



Grammar and the Chinese ESL Learner: A Longitudinal Study on the Acquisition of the English Article System, Student Edition

Yong Lang

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Note: This student edition is a shorter version of the original hardcover work for students and interested readers. References and endnotes have been removed for easier reading.

The acquisition of the English article system has been a subject of inquiry for linguists, psychologists, child language specialists, and second language acquisition researchers. Strong interest in the study of the acquisition and uses of English articles can be attributed to a few main factors.

First, it is a known fact that second language (L2) learners of English often have difficulty engaging in the use of articles until the very late stages of acquisition. More often than not, they do not ever attain mastery of using articles at the level of a native English speaker. In fact, the misuse of articles is often a marker of a non-native English speaker's having not reached a native English speaker's level.

Second, the acquisition of English articles has proven to be a notoriously difficult process because of semantic features, syntax-morphology interfaces, syntax-pragmatics interfaces, and meaning-form connections. This is especially the case for L2 learners whose native languages do not have an article system or have a different article system.

Third, interest in the acquisition of English articles by L2 learners is strong because of the challenges faced by ESL/EFL instructors, who are often at a loss on how to respond to the requests of L2 learners for simple and straightforward rules for the use of English articles, as well as how to address the random use of English articles by L2 learners. There is thus a need to develop effective and efficient pedagogy to facilitate L2 learners' acquisition of English articles.

Fourth, the study of L2 learners' acquisition of English articles also provides insight into the general processes of L2 acquisition and helps bring us closer to answers to important questions on interlanguage grammar, the role of L1 transfer, the metalinguistic knowledge that L2 learners employ in learning a new language, and second language acquisition processes.

This book which details an in-depth longitudinal study of Chinese ESL learners' acquisition process of English articles endeavors to fill this need. It combines a qualitative approach with quantitative methods to understand the acquisition sequence of English articles, using the case of a beginner Chinese ESL learner in an American context. The longitudinal data collected during the 13-month period are first carefully indexed using a qualitative-oriented computer software program and then statistically analyzed by using SPSS. An in-depth examination of different types of articles, as well as their relations with noun phrases and other types of determinants, was then conducted using the perspectives gained from both the accuracy paradigm and the usage pattern.

The analyses of the data reveal the acquisition sequence of English articles for the Chinese ESL learner. The data indicates that the acquisition of different types of articles can be identified and grouped into distinctive

developmental stages in terms of semantic functions and variation patterns. While the findings from this study challenge several claims documented in current L2 research literature on one hand, it also casts some much-needed light on the acquisition processes of English articles by Chinese ESL learners.

This is an important book for scholars interested in second language acquisition, child language development, language learning and teaching, and Chinese learners of English.

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