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L1 Features and Their Influences on L2 Acquisition

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YUNDONG SHIJIAN BIAODA YANJIU:
MUYU TEZHENG JIQI DUI ERYU XIDE DE YINGXIANG

曾永红 著

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Preface

This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation.

Looking back on all the years for my doctoral studies, I couldn't help thinking about the joys and sorrows, ups and downs I've experienced. Just imagine no matter what situation I've been in, there have always been a lot of people there, helping me, encouraging me and comforting me! To all these people goes my heart-felt gratitude.

First and foremost, my thanks will go to my supervisor, Professor Bai Jiehong, a knowledgeable teacher, a strict mentor, a loving mother and a warm-hearted friend to me. She is one of the very special people one feels fortunate enough to have met in life. I first met her over 20 years ago when I was then an undergraduate student. Years later, I have been blessed to be one of her doctoral students and have learnt so much from her in both academics and life. She has led me into the field of second language acquisition and later on applied cognitive linguistics, a relatively new but flourishing discipline. She has always been an unfailing source of support to me during my years of work and study, especially in the process of dissertation writing.

I just couldn't forget, back to September, 2006, I was sent to

the National Research Center for Foreign Language Education, Beijing Foreign Studies University. It's there that I've acquainted myself with some famous professors, to name just a few, Professor Wang Kefei, Professor Wen Qiufang, Professor Chen Guohua, Professor Han Baochen, Professor Dai Manchun, and Professor Henriette Hendriks from Cambridge University who kindly mailed to me an important paper from the UK. All these professors have instilled into me the basics and routines of second language acquisition research. It's there that I have also met a lot of friends, including Tian Juan, Ma Xiaolei, Liu Liangzhang, Yuan Fengshi, Chang Haichao, and got acquainted with quite a few visiting scholars from around the country. We met almost everyday, attending courses or lectures, discussing questions or met routinely at weekends for a drink.

I'm especially grateful to all the professors who have endeavored to help me revise and proofread the drafts. Professor Liu Zhengguang from Hunan University, Professor Peng Jinding from Central South University, Professor Liang Xiaobo from National University of Defense Technology, and Professor Deng Yunhua, without whose timely help, insightful comments and suggestions the present dissertation would have been impossible.

My sincere gratitude equally goes to some colleagues and teachers, and especially to Professor Jiang Jiansong, Professor Jiang Hongxin, Professor Huang Zhending, and Professor Shi Yuzhi. Their informative lectures have broadened my eyesight and academic interest.

I am also grateful to some best friends or classmates, Chen Zhongping and Chen Minzhe. We help each other. We motivate each other. We are more than friends; we are true brothers.

Thanks will also be extended to Chen Liang, a very good friend of mine now working in the University of Georgia, USA, who took efforts collecting the English native data and some of the important papers for me. And to Professor Ji Yinglin, a PhD graduate from Cambridge University who once worked as a Post Doctoral Fellow in King's College London and now Head of Language and Cognition Research Center in Shenzhen University, who kindly sent me three key chapters of her dissertation for my reference.

Special thanks will go to my family too—to my father and my mother! Without their insistence and support, I would have quit schooling in the 1980s, like most of my childhood pals did. Their patience, encouragement and diligence have motivated us three brothers to strive forward. Much to my regret, my mother passed away in 2009 and my father in 2016. I miss them deeply. And also to my wife and my son, for their years of support, understanding and comfort.

To all those people whose names I may not have even mentioned here but have helped me in one way or another, my deepest gratitude.

Abstract

Motion is pervasive in our daily life, which explains why motion event is central to our human experience and why research on the use and acquisition of motion event expressions has been one of the key issues linguists and psychologists both at home and abroad pay special attention to. This is especially the case ever since Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000) has categorized languages as being either a satellite-framed or a verb-framed language, which has inspired a plethora of cross-linguistic studies involving how spatial relations are represented in different languages. However, this typology has been challenged by many researchers as their research findings have revealed that not all languages fit easily into Talmy's binary typology, and that a third class of E(quipollently)-framed languages should be encompassed in which "path and manner are expressed by equivalent grammatical forms" (Slobin 2004: 249). In particular, the Chinese motion typology has been a controversial issue as it has been categorized as an S-language, a V-language or an E-language. To seek for a thorough understanding of this phenomenon, an examination of the habitual language use in terms of motion event expressions by Chinese native speakers is of vital

importance. This, in turn, serves as a cornerstone for us to better understand L1 use and L2 acquisition of motion events.

Previous research results show, however different the typological patterns can be, they do not have a strong impact on children. But it does influence second language learners, since in first language acquisition children show sensitivity to language-specific patterns in the way they talk about motion and these patterns have a strong impact on the online thinking for speaking, and are "resistant to restructuring in adult second language acquisition" (Slobin 1996a). So, when two languages differ in motion typology, will this affect how learners come to express themselves in an L2? This question is "a rather neglected area" (Cadierno 2004) and existing empirical research is "rather scarce" (Cadierno 2008b), but still remains "a fertile area" (Navarro Ortega 2017: 15). Though some relevant research has been published ever since, the results are quite inconclusive as to whether and to what extent learners can acquire the L2 thinking for speaking patterns. Besides, hardly any work has been devoted to an in-depth analysis of how Chinese EFL learners acquire English motion event expressions across event types.

Given the controversy over the Chinese typological classification and the inadequate empirical research on different event types, the present study aimed to investigate how Chinese adult native speakers express motion events in Chinese, based on data elicited orally in terms of both voluntary and caused motion events. This was followed by further exploration into motion event acquisition across event types by Chinese EFL learners at different proficiency levels, and to what extent the L1 thinking for speaking influences the acquisition. Specifically, we have addressed the following three questions:

1. How do Chinese adult native speakers express motion events in Chinese?

2. To what extent do Chinese learners at different levels of proficiency acquire the English motion event expressions?

3. Does the L1 thinking for speaking influence the acquisition of English motion event expressions? If so, to what extent?

Oral narrative data were elicited from three groups of Chinese learners at different levels of proficiency by means of the *frog story* and video clips from cartoon programs for voluntary and caused motion event expressions respectively, in comparison to data collected from English and Chinese native speakers. The oral narrative data were then transcribed, proofread, coded, and analyzed. An examination of the habitual language use in both voluntary motion (VM) and caused motion (CM) tasks revealed some major findings, which can be summarized below.

Firstly, Chinese adults used a diversity of manner verbs in voluntary motion events, but not as rich as those in English. However, these speakers produced almost equal number of manner and path verb tokens. For verb constructions, the majority of which took the form of M + P constructions, while Manner only constructions occurred with almost the same frequency as Path only constructions, exhibiting a unique feature of its own. The frequency of plus-ground clauses tilted towards verb-framed languages, the same being true with the use of event conflation and description of physical setting. In caused motion tasks, Chinese speakers produced a rich variety of cause verbs as well, but more diverse verb constructions, of which C + P constructions accounted for about 50%, and three other options took the remaining 50%. From the perspective of providing

locative elements, Chinese speakers followed a consistent routine as they do in VM tasks. Besides, they used very few cases of event conflation.

Overall, findings concerning the availability of a diversity of manner verbs and cause verbs in VM and CM descriptions, the limited provision of ground information, and event conflation, descriptions of physical setting and dynamic movement, and the special motion verb constructions available, especially in CM tasks, demonstrated that Chinese is neither really a satellite-framed language nor a truly verb-framed language. Rather, it stands up as a unique type, showing some characteristics that are different and unique from both the language families. These mixed features elicited and deduced from actual language use explains why it is better to categorize Chinese as an equipollently-framed language.

Secondly, Chinese learners used a relatively very limited number of manner and cause verb types in both VM and CM tasks, mostly referring to very general, rather than specific and elaborated, first-tier motion verbs. With proficiency, they showed a steady but not significant increase of such motion verbs. They generally provided almost as much plus-ground information as native English speakers, irrespective of event types, but exhibited a nonlinear developmental pattern. They preferred event serialization over event conflation, but showed a steady increase in using event conflation. In addition, Chinese learners allocated their attention to physical setting descriptions as well as dynamic movement, a perspective which differed Chinese learners with English native speakers remarkably.

Thirdly, for the L1 thinking-for-speaking influence in the process of acquisition, some traces of L1 patterns surfaced in the L2 motion

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event expressions in VM tasks, mainly in the choice of general manner verbs and the expression of the mixed pattern describing the static setting and dynamic movement as well, a strategy very different from that of native English speakers, but resembles closely the one employed by Chinese native speakers in Mandarin narratives and therefore is in agreement with Slobin's thinking for speaking hypothesis. But in CM tasks, no particular traces of L1 patterns could indicate explicitly that learners were under an influence in the L2 motion acquisition. Nevertheless, traces of idiosyncratic use of verb and verb constructions might result from L1 transfer; besides, the L1 thinking for speaking might be functioning in terms of ground elaboration.

Based on the above findings, this study concludes with answers to the three main research questions:

1. Chinese native speakers used a diversity of manner verbs, path verbs and cause verbs but kept using limited ground information. They preferred event serialization to event conflation and they produced static and dynamic physical settings as well. These features demonstrated that Chinese possesses some unique characteristics that differentiate it from satellite-framed languages and verb-framed languages, rendering it better to categorize it as an equipollently-framed language.

2. Chinese learners seemed to have acquired the characteristic motion event expressions typical in the target language, showing not necessarily a linear developmental pattern. Chinese learners differed markedly with native English speakers in motion verb use and physical setting descriptions.

3. Chinese learners transferred some of the L1 typological features

to English motion event expressions, especially in terms of motion verb use, and the description of physical setting. That is, L1 thinking for speaking existed in some perspectives, but not as strong as expected.

These results have both important theoretical and pedagogical implications. Theoretically, the study serves to better inform us of the features of Chinese motion event expressions and acquisition of English motion event expressions by Chinese EFL learners and it has bridged a gap in studies on motion event acquisition at home and thus enriched the relevant research. It may also shed light on second language acquisition research based on cognitive linguistics theories. Practically, pedagogic intervention and awareness-raising activities may prove to be significant for further acquisition of motion event expressions.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

The past twenty years has witnessed an increasing interest in the research of motion events and their descriptions in typologically different languages. The fact that motion is pervasive in our daily life and central to our human experience can only partly explain why this notion intrigues our interest and why the study of motion events in spatial domain has attracted a great deal of attention in terms of both theoretical pursuits and empirical studies of acquisition (e. g. Talmy 1985, 1991, 2000; Bowerman & Choi 2001; Slobin 1996a, 1996b, 2003, 2004). Much of the interest, however, has derived from the seminal works of Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000, 2009) and his lexicalization patterns. These typological characteristics and lexicalization patterns influence, if not determine, the verbalization of our experience. Put differently, the different options available to speakers by their language strongly influence how they habitually verbalize motion events (research findings in a plethora of studies have

revealed these, such as Berman & Slobin 1994; Cadierno 2004, 2008a; Cardini 2008; Hendriks & Hickmann 2011; Hickmann 2003; Özçalışkan & Slobin 1999, 2003; Slobin 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2006; Strömqvist & Verhoeven 2004). With this in mind, Slobin (1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 2000) put forward his "thinking-for-speaking" hypothesis, a modified version of the classical Sapir-Whorf debate on linguistic relativity. Situated within the framework of Talmyan typology and Slobin's thinking-for-speaking hypothesis, the present study aims to investigate whether and to what extent Chinese EFL learners are able to acquire the English motion event expressions, and how the L1 thinking-for-speaking influence L2 acquisition, on the basis of exploring the typical features of Chinese voluntary and caused motion event expressions.

This introductory Chapter intends to elaborate on the motivation of the research, research objectives, significance of the study, and the structure of the book.

1.1 Motivation of the Study

The selection of the theme in the current study was originated from the consideration of the "SLT dilemma" and the author's research interest in cognitive linguistics and second language acquisition.

As a language teacher and learner, I have been for years puzzling about the ultimate attainment a learner can achieve after a long span of relentless efforts in learning a foreign language. The same question was raised by Danesi (2000, 2003), termed as the "SLT dilemma":

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