Research on English Writing Discourse Markers Acquisition by Chinese English Learners From the Diachronic Perspective

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Abstract: Discourse markers have been a hot topic of research at home and abroad for more than 20 years. This paper will study the acquisition characteristics of English writing discourse markers by Chinese English learners from a diachronic perspective. The research will be carried out from the following two parts: the first part is the relevant literature review. The second part is the theoretical basis of Chinese EFL learners' acquisition of discourse markers.

Keywords: English Discourse Markers; Diachronic Research; Pragmatic Function; Language Acquisition

1. Introduction

As a way of written communication, English writing is inseparable from the use of discourse markers. The rational use of discourse markers is an important indicator of English writing ability. Discourse marker is a component which does not have a grammatical meaning and functions. In the past years, scholars have completed relative researches on discourse markers, which would strengthen our ability in studying this aspect and reinforce the base of discourse marker in pragmatic study. The literature review will not only conclude the definition and function of discourse markers, but also aim to exemplify some daily usage of discourse markers in English.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Discourse Markers

Schiffrin (1987：322-326) argues that for discourse markers should be recognized from the dimension of deixis. It is believed that all markers are indexical functions. The accurate definition of discourse markers is inseparable from its connotation and external meaning.[1] The understanding of extension is the essential attribute and connotation of the concept itself the range of members it contains. In this regard, the academic circles are mostly marked by discourse. It is usually divided into phonetic features and semantic features. The definition of discourse markers has always been the most concerned by researchers and more controversial.[2]

2.2 Common and Concrete Expression of English Discourse Markers

Maria-Josep Cuenca (2008)proposed that "well" means that it is organized into two wide spaces: the space of the model and the space of the structure. These operations are not different, but very related. Good analysis has resulted in better use as a radical set, encompassing intermediate meaning (such as an agreement, which is very similar to good use) and pure textual meaning (such as change or stop).[3] Some of these meanings are related to other signs. Two basic features of "well" are continuity and noise reduction. It seems to be forward and backward, because at least using the prototype it shows the answer to the previous discourse and opens up expectations of the next discourse. As a candidate for the second type of discourse, it is expressed through certain changes in attitude, expectations or structure of the text. Lieven Buysse (2017) put forward the usage of the discourse marker "you know" in British English. He showed that all kinds of learners group use "you know" less than their mother language groups, while "you know" are used less than them in each group of learners.[4] With the change of

actual context and communication needs, the speaker can insert you know to mark key information in almost any position of the discourse, so as to strengthen the speaker's attitude and emotion in a specific context.[5]

2.3 Pragmatic Functions of Discourse Markers

Discourse markers, as the cohesive component of turn taking, have the function of prompt and guidance, so as to make them pay the least effort to find discourse and cognitive context to construct the ideal contextual effect of discourse communication. Next, interpersonal function enables the speaker to express his identity and place in language in the process of verbal communication position, which expresses his views and judgments on events, affects the listener's inference and evaluation, so as to establish and maintain a certain interpersonal relationship.[6]The interpersonal function of discourse markers is mainly reflected in that on the basis of not increasing the truth condition of discourse proposition, the speaker uses this language expression to express his emotion and position, adjust the intensity of discourse, ease the tone, and maintain the face of both communicators, so as to form good social relations and contextual conditions and carry out effective verbal communication. The last function is the interactive subjectivity. In the discourse communication between people, interactive subjectivity is the embodiment of the relationship between the speaker and the listener. In this process, both of them act as the main body of contact.

3. Application of Discourse Markers in Foreign Language Teaching and Translation

3.1 Application of Discourse Markers in Foreign Language Teaching

In the field of language teaching, Lenk (1998) studied the four-year reading corpus of 14 English Majors in the Chinese English learners' in-depth oral corpus (LSECCL), and investigated the prosodic patterns of discourse markers in reading tasks from three prosodic indicators: independent tone group, intra-tone group prominence and non prominence.[7] Personal preference is the main factor affecting discourse marker acquisition. Whether it is learners with strong language ability or learners with poor language ability, some learners prefer to use discourse markers. Among them, learners in a group with low language ability use discourse markers in almost every sentence. Foreign language learners tend to acquire and use discourse markers; Learners tend to use more simple and easy-to-use discourse markers at different learning stages.

3.2 Application of Discourse Markers in Translation

In the field of translation, within the framework of relevance theory, researchers have analyzed the various pragmatic functions of discourse markers such as "actually" / "in fact" / "as a matter of fact" in different contexts.[8] The role of discourse markers is often unexplained by grammatical and semantic analysis. Therefore, studying their practical role in communication is helpful to reveal the dynamics of verbal communication.

3.3 Research Perspective of Acquisition of Discourse Markers

The ontological study of Chinese discourse markers in domestic academic circles can be divided into two dimensions: synchronic and diachronic. The synchronic dimension research mainly includes three macro perspectives of "conversation analysis", "cognition pragmatics" and "semantics syntax discourse", as well as the macro and micro research based on this.[9] For the perspective of cognitive pragmatics, most domestic scholars mainly use relevance theory and adaptation theory to study discourse markers from a cognitive pragmatic perspective. In the above macro perspective, discourse markers research is mainly divided into macro category research and micro individual research: the objects of macro research and micro individual research on Chinese discourse markers include discourse markers in Chinese, English and Japanese. As for the diachronic dimension research, it mainly focuses on the lexicalization and grammaticalization of discourse markers.[10] The domestic scholars' research on the diachronic dimension of discourse markers is mainly Chinese scholars. Most scholars believe that the formation of discourse markers is inseparable from grammaticalization or lexicalization. Therefore, the

diachronic study of discourse markers is the study of the relationship between discourse markers and the process of grammaticalization and lexicalization.

4. Acquisition of Discourse Markers by Chinese English Learners

First of all, Chinese EFL learners are different from native speakers in using spoken discourse markers; Compared with native speakers, there are obvious deficiencies in the use of discourse markers by Chinese students; Chinese students overuse a few additional and emphatic discourse markers, such as and, but, very, etc; There is no significant difference in the position of discourse markers between Chinese students and native speakers.

Second, it's the degree of pragmatic cognition and its influence on output. Based on the understanding of the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker "well", it is found that Chinese English majors can only better understand the functions of "delay marker" and "discourse segmentation" of "well", but their understanding of the function of "information modifier" is poor. Chinese EFL learners' cognitive understanding of "you know" has not yet reached the level of native speakers. The internal cognitive difficulty of each specific marking function of discourse marker "you know" has a significant impact on learners' pragmatic output. The degree of pragmatic cognition is positively correlated with the degree of pragmatic output.

In the third place, it's the acquisition order. To a certain extent, there is an order when learners acquire various pragmatic functions of well. The pragmatic function of Organizational Discourse Structure at the text level is acquired first, and then develops to the pragmatic function at the interactive level of transmitting interactive characteristics and expressing interpersonal intention. The research on the acquisition order of discourse markers in second language acquisition is rare and needs to be further discussed.

In the fourth place, it's the pragmatic fossilization. Fossilization is a common phenomenon in the development of interlanguage. Pragmatic Fossilization in the acquisition of discourse markers by English learners has attracted the attention of some researchers. When using some commonly used discourse markers, such as "well", "you know", "I mean", English learners have pragmatic fossilization to varying degrees. The root cause of fossilization is that English learners cannot start from the function like native speakers and acquire the form and function of the language at the same time in the natural contact of the language.

5. Conclusion

From the current research and observation, discourse markers are not a single phenomenon, but a diverse and complex phenomenon. In a word, first, when Chinese English learners acquire discourse markers, they have significant differences in type, frequency and function compared with native speakers. They use less discourse markers than native speakers, have a single type and have an incomplete understanding of their pragmatic functions; secondly, there are also individual differences among English learners at different levels. With the improvement of learners' English level, the number and types of discourse markers gradually increase from less to more long; thirdly, the cognitive level of pragmatic functions of some discourse markers still can not reach the level of native speakers, which leads to insufficient pragmatic output to a certain extent; fourthly, fossilization occurs in different degrees in the process of learners' acquisition of discourse markers.

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