

Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Besides English nouns and verbs, English adjectives and adverbs play a relatively important role in sentences (Leech, 1989). Also, English adjectives and adverbs can be generally described as modifiers in sentence complements. As modifiers, adjectives are used to modify or describe nouns while adverbs are used to modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs. Because of the nature of their modification, adjectives and adverbs could be placed in more than one position in a single sentence. For example:

(1a) A **big round** table is available.

(1b) A **round big** table is available.

(2a) **Perfectly**, Peter had read the book.

(2b) Peter had **perfectly** read the book.

(2c) Peter had read **perfectly** the book.

(2d) Peter had read the book **perfectly**.

[Examples 2a-2d are adapted from Costa (2004:723)]

In the examples (1a) and (1b), both the adjectives *big* and *round* simultaneously describe the core noun (*table*), and English pre-nominal adjective order (AO) seems flexible. Nevertheless, a native speaker (NS) prefers *big round table* to *round big table*. On the other hand, the adverb ‘*perfectly*’, used in (2a)-(2d), is placed in different positions: sentence-initial, pre-verbal, post-verbal and sentence-final. And all the four examples of English adverb placements are grammatical correct and acceptable^①. However, NS would place the adverb ‘*perfectly*’ differently according to different contexts. In general, this study focuses on investigating the linguistic alternations of English prenominal AO and English adverb placement. Both NS and the learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) are examined to find out each other’s preferences towards those linguistic alternations.

Basically, several former studies (Quirk et al., 1985; Biber et al., 1999, etc.) have concluded that linguistic factors from syntactic, semantic or phonological aspects are crucial to NS’s adjective and adverb placement. To be specific, studies from Wulff (2003) and Costa (2004) have summarized all the aforementioned factors and illustrated how each factor influences NS’s linguistic behavior. One of the aims in this study is to scrutinize whether the previously mentioned linguistic factors are still influential to NS.

With the development of corpus linguistics and rising numbers of learner corpora, numerous studies have investigated EFL learners’ English use (see Hasselgård & Johansson 2011 for an overview). But

① The four possible distributions of ‘*perfectly*’ are slightly different in the light of semantics, which will be discussed later.

the researches relate to EFL learners' English adjective and adverb orderings are relatively few (c.f. Gledhill, 2005; McMahon, 2008; Osborne, 2008). Moreover, the aforementioned studies all focus on examining the 'occurrence frequency' of English adjectives or adverbs from non-native speaker (NNS) corpora, and the frequencies of specific English prenominal AO and adverb placements from NNS and NS corpora are compared. Through the comparison, instances where learners deviate from native-like behavior are observed.

Admittedly, frequency is an important indicator to reveal the features of NNS's English use. For example, by comparing the occurring frequencies of some specific English words, phrases or grammatical patterns from both NNS and NS data, it is easy to identify whether NNSs 'underuse' or 'overuse' the target English expressions with reference to NS. The terms of 'overuse' and 'underuse' are frequently adopted in the studies about learner corpora (Granger, 2015:18), and they are reliable predictors in describing actual linguistic performance of language learners. However, 'occurrence frequency' alone cannot reveal the underlying reasons why NNS overuse or underuse some English expressions. Only by examining the factors which potentially influence NNS's English use can we interpret why NNSs have such linguistic performance. Therefore, in the current study, the indicator of influential factors is more focused than occurrence frequency.

Recently, Wulff & Gries (2015) has put forward a new methodology called 'Multifactorial Prediction and Deviation Analysis Using Regression (MuPDAR)', which is used to investigate both Chinese and German EFL learners' preferences of English prenominal AO

with NS's choices as a reference. The specific factors that govern NS's choices on prenominal AO are first listed out: by simultaneously examining several potential influential factors in a regression model, the most influential factors are worked out. As for the EFL learners, if they are influenced by the same factors as NS, they are supposed to have a native-like linguistic behavior. If there are any differences between NS and NNS groups, it can be concluded that EFL learners are affected by some other factors. MuPDAR provides us a multifaceted view in examining EFL learners' English use and it proves to be a powerful methodology in revealing potential factors that influence language users' linguistic behavior.

This study can be considered as an extension of the Wulff & Gries (2015) study because their methodology is applied in the current study. The novelty of the current study is: (1) it adopts English written corpora whereas the Wulff & Gries (2015) study applies English spoken corpora; (2) it focuses on analyzing Asian EFL learners' (both Korean and Chinese) English use; (3) it investigates the linguistic phenomena of both English prenominal AO and adverb distribution; (4) it involves different English proficient learners' English writings in the study corpora; (5) it applies statistical techniques of both regression model and random forest during data analysis.

1.2 Research Purpose

First of all, it aims to scrutinize the factors influencing NS's English adjective and adverb distribution. According to the previous

studies (Richards, 1977; Quirk et al., 1985; Biber et al., 1999 and many others), syntactic, semantic and psychological factors can influence NS's English prenominal AO and adverb placement. However, all the above-mentioned findings are generated in different separated studies. In other words, only one factor was focused on in each time. By applying a multifactorial analysis, all the former reported factors are simultaneously examined in this study.

Second, this study also concerns the divergence between NS and EFL learners in their choices on both English prenominal AO and adverb placement with respect to the influential factors. In other words, whether the EFL learners are influenced by the same factors as NS in their choices of English prenominal AO and adverb placement is examined.

Third, this study is to reveal whether and how EFL learners' L1 and English proficiency affects their linguistic choice of English prenominal AO and adverb placement. If there are more similar rather than different preferences shared by both Korean and Chinese EFL learners, it indicates L1 is not crucial in governing their linguistic choices of English prenominal AO and adverb placement, vice versa. Besides, three different English-level learners (advanced, intermediate, and low levels) from both L1 groups are involved in this study, which aims to examine whether different English proficiency could be one important factor in NNS's English adjective and adverb placement.

Last but not least, this study also aims to publicize a useful tool in learner corpus study—multifactorial analysis method, which allows