

英语前置句法结构 习得中的语用制约



尹洪山 著

*Pragmatic Constraints
on the Acquisition of
English Preposing Constructions*

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序

本书是尹洪山博士在他的博士论文基础上撰写的一部有关二语习得的专著。本书的独特之处和创新在于结合了语用学和语篇分析的理论,对中国英语学习者前置句法习得中的语用制约进行了实证研究。虽然我不是二语习得领域的专家,但对作者将功能主义语言学理论应用于语言习得研究的做法颇加赞赏,因而乐意将本书推荐给语言学研究和二语习得研究的爱好者。

尹洪山博士于2004年考入山东大学外国语学院攻读博士学位,师从王守元教授。王教授是二语习得和文体学领域的专家,早年在英国爱丁堡大学师从H. G. Widdowson专修文体学,并深受著名应用语言学家Pit Corder的影响,后来在美国专攻二语习得研究,并获得博士学位。令人痛心的是,王教授于2004年因病去世,这无疑是我国外语界的一大损失。尹洪山后来转到了我的门下,经过三年的寒窗苦读,出色地完成了博士论文的研究和撰写,顺利毕业。尹洪山博士的出色表现没有辜负王守元教授生前的期望。

尹洪山博士的研究兴趣是二语习得,而我的研究兴趣是功能语言学、语篇分析和语用学,因此在博士论文的选题上,尹洪山博士选择了句法习得中的语用制约问题作为研究的核心,并参照Lambrecht (1994) 和 Birner & Ward (1998) 对英语话题和前置句式的研究,设计了具体的研究方案,通过实证研究得出了令人信服的结论,从而揭示了二语学习者习得英语非典型语序的特点和规律。

20 世纪 80 年代以来,西方许多语言学家对非典型语序结构的句法特点和语篇语用功能进行了系统的研究。在这一方面,Lambrecht (1994) 和 Birner & Ward (1998) 的研究最具代表性。非典型语序结构主要涉及三种类型的移位结构:(1)前置结构(preposing),包括主题化(topicalization)、焦点前置(focus preposing)和左向移位结构(left-dislocation);(2)后置结构(postposing),包括存现结构(existential structure)和右向移位结构(right-dislocation);(3)谓项置换(argument reversal),包括倒装(inversion)和被动结构(passivization)。所有这些非典型语序结构在语用上是有标记的,因为它们在使用上受到语篇语用因素的制约,并具有特定的语篇功能。那么,中国英语学习者在习得此类非典型语序结构时会表现出什么样的特点和规律呢?本书从前置结构入手,主要从以下几个方面对这一问题进行了回答:语境与信息结构如何影响前置句式在中介语语法中的可接受程度;语用因素与学习者对前置结构的反应时间之间的关系;学习者在处理前置句式时使用了哪些语用策略。该研究对第二语言习得研究具有一定的启示意义。特别是在理论层面上,本研究在功能主义语言学的理论框架内,基于句法与语用的接口层面探讨了前置结构在二语习得中的语用制约,弥补了传统句法习得研究的不足。以往的语序习得研究大多关注普遍语法和母语迁移的作用,忽视了制约句法能力发展的语用因素,本研究所做的尝试为二语句法习得研究提供了新的视角。就语言学研究而言,本研究带给我们的一个重要启示就是,理论只有与实践相结合才能表现出强大的生命力。语言学研究的一个重要任务就是探讨语言的性质、结构和功能,但语言学研究的最终目标并不仅仅是抽象的理论和假设。如果语言学的理论和假设不能得到语言实践的验证或者不能与语言实践相结合,就失去了存在的价值。尹洪山博士的研究不但做到了理论与实践的结合,而且在二语习得的语境中验证了语言学理论的解释力和应用价值,丰富了语言学研究的内涵。

在本书即将出版之际,再次向尹洪山博士表示衷心的祝贺,并祝愿他在未来的研究中取得更大的成绩。

苗兴伟

山东大学外国语学院

2009年4月12日

前言

本书旨在研究中国英语学习者前置句式习得中的语用制约,并报告了三个实验的研究结果。本研究所基于的理论模式是 Lambrecht (1994) 和 Birner & Ward (1998) 对英语话题和前置句式的研究,其主要理论观点为,英语中的前置结构受语篇成分之间的语用关系制约。根据这一理论前提,本书主要回答以下几个方面的问题:语境与信息结构如何影响前置句式在中介语语法中的可接受程度;语用因素与学习者对前置结构的反应时间之间的关系;学习者在处理前置句式时使用了哪些语用策略。

为了回答上述问题,作者设计了三组实验。参加试验一的受试者由来自五所中国内地高校的 387 名英语专业本科生和研究生组成,并被分为三个不同的水平组。实验一的研究结果显示,由于汉英两种语言之间在 NP 前置方面存在类型相似性,受试者基本能接受英语中的这类结构,母语迁移的影响比较明显。但是,脱离语境的 NP 前置句式在两种语言中有着不同的语用制约,大多数受试者并没有意识到其中的语用差异。研究同时发现,三个水平组的受试均拒绝接受英语中的 VP 前置结构,即使在增加语境的情况下,受试者也不接受。就信息结构与前置句式的关系而言,研究结果显示,受试者对语篇中已经激活的前置话题接受程度最高,对传达语篇新信息的前置话题接受程度最低。研究中还发现,尽管英语中也存在标记可及性信息的前置话题,但二语学习者在识别其中的语篇内在关系时有着较大的困难。

实验二通过测量二语学习者对前置句式的反应时间研究语用因素的作用。参加本次实验的 60 名英语专业大学生被分为两个

水平组。研究方法采用 DMDX 计算机反应时测量,该方法近年来由心理语言学领域引入二语习得研究,并得到了广泛应用。实验二的研究结果显示,多数情况下受试者对 VP 前置结构的反应时间要稍慢于典型语序,但总体而言这种差异并不明显。然而,在处理 AP 前置结构时,大多数受试者的反应时间则明显慢于典型语序。上述两种情况可以从英语限定动词和形容词在句子中的语序特点进行解释,前者位置比较固定,前置时容易引起受试者的注意,但不会造成理解上的歧义。后者的位置较为灵活,前置时有时会在大脑中引起功能与形式匹配时的竞争。

试验三采用“有声思维”的方法研究二语学习者在处理前置结构时利用了哪些策略,该方法的优势在于能够采集到反映其大脑活动的心理语言数据。参加本次实验的受试者为八名英语专业大学生,他们均接受过相关的培训,能够在“有声思维”任务中合理分配自己的注意力。实验结果显示,二语学习者倾向于使用以下五种策略处理语言输入中的前置结构:凭借语境线索、利用语言知识、依靠语用直觉、依赖学习经验、借助最少努力策略。

本研究的上述发现在理论、方法和实践方面对第二语言习得研究具有一定的启示意义。首先,就理论层面而言,本研究基于句法与语用的接口层面探讨了前置结构在二语习得中的语用制约,弥补了传统句法习得研究的不足。本研究的发现有助于说明,英语非典型句式的习得不仅受语言因素的影响,而且也是一个涉及语用因素的过程。本研究在方法论方面的启示在于,有机结合不同的研究方法对于探讨前置句法的习得特点和规律有着特别的意义。在语言教学实践方面,本研究的相关发现可以帮助教师进一步了解句法习得的复杂过程,而不再仅仅关注句法规则的内化和习得。另外,掌握英语前置句式的语用制约因素可以帮助二语学习者提高其语篇的组织和信息连贯能力。

作者

2009年4月20日

List of Abbreviations

AD	advanced
AP	adjective phrase
BLC	Backward Looking Center
CAH	Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis
CL	classifier
CLI	cross-linguistic influence
DMDX	Dmstr and Direct X
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
FAH	Full Access Hypothesis
FTFA	Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis
IHS	Initial Hypothesis of Syntax
HIM	high-intermediate
ILH	Interlanguage Hypothesis
INV	inversion
LIM	low-intermediate
L1	first language
L2	second language
ms	millisecond
NL	native language
NNV	noun + noun + verb
NP	noun phrase

2 英语前置句法结构习得中的语用制约

NVN	noun + verb + noun
OP	open proposition
OSV	object + subject + verb
PRT	particle
PP	prepositional phrase
PT	Processability Theory
SLA	second language acquisition
SVO	subject + verb + object
TEM	Test for English Majors
TL	target language
UG	universal grammar
VP	verb phrase

Contents

序	(1)
前言	(1)
List of Abbreviations	(1)
Chapter One Introduction	(1)
1.1 The concept of preposing	(1)
1.2 Typological features of preposing	(5)
1.3 Significance of the research	(7)
1.4 Organization of the thesis	(8)
1.5 Summary	(9)
Chapter Two Literature Review	(11)
2.1 Context and felicity	(11)
2.2 Information status in preposing	(15)
2.2.1 Information structure	(15)
2.2.2 Topic preposing	(20)
2.2.3 Focus preposing	(23)
2.3 Discourse functions of preposing	(25)
2.4 Discourse functions of left-dislocation and inversion	(28)
2.5 Preposing in cross-linguistic perspectives	(33)
2.5.1 Subject and topic in Chinese	(34)
2.5.2 Preposing in Chinese	(40)

2 英语前置句法结构习得中的语用制约

2.5.2.1 NP preposing	(40)
2.5.2.2 VP and AP preposings	(45)
2.6 Issues in the acquisition of L2 word order	(48)
2.6.1 The role of L1 transfer	(49)
2.6.1.1 Changing views of language transfer ...	(49)
2.6.1.2 Transfer in L2 word-order patterns	(51)
2.6.2 Universalist account	(55)
2.6.3 Cognitive approaches	(60)
2.6.3.1 General nativism and the Competition Model	(60)
2.6.3.2 The Processability Theory	(63)
2.7 Limitations of the previous studies	(66)
2.8 Summary	(68)
Chapter Three Theoretical Framework	(70)
3.1 The Topic Acceptability Scale	(70)
3.2 Pragmatic constraints on preposing	(74)
3.2.1 Linking relations in preposing	(75)
3.2.2 Constraints on VP and AP preposings	(79)
3.2.3 Constraints on focalization	(81)
3.3 A general model for the present research	(82)
3.4 Objectives of the study	(84)
3.5 Summary	(85)
Chapter Four Pragmatic Effects on the Acceptability of Preposing in Interlanguage Grammar	(86)
4.1 Research questions	(86)
4.2 Methodology	(87)
4.3 Participants	(87)
4.4 Instruments	(89)

4.5	Procedure	(95)
4.5.1	The pilot study	(95)
4.5.2	Research design	(96)
4.5.3	Data collection	(96)
4.6	Results	(97)
4.6.1	Findings from Test A	(97)
4.6.2	Findings from Test B	(102)
4.6.3	Findings from Test C	(108)
4.7	Discussion	(113)
4.7.1	The acceptability of preposing in isolation	(113)
4.7.2	The acceptability of preposing in context	(114)
4.7.3	The effects of activation states	(117)
4.8	Summary	(118)

Chapter Five Pragmatic Effects on Response Times

	to Preposing	(120)
5.1	Research questions	(120)
5.2	Methodology	(121)
5.3	Participants	(122)
5.4	Instruments	(122)
5.5	Procedure	(128)
5.6	Results	(129)
5.7	Discussion	(134)
5.8	Summary	(137)

Chapter Six Strategy Choice in Processing Preposings

		(139)
6.1	Research questions	(139)
6.2	Methodology	(140)
6.3	Participants	(141)

4 英语前置句法结构习得中的语用制约

6.4	Instrument	(141)
6.5	Procedure	(144)
6.6	Results	(146)
6.7	Discussion	(152)
6.8	Summary	(154)
Chapter Seven General Discussion		(155)
7.1	The influence of L1	(155)
7.2	Context and preposing	(157)
7.3	Information status and preposing structure	(161)
7.4	Canonical VS noncanonical word order	(163)
7.5	The role of L2 proficiency	(165)
7.6	Strategy choice	(167)
7.7	Summary	(168)
Chapter Eight Conclusion		(169)
8.1	Major findings	(169)
8.2	Implications	(171)
8.2.1	Theoretical implications	(171)
8.2.2	Methodological implications	(173)
8.2.3	Pedagogical implications	(174)
8.3	Limitations of the study	(176)
8.4	Suggestions for future research	(177)
8.5	Summary	(178)
Bibliography		(179)
Appendix I Judgment Test A		(195)
Appendix II Judgment Test B		(198)
Appendix III Judgment Test C		(205)
Appendix IV Think-aloud Test		(212)
Acknowledgements		(216)

information units in the text (Saunders and Noorhman, 2000). For instance, it is often observed that speakers employ various syntactic constructions to mark the information status of the elements in their utterances. From a discourse perspective, the use of noncanonical word order, speakers also make use of noncanonical constructions, such as preposing, left dislocation, inversion, etc., to structure the flow of discourse.

Chapter One Introduction

This study probes into the relationship between contextual effects and the acquisition of English preposing constructions by Chinese-speaking learners. The focus of the research is placed on pragmatic constraints¹ upon preposing and how they affect the acceptability of this noncanonical word order in interlanguage grammar. To address the questions in these respects, the present thesis reports on the findings of three experiments conducted within the theoretical framework formulated for this research. It is hoped that the results of the study will contribute to second language acquisition² (SLA) from the perspective of syntax-pragmatic interface. This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the concept of preposing and its typological features. Then it discusses the significance of the study and sketches the structure of the thesis.

1.1 The concept of preposing

In discourse organization the variation of word order often serves as the links between the current utterance and the prior context. These links reflect the information structures in the sentence and facilitate discourse processing through the establishment of coherence relations between discourse entities. This suggests that speakers establish coherence by relating different

information units in the text (Sanders and Noordman, 2000). For instance, it is often observed that speakers employ various syntactic constructions to mark the information status of the elements in utterances. Apart from the overwhelming choice of canonical word order, speakers also make use of noncanonical constructions, such as preposing, left dislocation, inversion, etc., to structure the flow of discourse.

Preposing, as defined in Ward and Birner (2004), refers to a type of sentence in which a lexically governed phrasal constituent is moved to the left of its canonical position, typically to the sentence-initial position. This definition is similar to Biber et al.'s (2000) concept of fronting, but the difference between them is also obvious. From a grammatical point of view, Ward and Birner's definition of preposing excludes inversion as a separate type of noncanonical structure, while fronting, according to Biber et al., includes not only preposing, but also subject-verb inversion. Based on information analysis, Ward and Birner argue that preposing is a focus/presupposition construction involving a salient or inferable open proposition³ (OP) in discourse. This discourse function is achieved mainly through leftward movement of phrasal categories, including noun phrases (NPs), as shown in the example from Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*:

(1) She thanked him again and again; and with a sweetness of address which always attended her, invited him to be seated. But this he declined, as he was dirty and wet

(*Sense and Sensibility*; 36)

Here the NP ("this") which is lexically governed by the

verb “declined” is preposed beyond its canonical position. The preposing in this discourse is rather felicitous in light of the information principle, according to which the preposed NP refers anaphorically to what is stated in the prior context, e. g., “... invited him to be seated”. In this case the preposed constituent is held in a linking relation with the preceding discourse. The variation of word order succeeds in meeting the requirements of information flow, which renders the discourse more coherent. Apart from NP, some other grammatical categories that are lexically governed can also be preposed. Consider the following examples:

- (2) The time has come for a new American Emancipation, a great national drive to tear down economic barriers and liberate the spirit of enterprise in the most distressed areas of our country. My friends, together we can do this, and do it we must

(Zheng, 1996: 325)

- (3) A: What do you think of John?

B: He's a very successful, but humble guy.

A: Successful, yes. But humble he's not.

(Birner and Ward, 1998: 72)

In (2) it is the verb phrase (VP) “do it” that is preposed, while in (3) what is preposed is the adjective phrase (AP) “humble”. In both cases the preposed constituents have their respective antecedents, which help establish linking relations within the preceding context and reduce processing cost. It follows that the choice of preposing constructions in a given discourse has its functional basis.