

Language-Universals, Language-Specifics and Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

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難

难

difficulty

Characteristics of “Difficult” Items

Acquisition 習得較慢
Frequency 使用頻率低
Fossilization 易化石化
Avoidance 常迴避使用
Errors 病句出現頻率高

Former Literature on “Difficult-ness”

- Cross Linguistic Distance.
- Structural Complexities.
- Semantic Complexities.
- One to Many Correspondences.
- Many to One Correspondence.
- Etc.

共性 vs. 特性

Language-Universal vs.

Language-Specific

Relative vs. Absolute

Comrie 1989, Language Universals and Linguistic Typology

1.1 TYPOLOGY AND UNIVERSALS

At first sight, the study of language universals and the study of language typology might seem to be opposites, even in conflict with one another: language universals research is concerned with finding those properties that are common to all human languages, whereas in order to typologize languages, i.e. to assign them to different types, it is necessary that there should be differences among languages. The contrast can thus be summed up as one between the study of similarities across languages and the study of differences among languages. ~~Yet, in practice, the two studies proceed in~~

Language Universal

A linguistic universal is a pattern that occurs systematically across natural languages, potentially true for all of them.

Scope of Language Universal

- All natural languages
- All Han dialects (卷舌, ü)

共性

language universals

通常 usually

一般 in general

共同 in common

普遍 universal

特性

Language Specific

Distinctive to a
specified language.

特性

language specifics

个性 particular

一般不 usually not

通常不 general not

特例 unusual

例外 exceptional

A Postulation of “Difficult-ness”

A grammatical item that has language universal properties is more easily acquired, i.e. less difficult.

Non-Difficult Items

“Zero Instruction”

SVO

Attribute+Head

Action+Result

Adj: attributive/predicative

Tenses (3)

Aspects (3)

Pedagogy of

Difficult Items

- Rules clearly formulated
- Focused instruction
- Elaborate Drills and exercises
- Repetition after time lapse

Non-Universals in Chinese

Polysemy 多义

Separables 离合词

Existential 存现句

Attr/Pred 唯谓, 唯定

Aspects 时态

Polysemy 多义

Optimally: Uniqueness. One meaning per word.

lexical, grammatical, pragmatic

好: good, OK, done, very, so that etc.

才: only, then and only then, short of expectation etc.

就: soon, better of expectation, consequently etc.

还: still, concession, threat etc.

可以: may, possible, feasible, “impossible” etc.

又:

Separables 离合词

Generally: Integrated. Whole.

结婚：结过婚，结了婚，结了三次婚

毕业：毕了业

幽默：幽了人家一默

上班：上过好几年班

担心：别担他的心

Existential 存现句

Generally: Pre-verbal Subject. SV.

昨天来了不少顾客。

地上躺着一群人。

墙上挂着一张大千的画。

台上坐着主席团。

王冕七岁死了父亲。

Attributive/Predicative 唯定唯谓

Generally: Adj. with Both.

我的时间实在不**够**。 (*我没有够时间。)

我很**高兴**认识您。 (*...高興的生活是最重要的事)

你的答案**对**了。

假面具须及时拆穿。

我负责**国际**关系。

这才是我们的**主要**敌人。

Topicalisation 话题化

SVO=>OSV, SOV

电池你带来了吗？

你电池带来了吗？

电池你经常买那一种的？

海鲜我最不习惯海胆。

Complement 补语

Prototype: Action+Result

Atypical: 动后非宾

今天热极了。

我们吃馆子去吧。

手机用坏了再买。

苹果机用不坏的。

他累得再也走不动了。

Classifiers 量词

Optimal: Count Nouns

一个人。

一条鱼。

一台电脑。

Etc.

Information Structures

Topic-Prominent Languages

Subject-Prominent Languages

a la Li&Thompson

Which is Universal? In the Majority? In the Minority?

Sentence-Grammar Structures

Vs.

Discourse-Grammar (Information)
Structures

Topic: OSV, TS

Contrast: SOV

DeTheme: VS, TVdeT

Pronominalisation

Zero Pronoun

王冕七岁死了父亲。

A Postulation of “Difficult-ness”

A grammatical item that has language universal properties is more easily acquired, i.e. less difficult.

Concluding Remarks

- A grammatical item that has language universal properties is more easily acquired, i.e. less difficult.
- On the other hand, an item that has language specific properties is difficult to acquire.

What We Have not Dealt with

- Quantification.
- Interactions with other Parameters.
- ???Information Structures.