

汉语情态动词的二语习得研究
——以“能”类为例

The L2 Acquisition of
the Chinese Modal Auxiliary Verbs
—In Reference to the Neng Verb Group

By Xiong Wen

熊文著

emergence diversification
consciousness-raising
elaborating stabilizing

systematic emergence diversification
noticing
elaborating narrowing elaborating

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云南大学出版社
YUNNAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

汉语情态动词的二语习得研究:以“能”类为例 =
The L2 Acquisition of the Chinese Modal Auxiliary
Verbs—In Reference to the Neng Verb Group: 英文 /
熊文著. — 昆明: 云南大学出版社, 2020
ISBN 978-7-5482-4075-4

I. ①汉… II. ①熊… III. ①现代汉语—动词—研究
—英文 IV. ①H146.2

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2020)第153615号

责任编辑 蔡小旭
特约编辑 段立蕊
装帧设计 石 斌

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出版发行 云南大学出版社
印 刷 昆明理焜印务有限公司
开 本 787mm×1092mm 1/16
印 张 21.5
字 数 432千
版 次 2020年8月第1版
印 次 2020年8月第1次印刷
书 号 ISBN 978-7-5482-4075-4
定 价 120.00元

社 址 昆明市一二一大街182号(云南大学东陆校区英华园内)
邮 编 650091
电 话 (0871)65031071 65033244
网 址 <http://www.ynup.com>
E-mail market@ynup.com

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Dr. Xiong Wen is an Associate Professor of Chinese Studies and the chairperson of the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Winston Salem State University in North Carolina of the U.S.A. She received her B.A. and M.A. at East China Normal University (Shanghai, China), and earned her Ph.D. from La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia in Second Language Acquisition and Language Education. Dr. Xiong has worked at different universities across three continents as the Chinese program founder at the current university, the University of Rhode Island (U.S.A), Shanghai University (China), as well as the visiting professor at University of Technology of Sydney and National University of Laos. She has over 30 years of experience in teaching and researching Chinese as a second/foreign language. Dr. Xiong's research interests focus on the learning and teaching of Chinese as a second or foreign language and the acquisition of Chinese language and culture. Her publications address the following research areas: second language acquisition, Chinese linguistics, language contrast, language teaching and curriculum design, and Chinese cultural studies. Dr. Xiong published seven textbooks for learners of Chinese. She was one of the 12 recipients of "National Best Teacher of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language" (China, 2001) and most recently received the Wilma Lassiter Master Teacher Award at WSSU (U.S.A, 2020). She held the language tester qualifications of OPI, AAPPL and HSK in her career.

Preface

For 30 years, as a language educator and researcher, I have been trying to answer the following inquiry: Why do learners of Chinese experience difficulties in acquiring the language? This inquiry naturally gives rise to two more essential questions: Do we really understand what the learners are doing in the process of their L2 language development? How do we assess the learner's language growth and finally: What are the effective teachings to deal with difficulties?

The above inquiries formed the motivation and endeavor for my research about the acquisition of Chinese modal auxiliary verbs as a second Language (2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, and 2019, see the bibliography).

The fascinating and complicated features of Chinese modal auxiliary verbs have propelled me to start (in 1990s) and continue to explore it because learning modal auxiliary verbs in Chinese and English are considered difficult by both learners. The acquisition of modal auxiliary verbs carries the features of *variability* and *incompleteness* (Clahsen and Muysken, 1986) and therefore are hard to master. It brings us to the familiar scenes of how the learners of English acquiring the indefinite and definite articles “*a, an, the*” in English, and the learners of Chinese acquiring words or structures like “*de*的, *bǎ*把, *le*了” in Chinese.

The studies of mood or modality have been related to each other for centuries and can be traced back to debates in the literature of logical and philosophical studies. From the perspective of language, mood (modal, -ity) is defined by Crystal (2003, p. 299) as follows :

Mood (“modality”, or “mode”) refers to a set of SYNTACTIC AND SEMANTIC CONTRASTS signaled by alternative PARADIGMS of the verb, e.g. INDICATIVE (the UNMARKED form), SUBJUNCTIVE, IMPERATIVE. Semantically, a wide range of meanings is involved, especially

attitudes on the part of the speaker towards the factual content of the utterance, e.g. uncertainty, definiteness, vagueness, possibility. Syntactically, these contrasts may be signaled by alternative INFLECTIONAL forms of a verb, or by using AUXILIARIES.

Based on this definition, it can be interpreted that mood or modality is a common category in language, and is a combination of syntactic elements (alternative PARADIGMS of the verb), semantic elements (a wide range of meanings) and pragmatic elements (including attitudes on the part of the speaker towards the factual content of the utterance).

Extending this argument, meanings such as permission, obligation, volition, possibility, necessity, and prediction, can be seen in different languages by alternative PARADIGMS of the verb. While it may not be possible to easily claim universality for any of these aforementioned meanings, it is highly likely that substantial parts of these meanings will be shared between languages (and cultures). One consequence of this is that the second/foreign language learners will need to discover whether these meanings are realized differently in a new language, and if so, how.

In relation to language development, research on L1 (Halliday, 1975; Papafragou, 2001; Perkins, 1983; Richards, 1990; Wells, 1979, 1985) claims that the acquisition of the auxiliary verbs is particularly interesting because it is important in a child's linguistic development in relation to the acquisition stage, rate, variation and communicative strategies, reflected in Richards' (1990, p. 5) assertion. According to him; "Despite the possibility of alternative strategies to express auxiliary meaning, however, an increasing mastery of the syntax, semantics and pragmatics of auxiliary usage is an inextricable part of language development from an early stage." Furthermore, the category is "hard to master," at least before the "critical period," even though the modal items emerged at as early as two years of age because of the features of *variability* and *incompleteness* (Clahsen & Muysken, 1986).

The features of *variability* and *incompleteness* in the acquisition of L2 modal auxiliary verbs is true too though little is known about the nature process of the modal auxiliary in L2 development. Evidence from either experimental or naturalistic studies is rare. In teaching, the Chinese modal auxiliary is not only a set of frequently utilized words, but also one which is frequently used incorrectly by learners of Chinese (Chen, 2002; Ji, 1986; Tao, 1993; Xiong, 1994;). In recent years, there have been extensive attentions in the research of second language acquisition with respect to Chinese modal auxiliary verbs, but the research is clustered in language contrast and error

analysis. There are some research exploring the order or sequence of the acquisition of Chinese modal auxiliary verbs, with merely a few research papers conducted in language development. The impetus for this book is to introduce a wider audience to promoting research in the L2 acquisition of Chinese modal auxiliary verbs.

Considering the acquisition of Chinese modal auxiliary verbs, it may be useful to consider multiple paradigms for inquiry. The question herein is whether the acquisition of Chinese modal auxiliary verbs is related to 1) a stage in the L2 learner's development; 2) a reflection of different patterns of interlearner variation; or 3) whether the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics work together in the acquisition process of the learner.

The Neng Verb Group (*néng*能, *kěyǐ*可以, *huì*会 and *kěnéng*可能) is chosen as the study objectives of the book from an entire set of Chinese modal auxiliary verbs, which share both the root and epistemic meaning rubrics of ability, permission and possibility. What is expected that from the study of the acquisition of a small yet reprehensive class of modal auxiliary verbs (NVG), we can expand the study to the other small classes of modal auxiliary verbs so as to get a complete picture of the entire category.

There are nine chapters in the book. Following the introduction, Chapter Two begins with a review of the processes of second language acquisition. Subsequently, the chapter provides a review of the literature on the acquisition of modal auxiliary verbs in both L1 and L2.

Chapter Three addresses the Chinese modal auxiliary Neng Verb Group (NVG, *néng*能, *kěyǐ*可以, *huì*会 and *kěnéng*可能) and its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic correlations and features. Here, there is a detailed and descriptive comparison with Chinese and its English counterpart Can Group. In addition, a brief look at their Korean and Japanese analogs are used as reference for further discussion related to the different L1 learner groups (in the cross-sectional elicitation tasks) in this study.

Chapters four and six, respectively, consist of treatments of two components of the methodology in this study: 1) a longitudinal case study over a one year period in China with an English-speaking beginning learner of Chinese; 2) a set of cross-sectional elicitation tasks distributed to 70 learners of three L1 groups in three Chinese proficiency levels in China. The aim of the longitudinal case study is to document the sequence in which the NVG words emerge and to provide a system/method of identifying the meanings associated with the forms used at specific points during the L2 language development. The major purpose of the elicitation tasks is to explore the learners' reflections on the process of acquisition of the NVG among a much broader

cohort of learners, and to determine whether there are differences between the learners from different L1s and Chinese proficiency levels in the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimension. Chapters five and seven, respectively, contain analyses of the elicitation tasks discussed in chapters four and six.

Chapter Eight presents the findings and six major achievements from the study of both the longitudinal case study and the cross-sectional elicitation tasks. Chapter Nine discusses implications for both theory and pedagogy. Finally, suggestions for further study are provided.

My discussion of “*Single Emergence*” vs. “*Systematic Emergence*” was stemmed from the ZISA (*the Zweitspracherwerb Italienischer und Spanischer Arbeiter*, Second Language Acquisition of Italian and Spanish Workers) group’s acknowledgment of the first occurrence/use of the learner, which has led to a key academic debate in the SLA field on the acquisition criteria. The distinction of “*Interlocutor Dependent Uses* vs. *Interlocutor Independent Uses*” calls attention to how the learner’s performance is influenced by the interlocutor and the process of meaning negotiation. Evidently, we know that the interlocutor plays a vital role in the learner’s L2 growth during the interpersonal communication. The “*Attenuated period*” and “*Bubble Metaphor*” demonstrate the nature of the learner’s language development process. The “*plateau*” phenomena across learners of different L1 and proficiency levels signal to us from where and when the problems of learning Chinese modal auxiliary verbs originated and how we can address this in the classroom.

It is necessary to note that although the data in this book were collected years ago, the research of the author continues, and the discussion and contribution of the study to the L2 acquisition in Chinese remain essential and central in current research agenda. The methodology in the study that includes both longitudinal approach and a cross-sectional approach is valid for exploring the L2 acquisition in both depth and breadth.

Xiong Wen

North Carolina, U.S.A., April, 2020

熊文 2020年4月写于美国北卡

Acknowledgment

This work would not have been possible without the generous offer of wisdom and insight, selfless hard work, genuine academic interests, consistent and readily available moral support and encouragement, and many other kinds of assistance from a cadre of people, to numerous to mention but to whom I am deeply and eternally indebted.

I would like to acknowledge the significant support of the studies included in this book: Professor Howard Nicholas for his outstanding supervision; Kim (not the real name), for his generosity in offering his time during the gathering of data (case study); my friends and colleagues, Liu Songhao (刘颂浩), Wu Zhongwei (吴中伟), and Tao Lian (陶炼) for their generous support in conducting the elicitation tasks collection at three key universities in China, and Huang Hui (黄慧), for her generous support on using SPSS to manage the cross-sectional data; Professors Andy Kirkpatrick, Tony Liddicoat, Jonathan Newton, Peng Lizhen (彭利贞), Clement White, and Zhang Zhengsheng (张正生) for their valuable input, suggestions and encouragement.

I owe a great deal to my family members, my husband and my three children, who patiently put up with my busy schedules; my brother and sister, who took over all my family and moral duties while I have been away from home; and my parents, who always give me their passionate love in my life.

Book Reviews

Professor Andy Kirkpatrick

Department of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences
Griffith University, Australia
Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities

The research describes innovative and valuable research into the complex (and controversial) area of second language acquisition. The literature review is thorough and relevant, particularly for the justification of the methods adopted by the researcher. The analysis of the Neng Verb Group is detailed and accurate. The research methods—the longitudinal study of the acquisition of the modals by an adult English speaking learner and the elicitation tasks with 70 informants of different language backgrounds (English, Japanese, Korean) are in themselves rigorously carried out and well-reported, but each also provides excellent complementary data and findings for the other.

I was extremely impressed with the way the author has carried out this research and the tools she had developed/adopted. The Interlocutor Dependent vs the Interlocutor Independent distinction is important and the graph on page 145 is a very informative representation. The distinction drawn between the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic uses of the Neng Verb group is also groundbreaking.

Professor Tony Liddicoat

Centre for Applied Linguistics
University of Warwick, U.K.

The research is a study of the development of a group of modal verbs in Chinese using both a longitudinal approach and a cross-sectional approach. The topic is original in that the development of models has not been investigated in Chinese as a second language. The research also makes an interesting and well-supported case for the interdependence of syntax and semantics in understanding acquisitional processes.

The discussion of the significance of single items/ first occurrence in the learners' talk is well done as is the discussion of emergence and mastery in SLA. The discussion here shows a thoughtful approach to SLA research and engagement with some of the key academic debates in the field.

The combined longitudinal and cross-sectional methodology is one of the strengths of the research as it allows both an in-depth study of development with a single subject and also investigates the application of the findings in a much larger cohort, particular given the importance given to dependence/independence in the study.

Professor Jonathan Newton

School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

This research examines the acquisition of items in the NVG verb group in Chinese by adult second language learners, The NVG verb group is situated on the nexus between item and rule learning, and is a repository of a range of semantic and pragmatic features, For these reasons it offers a valuable site for investigating acquisition processes, Such an investigation is carried out here through a combination of case study and quantitative analysis of elicitation task data from a group of learners from three different L1 backgrounds.

The research and scholarship reported in the study is of a very high standard. It clearly reflects the investment of substantial and original effort and makes a substantial

contribution to knowledge. Overall, I found this to be a fascinating and impressive piece of research and scholarship which is deserving of high commendation.

Professor Peng Lizhen 彭利贞

School of Humanities, Zhejiang University, China

Co-Editor-in-Chief, Chinese as a Second Language Research (CASLAR, De Gruyter Mouton 《汉语作为第二语言研究》期刊)

本书通过一个纵向的个案考察和一个横向的诱导式问卷调查全面而深入地考察了汉语作为第二语言的情态动词习得，得出了汉语二语“能类”情态动词的习得模式，以第一手数据分析为基础，从理论上揭示了汉语作为第二语言的“能类”情态动词习得的本质特征，推进了汉语作为第二语言的情态动词习得的研究，为语言习得理论的发展提供了新的实证、展示了新的发展前景。

本书包括两个实证研究所取得的成果，一个是对一个英语背景的汉语初学者在中国为期超过一年的纵向跟踪研究，一个是对来自三种不同第一语言（日语、韩语和英语）、处于三种不同汉语水平（初级、中级、高级）的70个被试的横向的诱导问卷研究，两个研究互为补充，共同回答了汉语作为第二语言的“能类”情态动词习得中关键的理论问题。

成年二语学习者对汉语“能类”情态动词习得模式的得出，为汉语作为第二语言教学提供了更多的启发，它有助于我们更深刻地理解学习者学习的本质、对某一项目的习得过程、学习者可能遇到的学习困难、汉语教学与其他语言教学的共同点和差异性，甚至于教师在习得过程中的作用。

关于汉语“能类”习得的本质的新认识，无疑是本书会给读者留下最深印象的部分。“能类”情态动词有共同的句法特征，但又大多有多义词的性质，对这组词的习得，既是句法的，也是词汇的。正如作者所说的那样，“能类”情态动词这种“半功能”词，对它们的习得，既要了解词义，也要理解语法意义，对它们的习得，不仅可习得情态动词本身，也可习得它们与其他成分之间的语法关系，在“能类”词的习得中词义和句法的学习会相互影响。本书的研究为这一点提供了直接而丰富的证据。从这种意义上说，本书提供了一个既是句法又是词汇的交叉习得研究的范例。

情态动词有共同的句法特征，但每个个体都有自身复杂的词汇特性，并在使用中对语境高度依赖，这使得汉语“能类”情态动词虽是汉语的高频词，却是汉语学习者易错的学习项目。句法表现的复杂性，语义的高主观性，语用的多功能性，使得本书以习得为研究目的，其意义已经超出语言习得本身。它把语言和习得研究很好地结合起来，对汉语情态动词特别是“能类”情态动词的研究有重要的理论价值。本书对学生输出的“能类”情

态动词的详细而的精当的分析，很好地体现了这一点。

本书在研究方法为也为同类研究提供了很多可借鉴之处。在研究方法的设计上，既考虑了时间跨度的纵向要素，又考虑了学生第一语语言、学习汉语水平性别等横向因素，还把句法、语义和语用细化为不同的参项。这种研究方法的设计，使得本书的数据更为丰满、可信，使得本书的研究更有成效，表现出理论上的可论证性和数据的可检验性。

情态动词习得顺序和过程研究是汉语作为第二语言习得研究中相对薄弱的环节，本书的研究成果无疑在很大程度上弥补了这一薄弱环节。本书在研究方法和两种实证研究所得的数据及其分析结果上的开创性，提升了本书的理论价值和教学意义，表现出很高的学术水平，体现了作者长期对汉语情态动词及其习得研究付出的努力。

本书作者长期关注汉语情态特别是情态动词习得研究，相信本书的出版一定能推动此领域的研究。

Professor Zhang Zhengsheng (张正生)

Department of Linguistics and Asian/Middle Eastern Languages

San Diego State University, U. S. A

Former Editor-in-Chief, the *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association (U.S.A)*

In this thought-provoking volume, the author has undertaken a veritable daunting task: unraveling the many entangled issues with one of the last-to-be-acquired grammatical categories in any language, i.e., modal auxiliaries (more specifically, the four Neng Verb Group). Including both linguistic analyses and acquisition studies, with a keen eye on pedagogical application, the work has both theoretical and practical implications.

Commendably, the work has highlighted many complexities of modals concerning their analysis and acquisition. Analytically, the complexities lie not only in the lack of one-to-one correspondence between form and function and the overlap and difference between items of ostensibly the same category, but also in the significant intersection of pragmatics with syntax and the lexicon. The acquisition of modals has also been shown not to be at all linear (and in fact may well be u-shaped), with phases of losing, sliding, attenuating, plateauing, along with stabilizing, restructuring, and eventually the emerging of (sub) systems. Particularly noteworthy is the author's attention on the (less attended to) pragmatic dimension. As reported, modals not only vary in frequencies in different sentence types (declarative, interrogative, imperative), they

also change with different personal pronouns. Even more extreme, the author suggests that cultural values may also have an effect, as seen in Korean subjects' avoidance of 'boastful' modals.

The book also breaks new grounds with multiple methodological innovations. Largely data-driven, the work demonstrates a healthy respect for empirical evidence, resulting in a rather fine-grained account. Spurious categorizations are eschewed in favor of gradient continuums. Rule-based group learning is seriously challenged and item-learning with all its irregularity is given due recognition. In addition to the comparisons between different proficiency levels, those between learners of different language backgrounds, namely, English, Japanese and Korean, are also included, in order to gauge the effect of possible transfers from native languages. Supplementing the more common cross-sectional comparisons, a year-long longitudinal study is also detailly documented. Particularly note-worthy is the vital role accorded to the interlocutor. Learners' production is differentially assessed according to whether it is interlocutor-dependent or interlocutor-independent, the latter being much more indicative of true proficiency. This distinction is not only vital for the validity of the interpretation of research results, it also has implications for the larger issue of the transferability of classroom teaching to real-world performance.

Both macroscopic and microscopic, the book presents a rather full picture of the intricacies with modal auxiliaries. With a wealth of background information and methodological leads, it can indeed, as the author suggests, 'serve as a point of departure' for future work on this endlessly fascinating but complex topic. Its serious attention on methodological concerns may also lend guidance to future work on topics that are similarly complex.

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