A "the" or the "a"? Korean L2 learner problems and patterns

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Overview

- Learner difficulties
- Corpus study
- Pedagogical system
- Article (determiner) patterns

Problems

Does the count/non-count noun distinction work very well?
Can you say:
- A water, a coffee ?
- The feminism ?

Can you start a new topic with *the*?
Can us use *a/an* for a previously mentioned noun?

Problems

- Please give me a latte / a coffee / a water
- The feminism of the 19th century abolitionists
- Definitions: Now a first mover is <u>a</u> creative person who develops a new market.

Problems

- Obligatory *the* for instruments?
  - Mary plays the piano
- Prep. phrases
  - The satellite is in orbit.
  - The children were speaking in dialect.

Problems

- Inapplicability of textbook rules
- Count / non-count noun distinctions – too simplistic

Research questions

- Lexical concreteness
- Semantic categories (e.g., Lyons 1977)
- Certain structures like prepositional phrases & post-modified noun phrases

Corpus study

- L1: COCA corpus (Corpus of Contemporary American English), academic subcorpus (Gardner & Davies, 2013)
- L2: UIUC corpus (Cowan, Choi & Kim 2003)

Corpus		#files	#words	# the tokens	# a/an tokens
COCA (L1)	(academic)	24,169	103,421,981	13120	17817
EFL (L2)	Non-credit	56	11,822	10	10
	Undergraduate	110	60,236	92	44
	Graduate	324	169,798	297	130
	L2 total		241,856	399	184

Corpus study

- Lexical concreteness / abstractness ratings (Brysbaert, Warriner, & Kuperman, 2014)
- Lexical frequency
- Prepositionally post-modified nouns
- 269 frequent nouns in academic vocabulary (Coxhead 2000)

Corpus study

- WordSmith 7.0 Concord
- SAS 9.4 Studio statistical software (Univ. Ed. for Linux)
- Multinomial logistic hierarchical regression analysis

Corpus results

- Significant effects for:
- L1 vs. L2, and L2 levels
- Lexical frequency
- Concreteness / abstractness

L2 data: Less frequent nouns

- Liberman insists that supralaryngeal airway of modern humans is not defined by the existence of the hyoid bone
- In addition, positive stereotype influence our society as a good aspect.

L2 data: Abstract nouns

Omissions
- In addition, <u>positive stereotype</u> influence our society as a good aspect.
- and academic performance are also impaired <u>in serious degree</u>
- Because of this reason, it was very hard for me to understand <u>English pronoun system</u>.

L2 data: Post-modified nouns

Omissions
- I'm focus[ed] on <u>ratio</u> of user to a member of computer
- … growing of obese population in the USA indicate <u>severity</u> of the public health problem
- We have suggested that <u>three major limitations</u> of Neanderthal show us the impossibility of speaking like humans.

L2 data: Post-modified nouns

L2 writers more likely to use
 a/an + NP + PP

- but if these fears continuously reside in children's minds, and interfere their daily routines, it might be <u>a beginning</u> of social phobias (Gr)

L1 examples: Post-modifiers

the NP + PP = restrictive, anaphoric
- … and to further evaluate <u>the</u> arousal hypothesis of stereotype threat …
- … , the findings also confirm <u>the</u> central hypothesis of this study that …
- … , augmenting <u>the</u> inherent flexibility of the VTB abstraction …
- <u>The</u> use of short videos for patients in the waiting room encourages them

L1 examples: Post-modifiers

NP+PP (post-mod.): new, definitional, descriptive
- … Molina and Rowland proposed <u>an</u> alarming hypothesis in Nature that the use of chlorofluorocarbon …
- Breakwell (1986b) has defined <u>a</u> strategy for coping with stigma as …
- … to select <u>a</u> broadcast protocol for use in a large-scale WSN deployment …

Prepositional phrases

- Prep. phrases (?)
  - The satellite is in orbit.
  - The children were speaking in dialect.

L1 examples: Prep. collocations

- In response, in terms of, keep/bear in mind, in practice, in detail, to be in development, in relation to, in spring/summer/fall/winter, in decline
- difference in X, similar in form, believe in
- each involves significant drawbacks when used <u>in isolation</u>
- and emulated sensor nodes and radios <u>in real time</u>

L2 concreteness effects

Material vs. object nouns
- First, when you buy <u>a film</u>, you should check selection of <u>film</u>, brand ISO.

Other less "thingy" nouns
- Of course, stereotypes have <u>impact</u> on society

L2 concreteness effects

General activity cf. event nouns
- However, in anthropological behaviors of Neanderthals, they had enough ability to change <u>the</u> conversation each other
- That is, if this situation continues, it can be possible to increase <u>a crime</u> in our society

L2 concreteness effects

General activity cf. event nouns

L2 Concreteness effects

- Object nouns cf. material nouns
- Other "thingy" nouns
- Event cf. activity nouns
- Post-modified nouns (e.g., with restrictive meanings)
- Abstract nouns

Pedagogy & traditional grammar rules

Traditional rules are:
- Arbitrary
- Untested; not based on empirical evidence; ∴ unscientific
- Probably unintelligible to learners

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Science vs. arbitrariness

- "For me, it is far better to grasp the universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring."
  — Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*

Grammar

- NBMA: Non-bovine material approach

Grammar

- NBMA: Non-bovine material approach

Grammar

- Empirical basis
- Presented inductively when possible
- When possible, appeal to intuitive / natural categories / concepts
- Interactive activities (discovery, communicative …)
- Patterns (or principles) rather than "rules" and "exceptions"

Patterns

Pattern 1: Indefinite

A/an: Indefinite =
- New or unfamiliar
- Singular item / thing

Patterns

Pattern 2: Definite

The: Definite =
- Familiar / known entity or thing(s)

Patterns

Pattern 2: Definite

The: Definite =
- Familiar / known entity or thing(s)

15 출입구
The gate 出入口

Patterns

Pattern 3: Singular marked nouns (a/an/the)

A/an/the =
- Object or thing

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A/an/the =
- Object or thing

- Object / thing
- Specific type or batch (of material)
- Specific event / instance (of abstract noun)

Patterns

Pattern 4: Singular bare noun (Ø)

Ø bare noun (singular) =
- Material, mass, substance

Patterns

Pattern 5: Plural bare nouns (Øs)

Plural bare nouns (Øs) =
- Indefinite – unfamiliar / new
- Group or set of things

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MAN   WOMAN

Pedagogical system: Advanced

- Abstract nouns
- "the" + Post-modified nouns (restrictive)
- Definitional "a/an" (incl. post-modifiers)
- "Generalized / Abstractified" nouns
  - in orbit / in dialect

Patterns: Singular bare nouns

- Materials, substance
  - Water, coffee

Patterns: Singular bare nouns

- Materials, substance
  - chicken

Patterns: Singular bare nouns

- General activities
  - jogging / jog
  - theft / (a/the) theft
- Abstract nouns
  - Love, peace, war
- Generalized nouns
  - The satellite is in orbit.
  - The children were speaking in dialect.

Patterns: Plural bare nouns

- Set, group of things
  - I need to buy eggs and tomatoes.
- Categories, generalizations, general descriptions
  - Penguins are aquatic birds; penguins have adapted using their wings for swimming.

Pedagogical ideas

Object vs. material nouns
- Map tasks
- Recipes
- Shopping lists (grocery items)
- Shopping lists (for clothing, office supplies, furniture, or equipment)
- Budget proposals (e.g., for a company)

Pedagogical ideas

- Film budget (for a proposal for an independent film; pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution phases)

Pedagogical ideas

Process paragraph / description:
- Constructing an object (e.g., a house)
- Assembling a product (e.g., assembly instructions for a machine, piece of furniture, toy, computer, or other product)
- Manufacturing a product
- Accomplishing a goal

Pedagogical ideas

Process: Object / material
- How something is made from a material.
- Describing how special effects might have been done in a film, or how a video was made (e.g., OK Go videos).

Pedagogical ideas (advanced)

- Process: a scientific experiment, a research methodology
- A manufacturing processes, or the industrial processing of a material.
- Describe a particular artistic genre or subgenre (of film, music, novels, etc.); then discuss a specific example, and explain how it fulfills and differs from the standards of the genre.

Pedagogical ideas (advanced)

- Describe a particular theory, movement, framework, belief system, or ideology in your field of study, and particular phases or varieties of this system.
- Present a proposal for your own independent film project, as if you were pitching the idea to a group of investors in order to gain funding for the project.

Pedagogical goals

Thank you!

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Pattern 1: Indefinite

A/an: Indefinite =
- New or unfamiliar
- Singular item / thing
- First mention
- Hypothetical example
- Definition (via hypothetical example)

Patterns

Pattern 2: Definite

The: Definite =
- Familiar / known entity or thing(s)

Pattern 2: Definite

The: Definite =
- Familiar / known entity or thing(s)
- Second / subsequent mention
- Special contexts:
  - Physical context
  - Specifier adj./phrase
  - Whole-part context
  - Background scene
  - Specialized background knowledge
  - Scene / topic shift
- Post-modifier / post-specifier (specific example / type / instance)
- Exemplar / typical example
  - Definition by exemplar
  - Habitual / typical activity

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Plural bare nouns (Øs) =
- Indefinite – unfamiliar / new
- Group or set of things
- Group, set of things
- Category, type of things
- Generic description

Patterns

Pattern 6: Compound nouns

Compound nouns
- Determiner pattern depends on final noun
- Compounds
- Abbreviations
- Place names

Pedagogical ideas

- .
- .

Pedagogical ideas

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Pedagogical ideas

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Pedagogical ideas

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In-class unit

Basic patterns
   A/an
   The
   ø sg. - bare singular nouns
   ø pl. – bare plural nouns

In-class unit

Basic patterns
  A/an   indefinite
  The   definite
  Ø sg. - material
  Ø pl. – group, set

Instructional methods

- Short sample sentences & paragraphs illustrate determiner patterns
- Student group discussion
- Activities connected to thematic unit
- Full-class teacher-led discussion
- Basic patterns, then metaphorical extensions

Patterns: *A/an* = indefinite

- First mention
- Hypothetical uses
  - I want a man who knows what love is – a man who can cook and have an intelligent conversation.
- Definition style
  - A first mover is a person who develops a new product for a new market.

Patterns: *The* = definite

- Linguistic context
  - 2nd / subsequent mention
  - Specifiers
  - The first, the last, the nearest, the very thing …
- Physical context
  - You can take the red pill, or the blue pill.

Patterns: *The* = definite

- Extended contexts
- Part-whole
  - Open the computer and you'll see the SATA cable between the motherboard and the hard drive
- Background scene
  - On my way to work the weather was bad and the sun was hidden behind the clouds.
  - At the office, the secretary was gone and the photocopier was broken.

Patterns: *The* = definite

- Context
- Post-modifiers: relative clause, reduced relative, participle, prep. phrase
  - The satellite that the ESA launched failed to deploy.

Patterns: *The* = definite

The = exemplar
- In the jungle the lion sleeps tonight.
- Vivid description
  - The cheetah is the fastest land animal on earth.
- Regular, habitual activity
  - After stopping at the office, I went to the store to buy some chocolate. I then took the bus home.
  -

Patterns: Singular bare nouns

- Materials, substance
  - Water, coffee
- General activities
  - Bungee jumping, jogging, theft
- Abstract nouns
  - Love, peace, war
- Generalized nouns
  - The satellite is in orbit.
  - The children were speaking in dialect.

Patterns: Plural bare nouns

- Set, group of things
  - I need to buy eggs and tomatoes.
- Categories, generalizations (incl. encyclopedic descriptions)
  - Penguins are aquatic birds; penguins have adapted using their wings for swimming.

Students' suggestions

- providing some explanations in Korean (2)
- easier explanations (1)
- more examples (5)
- more common or relatable examples (1)
- summary of principles or patterns (3), chart, graphic or table to illustrate the patterns (3)
- more exercises, such as editing or practice with a written article (2).

Error-prone items

- Abstract singular Ø noun
  - culture, communication, literature,

- Generic plural incl. PPs
  - Ø contemporary works of art

Error-prone items

- Definitions
  - A first mover is a creative person who first develops an idea and brings it to market.
- Post-modified NPs
  - the impact that it had on ...
  - the presence of a human voice

  - But: Ø contemporary works of art

Native speaker variability

- Definitions
- Hypothetical
- Prepositions / generalized NPs: e.g., in (a) dialect
- Post-modified items (e.g., specifier vs. generic)

Improvements

- 6 basic patterns
  - Bare nouns vs. marked nouns (*a/an/the*)
  - *A/an* indefinite = unknown
  - *The*   definite = known, context
  - Ø sg. – material
  - Ø pl. – group, set
  - Compound patterns

Compound nouns

- Head noun determines pattern
  - According to the computer manual, RAM chip installation should be easy.
- Also abbreviations
  - The CIA and the NSA read my emails, not the FBI.
- Place names
  - The Congo = The Congo region
  - The Amazon = The Amazon river

Implications for theory & pedagogy

- Cognitive grammar can complement other theoretical approaches
  - Esp. constituent structure (syntactic & prosodic trees, relations, hierarchies)
- Articles / determiners do not submit to traditional grammar rules
- Dependent on natural categories, context, nuance

Implications for theory & pedagogy

- Pattern + metaphorical extension
- Natural transfer to pedagogy
- Can be tied in to thematic units, activities, contents

Future work

- L2 Corpus research
- Error correction research
- Pedagogical methods

Conclusion

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