

How Japanese and Chinese advanced learners of English found the frog: A SLA study on rhetorical style of motion events

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Abstract: SLA studies on motion events are mainly restricted to typological differences of lexicalisation patterns between L1 and L2. However, as Slobin (2004) pointed out that motion events often go across the clauses to the level of discourse, called “rhetorical style of motion events”, which involves not only typology but also sets of other factors. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to have more studies on how learners acquire L2 with a different rhetorical style of motion events. Based on this purpose, this research chose 15 English native speakers, 15 Japanese and 15 Chinese advanced learners of English as research subjects, whose first languages have different rhetorical style of motion events from each other, for these three languages are typologically different and with other factors involved as well. Considering that oral data can better reflect L1 transfer because of improvisation but on the other hand, some acquired L2 knowledge that is not very active may not be tested out in oral data, which can be made up for by written data to some extent, by using the picture book *Frog, Where are you?*, the author first collected oral data of L2 followed by L1 and then collected written data of L2 followed by L1 from Japanese and Chinese advanced learners of English. For English native speakers, only L1 oral data and L1 written data were collected. The data was analysed from the following four aspects: manner salience, path salience, ground salience and style (static or dynamic) based on the Slobin (2004) and Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2009). This research found that even advanced learners of English were remarkably affected by their habitual rhetorical style of motion events from their L1. Manner is much more salient in narratives of Chinese learners of English and English native speakers than Japanese counterparts; Path elements per verb was only one in both Japanese and Chinese data while several was common case in English native speakers; Average event segmentation in narratives of Chinese and English native speakers was more than that of Japanese; Ground was more salient in narratives of English native speakers than Japanese followed by Chinese; For style, both Japanese learners of English and Chinese counterparts tended to present much more static rhetorical style than English native speakers did. It is concluded that because rhetorical style of motion events is shaped by sets of factors, it is deeply rooted in language speakers’ mind and remains unconscious. Thus, extra attention should be paid to learning L2 with different rhetorical style of motion events.

References

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