.3	Methodology.....	173
6.3.1	Participants .....	173
6.3.2	Task and materials .....	174
6.3.3	Procedure .....	181
6.4	Results.....	182
6.4.1	Computing uniqueness .....	183
6.4.2	Uniqueness vs. existence .....	185