An Analysis on Overpassivization in the Process of Acquiring Ergative Verbs and Their Syntax

Liping Zhou

School of Foreign Languages, Hubei University, Wuhan 430079, Hubei, China

Abstract: Ergative verb serves as a special sentence type in English. The understanding of its syntactic structure will lay a foundation for better English acquisition. Overpassivization is an important phenomenon of adjectval verbs and their syntactic acquisition. Through empirical analysis and understanding of the causes of this phenomenon, it is of great practical significance to take effective measures to give corresponding solutions to it. This paper summarizes the characteristics of ergative verbs, and gives further analysis on the phenomenon of overpassivization and its causes in syntactic acquisition, so as to provide a feasible reference for the correct application of ergative verbs in English acquisition.

Keywords: ergative verbs, syntax, acquisition, overpassivization

Introduction

Ergative verbs in English are one of the hot topics in lexical semantics and an important part of second language acquisition. Ergative verbs are strongly active causative verbs, which are characterized with spontaneity of action without any external force, and neither the use of the mark of passive grammar. However, learners use passive voice in the acquisition of this kind of syntax in a incorrect manner. Therefore, the semantic confusion between the verb and the passive leads to the confusion of learners in the translation of Chinese and English. However, due to the influence of the semantic and cognitive factors of passive verbs in the process of syntactic acquisition, it is impossible for them to master such verbs in educational practice. This paper analyzes the overpassivization of ergative verbs and their syntactic acquisition as follows.

1. Overview of ergative verbs in English

In modern English syntax, ergative verb means that the subject of the sentence becomes the logical object of the predicate verb when the verb is transitive.

I opened the door and peered into the room.

Suddenly the door opened.

The ergative verbs with the above syntax are widely used and can be mastered faster than the passive voice.

2. The importance of ergative verbs and their syntax to language acquisition

In the second language acquisition process of Chinese non-accusative verbs, English for native adults speakers will encounter problems such as the "non-accusative trap hypothesis". In order to overcome the deficiency of the "non-accusative trap hypothesis", it shows that the primary learners fail to distinguish between ergative verbs and non-accusative verbs correctly when acquiring non-accusative verbs. In terms of the acquisition path of typical Chinese non-accusative verbs and aspect markers and the acquisition sequence of Chinese non-accusative verbs, language input in the target language environment, the structural constraints of semantic association rules and the transfer of mother tongue prove to be the main manifestation of ubiquitalization in the acquisition process.

3. Analysis on the overpassivization in the process of acquiring ergative verbs and their syntax

3.1 Case analysis

The ergative verb is derived from the causative verb V by noncausative :Pr absorbs the external subject role of V and selects a Tr that no longer contains φ- features without the function of verification of DP case features. By moving (i.e. compatibility and recombination),DP is moved forward to [Spec,TP], which checks EPP features of Tr, Pr,T and φ- features of T, and T checks nominative features of DP. As ergative verbs are typical event verbs, the generation of ergative structure is mainly determined by T/Tcomp with complete φ- features, Vdef with incomplete φ- features and the verification of

morphological features of functional language classes.

The ergative verb is a strong action causative verb, which is characterized with spontaneity of action without any external force to have relationship with its object. When a specific proposition exists, it implies passive meaning, and grammatical operations do not allow the addition of passive grammatical markers. By explaining the "motivation" of the ergative verb after it enters the ergative sentence form, it is revealed that the ergative semantic attribute is the semantic basis for the realization of the passive meaning of the ergative verb. In the process of second language acquisition, the passive generalization of English non-accusative verbs covers the hypothesis of system transfer of native language tense, materialization hypothesis, noun phrase shift marker hypothesis, non-accusative trap hypothesis and agent conceptualization hypothesis, especially in the aspects of syntax and semantics, with more emphasis on the influence of cognitive factors. The outstanding manifestation of case is the feature transfer of [±sentient]. In the process of cognition and interpretation of the world, human beings unconsciously add their own will and feelings, and unconsciously change the language mode.

In the teaching of English ergative verbs, we should arrange teaching of vocabulary and grammar in a reasonable manner to give students more input properly for exercises or tasks,which can be transferred to be their own knowledge by repeated practice. Different types of intransitive verbs should be taught creatively according to actual teaching needs. We should update the educational concept, improve the frequency of communicative strategies in English class, and pay attention to the infiltration of the strategies to encourage students to memorize the verbs in the context. Finally, we should pay attention to the internal relation of teaching and treat the transfer function of mother tongue correctly.

3.2 Cause based investigation

For the phenomenon of non-accusative, the French semantic level of the energy clause is gradually extended to the field of second language acquisition. Foreign language learners tend to make mistakes in non-accusative verbs, but seldom in non-ergative verbs. In the application part, the passive structure of English "be+en" is often applied to non-accusative verbs. According to the theory of non-accusative hypothesis, the argument of non-accusative verbs is extraterritorially (deep subject), while the argument of non-accusative verbs is indomain (deep object). Although they all belong to monadic verbs, and the only argument usually appears in front of the verb as the surface subject of the sentence, the deep logical semantic relationship between the two kinds of verb arguments is essentially different.

The theoretical analysis of the passive generalization of English non-accusative verbs has been widely recognized by linguists since the non-accusative hypothesis was proposed. The overpassivization of English non-accusative verbs in the process of second language acquisition highlights the weak form based on mother tongue transfer. In the theory of materialization hypothesis, the object appears in the position of the subject, and the verb should be presented in its passive form. In the nP-shift marking hypothesis, in the passive voice, the object is elevated to the position of the subject, whose subject is no longer the agent, but the recepient, so this change is represented by the form be+V-en, and NP shift in the words of non-object verbs is marked in the form of be+V-en. In the non-accusative trap hypothesis, it is customary to change non-accusative verbs into past participles preceded by the auxiliary verb "be". Learners' grammatical judgment or controlling language output lacks sufficient experimental data support.

4. Innovation strategies in teaching based on the phenomenon of overpassivization of ergative verbs

4.1 The understanding of the middle active voice

English based ergative verbs are a hot topic in lexical semantic category with special semantic representation. According to the nature of vocabulary, ergative verbs are causative verbs with strong action meaning, and causative inducement can be either external or internal, forming the transitive and intransitive forms in which the object can appear in the theme and object. This paper introduces the middle verb into the use of ergative verbs and their syntax, and gives a clear definition of ergative verbs and their structures in the current English grammar system, increasing the input frequency of ergative verbs and attaching importance to their usage.

The middle active voice, which acts on the author himself, is the same as the reflexive pronoun. For example, "I wash myself". To summed up, the middle active voice shows "action is made by his or her self". But this understanding is not complete, please see below for details. The object and the subject may not be consistent. For example, "I wash my feet", "I wash my horse". Sometimes the action affects the subject. It can be interpreted as "for my own sake...". However, the translation proves to be imperfect by doing so on most occasions, such as "I free these prisoners for my own sake". The literal translation is "I release the prisoners for the sake of myself, but the free translation is "I redeem the prisoners".

The middle active voice in the above examples can be used as a fixed usage. Some verbs no longer have a central verb

meaning "for oneself", which may mean something different from the main verb. For instance, "Consider" -- "A thoughtful." The middle active voice of this verb can be regarded as "deponent". Some of the "dissimilar" middle active voice require different case for the object from the main active voice, such as "Bring to a halt" (+ accusative) -- "Bring to a halt" (+ genitive); "To persuade" (+ accusative) -- "Comply with the" (+ dative). The more "dissimilar" middle active voice based verbs are absent of the main active voice, that is to say, this verb has no main active voice in the form, but its middle active voice in the form indicates the meaning of the main active voice. Words like "Come and go", "Come into being", "2/5000 camping" and "fighting" don't have the main active ending in "-ω."

4.2 Innovate teaching materials and improve cognition

The essence of English ergative verbs is the occasional existence of the marked subject, but the necessity of its block formation can't be quit. When the four kinds of ergative verbs are placed together, their semantic differences form a semantic "slope". Based on the innovation of teaching materials, the author ascribed to the similarity of syntactic structure and semantic structure, That is, there is a similarity between the relationship expressed by syntactic structure and the cognitive structure of the object being expressed.As a part of English syntactic acquisition, the correct cognition of the wrong idea of overpassivization is the result of grammatizing the pragmatic factors of semantics, which is projected into the language from the laws of real objects through cognitive refraction.

Conclusion

The overpassivization of ergative verbs and their syntax makes it difficult to acquire English. Attaching importance to this phenomenon, analyzing its causes and taking effective measures for solution can achieve better results in English learning.

Acknowledgments

References

[1] Qin Feng. Research on passive generalization of Non-object Verbs in Chinese English learner[D]. Shandong: Qingdao University of Science and Technology, 2019.
[2] Huang Yuanyuan, Chen Liping. Effects of scene encoding, frequency solidification and statistical foreshortening on passive generalization of english priming verbs [J]. Foreign Languages and Their Teaching, 2019(1):96-109.
[3] Zhu Xiujie, Wang Tongshun.A study on asymmetric acquisition of english intransitive verbs by Chinese students[J]. Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 2017,49(1):85-97.
[4] Qi Jing, Wang Hua. The influence of input frequency and semantics on dative acquisition of chinese english learners: Analysis method based on mixed effect model[J]. Foreign Language Education, 2020,41(2):76-80,113.
[5] Zhu Haiting, ALEXANDER CLARK. Research on English word class acquisition based on distributed lattice model[J]. Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 2017,49(1):111-123.
[6] Yin Hongshan, Guo Hui, Yang Pingping. Non-accusative constraints in the acquisition of english existential structure: A syntactic semantic interface approach[J]. Journal of Xi'an Foreign Languages University, 2018,26(2):34-39.
[7] Han Baijing, Zeng Tao. A study on derivational restriction acquisition of EFL learners in China — A case study of verb prefix un-[J]. Foreign Language Research, 2019(4):86-90.
[8] Wang Xin, Feng Shiwen, Yang Yiming.Research on the theory and empirical perspective of non-object hypothesis[J]. Modern Foreign Languages, 2020,43(3):413-423.