

## Number Variation of the Personal Pronoun we Used by Chinese English Learners

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**Abstract :** Language variation signals the newest usage of language community, which might become the developmental trend of that language. However, language textbooks cannot keep up with these emergent usages. Most Chinese English learners nowadays are still exposed to traditional grammar prescribed in the textbook so that some variational usages cannot be acquired. The personal pronoun we is prescribed as a plural pronoun in the textbook grammar, but its number value is more flexible in actual use. Based on the Chinese Learner English Corpus (CLEC), and with the homemade Friends corpus as reference, the present research explores the number value of the first person pronoun we used by Chinese English learners. With consideration of the subjectivity of we, this paper annotated the number value of all the wes in “we+ PCU (Perception-cognition-utterance) verbs” collocations. Results show that though exposed to traditional textbooks which prescribe the plural reference of we, there still exists some unconventional usage (singular or vague in reference) in the writings of Chinese English learners, which is less frequent than that of the native speeches. Corpus data and results from manual semantic annotation show that this could be due to the impact of formulaic sequence on the learners and the positive transfer from their native language. An improved SLA model of native language, target language and interlanguage is put forward to recognize the existence of variation in second language acquisition, which should be given more attention during teaching.

**Keywords :** Chinese English learners, number, PCU verbs, Personal pronoun we

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