

Preferred Argument Structure in CFL Learners' Written Summaries

This study will examine the alignment of argument structure and information flow in the discourse of L2 Chinese learners' written summaries. The purpose is to investigate whether the L2 Chinese discourse conforms to Preferred Argument Structure (PAS) as proposed by Du Bois (1987, 2003), which has been claimed to be a universal feature. PAS refers to a preferred syntactic patterning of nominals driven by discourse constraints. Specifically, it states that the syntactic distribution of nominals and the information packaging demonstrate an ergative shape in that there is an alignment between subjects of intransitive clauses (*S*) and objects of transitive ones (*O*) in terms of information flow, whereas the subjects of transitive clauses (*A*) behave differently. PAS is composed of the following constraints, with the first two governing the syntactic pattern and the other two constituting the discourse counterpart:

1. One lexical argument constraint: to avoid more than one referent in full NP form as a core argument per clause.
2. Non-lexical A constraint: to have the single lexical referent not appearing in the *A* role.
3. One new argument constraint: to avoid more than one referent carrying new information per clause.
4. Given A constraint: to have the new referent not occupying the *A* position.

Previous research has shown that PAS has been observed in a number of typologically different languages, including Japanese, Korean, Spanish and French (Jiang & Chen, 2019). However, in terms of English and Chinese discourses, even though PAS constraints are attested, closer examination reveals that the two languages display an accusative pattern in that *S* in general patterns with *A* rather than *O* (Kärkkäinen, 1996; Lin, 2009; cf. Jiang & Chen, 2019). That is, not only the *A* role disfavors a lexical referent and carrying new information, but also the *S* role. The differences have been attributed to topic continuity in Chinese and subjecthood in English. This study will contribute to the understanding of this topic by analyzing the L2 Chinese written discourse. The data are summaries of stories of nine Chinese idiomatic expressions produced by five English learners of Chinese who are at the intermediate level, and a total of 42 summaries were collected. The arguments in clauses will be coded by their grammatical roles, nominal forms and information status. An initial analysis of the data suggests that Chinese L2 learners are sensitive to PAS constraints. They avoid using more than one lexical NP form and having more than one referent carrying new information per clause. In addition, the L2 discourse demonstrates an ergative pattern: lexical NPs and new referents tend to occupy either *S* or *O*, not *A*. This is contrary to the findings in L1 discourse. This is hypothesized to be due to learners' insensitivity to the topic-prominence feature in Chinese, as well as the difference in genre. Pedagogical implications will be discussed.