

Errors in the Written Production of Chinese Learners of English: A Typological Perspective

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine errors in the written production of Chinese learners of English from a typological perspective. The thirty-nine participants were native speakers of Chinese enrolled in an undergraduate English course in Taiwan. Data were collected from a translation-elicitation task which involved ten Chinese sentences with Chinese TP (Topic-Prominence) features described by Li and Thompson (1976; 1981): *surface-coding*, *double subject*, *deletion of co-reference*, *null subject (topic chains)*, and *null dummy subject*. The data were analyzed by comparing with the Chinese TP features to decide if they exhibited the interlingual transfer. Further analysis was done to locate the causes related to overgeneralizing TP features, which were found causing grammatical errors. The results indicated that the learners' L1 structures in inter-language development were especially prevalent in the early stages. The less proficient learners used more topic-prominent structures (as shown in Mandarin Chinese), while those with better proficiency tended to be able to use the structures closer to the target language (English, a subject-prominent language). This study thus called for attention to contrastive analysis as a diagnostic function for learners' language development.

Key words: Error, Typological perspective, Topic-prominence

1. Introduction

In searching for the causes for learners' errors during the process of foreign language acquisition, the EFL teachers might face with challenges in terms of the ways of identifying the learners' errors and correcting them efficiently. Questions arisen might be: why do learners make such errors? How might a teacher approach error treatment in the classroom? How can a teacher interpret the learners' errors and accordingly provide helpful feedback?

A number of interactive factors were indicated to influence second/foreign language learners' linguistic performance. Widdowson (1987), for example, claimed that learners' linguistic behavior is controlled by a set of rules (i.e., L1 as an reference rule) that they might attempt to use as their expression rules. Additionally, Brown (2006) also stressed that in the early stage of learning a second language, learners usually draw upon their native language as reference before gaining more familiarity with the target language. It is a specific type of mental organization that causes the learners to apply a set of processing strategies to produce utterances in a language (Brown, 2006). The phenomenon involves interference, an interlingual transfer from the learners' native language. Researchers suggested that an interlingual transfer causes difficulties in learning a second language and that identifying errors has been viewed as a key to understanding the process of acquiring a second / foreign language (Brown, 2006; Mahmoud, 2005). That is, an interlingual transfer causes difficulties in learning a second language as a result of the differences between the habits of the native language and those of the target language.

This study, from a typological perspective, aimed to investigate the role of learners' native language (Mandarin Chinese, a topic-prominence language) in writing another language (English, a subject-prominence language) by relating learners' learning difficulties to contrasts across languages.. Another purpose of the present study was to help EFL Chinese learners, from the analysis of their errors, identify the reasons why they made such errors.

More specifically, this study addressed the following questions: (1) Are the errors in the learners' written production the evidence of direct influence from their mother tongue? (2) Is there any different production pattern among learners at different proficiency levels?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Typological Transfer in Second Language Acquisition

Contrastive analysis (CA) has contributed significantly to language teaching and learning. The horizontally organized contrastive analyses of system constructions across languages originated with Lado (1957) and resulted in inventories of differences and similarities between the compared languages (as cited in Özdemir, 2006). Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) indicates the main tenants of CAH as: (1) the main source of errors in L2 is the transfer of L1 habits; (2) errors can be predicted by a contrastive analysis of L1 and L2; and (3) the greater the difference between L1 and L2, the more errors that will occur (Brown, 2006). That is, *contrastive analysis* of two languages (i.e., phonology, morphology, lexicology, and syntax), helps in the process of anticipation of possible difficulties for L2 learners. CA Hypothesis also indicates that part of learning difficulties (i.e., difficulty in

learning a sound, word or construction in a second language as a result of differences with the habits of the native language) is attributed to the interference from mother tongue (Brown, 2006).

In their attempts to construct a new language, the EFL learners inevitably make errors which Widdowson (1987) considered as an evidence of success, instead of a failure. According to Widdowson (1987), the learner's linguistic behavior is controlled by a set of rules: (1) reference rules which constitute a learner's knowledge of the foreign language and his linguistic competence; and (2) expression rules which are used to generate a certain linguistic behavior meeting the communicative needs of the learner. Thus, errors might occur due to the learner's attempt to use reference rules as expression rules. There is always a deficit of reference rules and learners have to simplify their expression rules to communicate effectively.

By identifying and determining the sources of errors, researchers and teachers can reach an understanding of the learners' processes of second language acquisition. Brown (2006) categorized the sources of error as interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, and context learning. Interlingual transfer refers to a linguistic transfer from the native language and frequently occurs in the beginning stages of learning a second language. Once learners have begun to acquire parts of the new system, more and more intralingual transfer occurs. Negative intralingual transfer or over-generation causes errors. Besides, students often make faulty hypotheses and make errors because of certain dialect acquisition or a confusing explanation from the teacher.

Kardaleska (2003) further supported that applied contrast linguistics has concerned itself with error-prediction since a part of the difficulties can be attributed to the mother tongue. He categorized the major contributions of errors as language transfer, intralingual interference, sociolinguistic situation, modality, age, approximative system, and hierarchy of difficulties. Nevertheless, while Kardaleska's research (2003) has drawn our attention to the theory of error-prediction, the results from the analysis would be incomplete without a study of the typological transfer and the features of the learners' mother tongue. Thus, this present study, theoretically supported by the above-mentioned notions, focused on examining the errors in the EFL learners' English written production in comparison with their Chinese mother tongue.

2.2 Typological Transfer and Second Language Acquisition

Language transfer is assumed to be an important aspect in terms of second language acquisition process. During the process, learners are found to use previous linguistic knowledge in learning the target language. According to Corder (1983), mother tongue influence is considered to be as a broader term to refer to a common language transfer. This transferring process can be *positive, negative, or neutral* (Gass & Selinker, 1983).

To examine the typological transfer, it is necessary to understand the transferability of the typological parameters. Rutherford (1983), in his study, cited three parameters we need to refer to. The first one is the syntactic primes of subject, verb, and object (SVO) and their

different possible canonical arrangements for different languages. The second parameter regards the distinction between topic prominence and subject prominence. The third parameter involves the tendency, among language learners, to use word order to express either pragmatic relationships or grammatical relationships. According to Rutherford, only the latter two parameters directly occur in L1 transfer.

The previous research with respect to syntactic typology in second language acquisition has suggested that L2 learners systematically transfer topic-comment features from L1 to L2 at an early stage as the learners' proficiency increases (Huebner, 1983; Jin, 1994; Rutherford, 1983; Sasaki, 1990). Huebner (1983) conducted a longitudinal micro-analysis of the interlanguage of an adult Hmong speaker acquiring English in a natural setting without formal instruction. His findings suggested that topic-comment structures prevailed in the early stages of learning. Moreover, Rutherford (1983) examined five groups of learners learning English from both TP and SP languages and claimed that speakers of TP went through four stages of what he termed *syntacticization* in learning English. It was suggested that early TP-like production is a systematic transfer of TP features from L1 to L2.

The evidence of language transfer was also supported in Fuller and Grundel's study which claimed that there is a universal topic-comment stage in interlanguage, independent of the learners' native language (Fuller & Grundel, 1987). Fuller and Grundel examined oral narratives, both English narrative and English interlanguage, from speakers of three highly topic-prominent and three less topic-prominent languages. They found that L2 interlanguage as a whole was characterized by an early universal topic-comment stage and L2 learners of different language backgrounds show the TP features at the early stages.

Furthermore, Rutherford's (1983) proposal was further supported by Sasaki (1990) and Jin (1994) who found that learners gradually transferred from topic-prominent structure to subject-prominent and vice versa, as the learners' proficiency increased. Jin's (1994) investigation is another important study that lent support to the claim of a transferable typology. After investigating adult English speakers' oral and written productions in learning Chinese, Jin indicated that English speakers went through a process of systematically transferring English SP features to Chinese productions until they reach a requisite proficiency. This study had the same proposal that the process of learning TP language like Chinese is a process of typological transfer from L1 to L2.

While topological transfer has been proposed, some previous studies have emphasized that L1 interferes with productions of second language acquisition. Krashen (1982) suggested that L2 learners, particularly when forced to perform beyond their competence, trace back to their L1, and often make errors that are not naturally used in the target language. The notion of L1 transfer is further supported by Towell and Howkins (1994), noting that among those linguistic properties being transferred, L2 learners initially transfer the grammatical features of their L1 into their L2 productions.

2.3 Topic-Prominent Language V.S. Subject-Prominent Language

Typologically, Chinese is characterized as a highly topic-prominent language. The topic of a sentence is what the sentence is about and it always refers to something about which the

speaker assumes that the person listening to the utterance has some knowledge (Li & Thompson, 1981). The notion of topic-prominence (Li & Thompson, 1976, 1981) has been discussed and introduced into second language acquisition (SLA) research by Schachter and Rutherford (1979) and Rutherford (1983), who argued that the interlanguage development is shaped by the features of the learners' mother tongue.

Table 1. The topicalization creates a co-referential gap in the object position of the sentential comment

Pijiu	wo (shih)	bu	ho	de.	(Chinese)
Beer	I	not	drink	PRT	
'Beer I don't drink.'					
* 'It's beer that I don't drink.'					(Yip, 1995, p.78)

Table 2. Base-generated topic structure

Xiang	bizi	chang	(Chinese)		
Elephant	nose	long			
* 'Elephant's nose is long.'			(Li & Thompson, 1976, p. 93)		

Yip (1995) indicated two types of topic construction in Chinese (i.e., *derived topic structure* and *base-generated topic structure*), while English lacks of base-generated topics and has lower acceptability of moved topics within contrastive context. That is, they moved topic structure is derived by moving a non-subject to the topic position, or the left of the sentence. The topicalization creates a co-referential gap in the object position of the sentential comment, as shown in table 1. Base-generated topic structure, as shown in table 2, is base-generated in the sentential-initial position without bearing any grammatical relation to the full sentence comment. It forms a semantic relationship such as type-token and part-whole, with the sentential predication following it.

Several researchers have investigated the characteristic of Chinese and defined it as a topic-prominent language (Chafe, 1976; Huang, 1982; Li & Thompson, 1976, 1981; Yip, 1995). They indicate common features in topic-prominence as follows.

(1) Sentence-initial position:

A topic occurs in sentence-initial position and it can be followed by a pause particle, 'a, ma, ne,ba'. Subject, on the other hand, is not confined to the sentence-initial position. The sentence-initial property proposed by Li and Thompson (1976) is that topic-prominent language invariably has a kind of identifiable surface coding for topic (e.g., position in the sentence in Chinese), but not necessarily for the subject.

(2) Double subjects:

Double-subject construction involves topic and subjects in a part-whole relationship with each other. The speaker assumes that the person listening to the utterance has some knowledge.

Table 3

Nei	shu	ye zi	da. (Chinese)
That	tree	leaves	big
" That tree (topic), the leaves are big." (Li & Thompson, 1976, p. 15)			

(3) Deletion of co-reference constraints:

In a TP language, the topic, but not the subject, typically controls co-referential constituent deletion. In table 4, it can only be understood to refer to the topic of the preceding sentence, 'nei-ke shu' ('that tree'), not the subject 'yezi' (leave).

Table 4

nei	ke	shu	ye zi	da;	(suoyi)	wo bu sihuan
that	CL	tree	leaf	big	(so)	I not like
"that tree, the leaves are big; (so) I don't like it." (Li & Thompson, 1976, p.102)						

(4) Topic chains (non-NP):

An important universal constrain on grammatical topic structure is that a topic must have a definite, as in Table 5 (Gundel, 1988). That is, a topic always refers either to a particular referent mentioned in the previous discourse, or to a non-specific NP, a class of items in the shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer. In Chinese TP, NP, non-NP (Time-Adverbial phrases and prepositional phrases), VP, or an entire clause can be the topic.

Table 5

Nei zhi	gou	wo	yijing	kan	guo le.
That CL	dog	I	already	see	- EXP CRS
That dog I have already seen. (Li & Thompson, 1976, p.88)					

(5) Absence of 'dummy' subject:

"Dummy" or "empty" subject such as "it" and "there" in English is not found in Chinese. In TP language, in case where no subject is called for, the sentence can simply do without a subject, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

hao	leng	a.
very	cold	RF
"It's very cold." (Li & Thompson, 1976, p. 16)		

To explain why Taiwanese TVES learners make a huge amount of errors in their second /foreign language production, it seems necessary to investigate the role of learners' mother tongue (a topic-prominent language) in second language acquisition.

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects

Thirty-nine participants were native speakers of Chinese enrolling in an undergraduate English course in Taiwan. Four students in this course were withdrawn from the experimental test; as a result, the subjects became 39. The mean scores of the national entrance examination were used to divide the participants into three groups, as shown in table 7. This examination referred to a nationally standardized test for technical and vocational educational system in Taiwan. It was an annual examination which consisted of fifty multiple-choice items to assess the learners' proficiency in vocabulary, grammar, and reading. Group A referred to the students with better proficiency; group B meant a mid-proficient group; and group C included the less proficient students.

Table 7. Profile of participants

English proficiency level	A	B	C
Males	2	3	2
Females	11	10	11
Total population	13	13	13
Mean on Entrance Exam.	69.31/100	58.78/100	41.45/100

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

A translation task was conducted as an elicitation measure to elicit the learners' written production. To examine whether the learners whose first language was a highly TP features exhibit the transfer of TP structures (i.e., L1 transfer), ten sentences (see Appendix I) were designed according to Li and Thompson's (1976; 1981) taxonomy. Each pair of sentences was characterized by a TP feature: sentence-initial (sentences 1 & 2), double subject (sentences 3 & 4), deletion of co-reference (sentences 5 & 6), topic chains /or none-NP (sentences 7 & 8), and absence of dummy subject (sentences 9 & 10). The participants were allotted 40 minutes to complete the task.

3.3 Data Analysis

The researcher checked the data and scored the results of the translation task. There are twenty-six sentences for each TP feature produced by the participants in each group with different proficiency level. Li and Thompson's (1976; 1981) taxonomy of TP structures was the principal analysis tool to determine whether the written data exhibited the transfer of TP features. The data were presented in terms of percentage and frequency, as shown in the Results section. Another researcher member check was also utilized to ensure the credibility of the analysis procedures.

4. Results

4.1 Evidence of L1 Transfer in the Participants' Written Production

Table 8 showed the results of L1 transfer in terms of sentence-initial topic, double subject, co-reference deletion, topic chains (or none-NP), and absence of dummy subject. The results

indicated that learners at less proficiency levels clearly produced more errors that were drawn upon from their native language, while higher proficiency learners were able to eliminate many errors; however, the inter-lingual interference was also apparent. The results also indicated that the percentage of sentence-initial structure in TP language did not decrease in the written production of the learners with better proficiency in English. In contrast, the higher level students exhibited more percentage of sentence-initial feature, which is characterized as TP language in their L1.

Table 8. Frequency Distribution and Percentage of TP Transfer in Written Production

TP Features	Level A		Level B		Level C	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Sentence-initial	10	38%	5	18%	3	11%
Double Subject	5	19%	7	27%	12	46%
Co-reference Deletion	10	38%	17	65%	23	88%
Zero-NP	11	38%	10	65%	12	88%
Dummy Subject	5	19%	15	58%	18	75%
Total	41	32%	54	42%	68	52%

Note: Total sentences for each feature are 26; total sentences for each proficiency level are 130.

A topic-prominent language may have a so-called “double-subject construction” (Li and Thompson, 1976, p.15). As indicated in Table 8, the students at lower proficient level (A) produced 46% of double-subject sentences, while those at intermediate level B produced 27% and those at higher level had only 19%. The findings suggested that as the learners’ English proficiency was improved, the number of double-subject structures decreased. As at the higher proficiency level, learners were likely to exhibit a decrease of transfer of TP features (Mandarin Chinese). They might be learning to acquire that double subject is not allowed in English structures. While the learners at lower proficiency level produced higher percentage of topic-comment structures as shown in Table 8, the frequent occurrence of the TP features decreased in their higher-proficient counterparts.

Table 8 shows that pronoun deletion in co-reference contributed to the high frequency of TP features at all levels of participants. Like the students at the lower level who produced 88% of deletion of co-reference sentences, the students at higher levels also produced this type of structure more than the other features. With regards to zero features, Table 8 reveals that students at Level A, Level B and Level C produced 44%, 38% and 48% of zero-NP structures, respectively. The result did not reveal a significant difference between the participants at different proficiency levels. Participants from Level A to C appeared to exhibit topic chains in their production, regardless of their language proficiency. The finding in this aspect suggested that the *compound sentence* (e.g., item 8) was challenging to participants at all levels.

As for the dummy subject, the results indicated that the learners at lower proficiency levels revealed more use of dummy subject than their higher proficiency counterparts. As Table 2 reports, level C students, the lowest level, produced 75% dummy subjects, those at Level B

58%, while those at the highest level produced 19% dummy subjects.

4.2 The Participants' Typical Production Patterns of TP Features

A further analysis was conducted to locate the sources of overuse of Chinese TP features that might result in grammatical errors as they produced English sentences. The sentences produced by the students were categorized into five types in terms of the TP characteristics: 1.) sentence-initial, 2.) double subjects, 3.) co-reference deletion, 4.) topic chains, and 5.) absence of dummy subject. The sentences with highly frequent occurrence of those TP features were shown as follows (also see Appendix II).

1.) The patterns of sentence-initial:

Table 9

Shuiguo	wo	zuei	sihuan	ping quo.	(Mandarin Chinese)
* fruit	(is) I	most	like	apple.	(Level C)
* All kinds of fruit I most like apple.					(Level B)
(v)The fruit that I like very much is apple.					(Level A)

Table 10

Na ge ren, (-CL)	ta de	ma ma	shen bing	le.	(Level B)
* That man,	his	mother	(is) sick.	ASP	(Level A, B, C)
* That man whose mother was sick.					(Level A, C)
(v)That man's mother is sick.					(Level A)

Type table 9 and table 10 indicate that lower level participants preserved the topic 'fruit' and 'that man' at the sentence-initial position, which was clearly influenced by their mother tongue, a highly topic-prominent language. Only participants who had reached higher proficiency (i.e., level A) were able to produce more English-like usage, such as 'like very much,' 'most,' 'like,' possessive marker and relative clause. However, the participants in high proficient group still had limited language production proficiency, often resulting in incorrect English sentences even though they tried to apply more grammar components. The transfer of sentence-initial feature in TP language caused the lower proficient learners did word-for-word translation instead of making up a complete sentence.

2.) The patterns of double subjects:

Table 11

Chang jing lu	bo zih	hen	chang	(Mandarin Chinese)
*Giraffe	neck	(is) very	long.	(Level C)
*Giraffe the neck is very long.				(Level B)
*Giraffe the neck is very long.				(Level B)

Type table 11 and table 12 suggested that participants had the knowledge of possessive maker, but failed in using it correctly. The data also suggested that Chinese learners of English might initially transfer L1 (TP) features, the double subject, into their production and then gradually learn to attach the possessive maker to the topic NP, as their proficiency improved. All the participants exhibited the 'house' and 'window' in the position for subject because this English structure parallels with that of Chinese. In other words, the interference from L1 caused the grammatical errors.

Table 12

Jhe dong	fangzih	chuang hu	hen	piao liang.
*The -CL	house	window	(is) very	beautiful. (Level A,C)
* The house windows very beautiful.				(Level B)
? The house's window is very beautiful.				(Level A,B,C)

As shown in type table 13, the deletion of co-reference was almost frequently found in the sentence production by all levels of participants. This error might be explained typologically that in Chinese, the co-referential pronoun can be omitted if it is co-referential to the topic in the sentence-initial position. It seems that the use of be-verb was progressively influenced from the be-verb in the main clause.

3.) The Patterns of co-reference deletion:

Table 13

Jhe jian	T-shirt	hen	jin,	wo	bu	sihuan	(Mandarin Chinese)
*This-CL	T-shirt	is so	tight,	(so)I	don't	like.	(Level A, B,C)

Table 14

Jhe fen	li wu	shih song	gei	guo wang	de,	suo yi	hen jhen guei
This-C L	gift	is presentation	to	the king,	(ASP)	so	valuable. (Level C)
* The	gift	is give	to	king,		so	is valuable. (Level B)
* The	gift	is	for	king,		so	valuable. (Level B)
* The	gift	is	for	king,		so	is valuable. (Level C)

4.) The patterns of topic chains;

Patterns in type table 15 and table 16 demonstrated that the dummy subject "it is" was dropped by the participants at all levels of proficiency. The features of null element, such as

null dummy subject in TP language, seem relatively to be the source that contributed to the difficulty in acquiring the usage of dummy subject "it is" in English. For Taiwanese EFL learners, it is not easy to acquire the dummy subject, even though they learn through explicit instruction. However, type table 15 and table 16 also demonstrated a developmental trend, in which participants at Level A showed their proficiency was closer to English structure than those lower proficient counterparts at Level C.

Table 15

Hen	gao sing	zai jhe li	jian dao	ni	(Mandarin Chinese)
Very	happy	(here)	meet	you	(Level A, B, C)
It's very glad to meet you here.					(Level A)

Table 16

zai	dushih (CL)	renkou	hen duo	jia tong	hen	fan mang.	
	*City	population	a lot of	traffic	is very	busy.	(Level C)
*In	City	population	is very many	traffic	is very	busy.	(Level B)
*In	the city	population	is very much	so/and traffic	is very	busy.	(Level A)

5.) The patterns of drop of dummy subject:

Table 17

Jhangjheng	Ke neng	hen kuai	hui (CL)	jie shu	(Mandarin Chinese)
*War	maybe	very quick		end.	(Level C)
*War	maybe/could	very quickly		end.	(Level B)
*War	is possible	very quick		end.	(Level A)

Table 18

Kan ci lai	ta	huei	ying	de- EXP	bi-sai(MandarinChinese)
*Looking on	he	will	win		the game. (Level C)
*Look like	he	will	win		the game. (Level B)
*Look like	he	can	win		the game. (Level A)

5. Discussions

This study showed an evidence of TP transfer in the Chinese EFL learners' written production (i.e., sentence-initial topic, double subject, co-reference deletion, topic chains (or none-NP), and absence of dummy subject). Learners at less proficiency levels produced more errors that were drawn upon from their native language Chinese, while higher proficiency learners were able to produce sentences closer to the target language. These findings lend support to

Rutherford's (1983) and Jin's (1994), which demonstrate that learners go through a process of gradually transferring L1 (TP structures) to their L2 acquisition. This is also consistent with the previous research that noted topic-prominence in the learners' interlanguage development, especially in its early stages (Fuller & Grundel, 1987). It is further in line with Towell and Howkins (1994) who suggested that among those linguistic properties being transferred, L2 learners initially transfer the grammatical features of their L1 into their L2 grammar.

However, it seems that higher proficient learners' producing more sentence-initial features was contradictory to the notion of gradual L1 transferring during the language acquisition process. One possible reason might be that all the participants were all still at very low English proficiency level, even though part of them were grouped as more proficient. Another possible explanation could be seen from the data (Appendix II) that the students at higher proficient level overused the relative clause, i.e. "**That man whose mother was sick,*" and this overgeneralization caused the grammatical errors in their written production. That is, overproduction of those TP features is the evidence of L1 transfer, as indicated in Schachter and Rutherford (1979). Chinese learners' overuse of relative clauses and its relationship with misuse of sentence-initial feature in writing English might be further investigated in the Chinese EFL learners.

Moreover, table 8 indicates a higher frequency of co-reference deletion which might be related to the feature of a topic-prominent language, such as Mandarin Chinese, that deletes the co-referential pronoun in the second sentence. The higher frequency of co-reference deletion in the data might also be attributed to the less restrictive use of co-reference in Chinese. In Chinese, if the subject in the embedded sentence is co-referential with the subject in the main clause, it is preferable to omit the subject in the clause. When the pronoun in the second sentence is co-referential to the subject or object in the first sentence, it is also common to omit the pronoun in the second sentence. On the contrary, the co-referential pronoun is restrictively used in English structure.

Another point to be discussed is that Mandarin Chinese, a highly topic-prominent language, does not possess dummy subject or empty subject, such as 'it is' and 'there is /are' in English. This typological difference might contribute to a high percentage of production of dummy or empty subjects, especially as is frequently found in participants of lower proficiency levels. As Table 8 indicates, the learners at lower proficiency levels revealed more use of dummy subject than their higher proficiency counterparts.

The findings in this study raised another issue for SLA: learning ability. The properties of Chinese TP language might lead to the EFL Taiwanese learners' learning difficulties in the acquisition of English, a SP language. As we can see from the comparative typology, Chinese allows a range of structures, while English has restricted nature of those, except the cases in the colloquial speech. In set-theoretic term, English socialization structures are a small subset of those in Chinese (Yip, 1995). When acquiring English, the learners have to impose constraints on topic structures without the benefits of negative evidences. The Subset Principle causes a learner to select the most restrictive possible grammar generated by UG. This case can account for a language development. For example, as shown in this study, the

Chinese learner's TP features became fewer in the higher proficient group.

6. Conclusion, Implications, and Limitations

This study examined the learners' written production data and determined the sources of the errors from a typological perspective. The results indicated that the participants at lower proficiency level produced more TP structures, compared to their more proficient counterparts. That is, the frequent occurrence of TP features in English in the Mandarin speakers' written production was evidence of a direct influence from the mother tongue, a L1 transfer. L2 learners with very limited proficiency in English tended to rely on structures that are similar to their mother tongue, Chinese which is a highly TP language with such features as null subject, and deletion of co-reference. This study suggested that errors in the learners' written production serve as a diagnostic function for the learners' language development and should be treated as a part of learning and an indicator of learners' language learning strategies.

There are several implications for English teaching and learning. First of all, to help students learn better, teachers should make learners aware of the typological differences between their mother tongue and the target language, particularly at the beginning stage. "Think Aloud" makes the thinking process apparent to the learners. In the EFL environment, it is vital to provide learners with repetitive practice of certain difficult patterns in the target language. Moreover, teachers should regularly monitor learners' learning and conduct on-going evaluation to trace if their errors become fewer. Other learner awareness activities, such as contrast analysis for error prediction and understanding, self-revision and peer-revision activity, should also be included in the course design to enhance independent learning and meta-cognitive development.

Additionally, it is equally important to remind the students that there is frequently a non-correspondence between Chinese and English with regard to syntax. This might help avoid the negative transfer from the L1 and draw the students' attention to the differences between two languages. Small group or whole class discussion might be held for the student-initiated problems before the end of the lesson or left until next lesson. Group discussion fits in with the methodological trend because they are *interactive and cooperative*. It is also necessary to assign the students sentences or paragraphs or a page of text with the target structures and ask them to work in pairs or groups to work out the correct usage and describe how they do. The assumption is that two heads are better than one, and that students work cooperatively with peers. Their performance on each assignment can be kept as records as a means of increasing motivations.

Another pedagogical implication is that as soon as an initial analysis of errors is made, a code might be placed to indicate the types of diversion for further classification regarding what and how to teach. Attention should also be paid to the frequency of errors which in turn reveal the severity of the interference from L1. A detailed categorization of error patterns and a list of frequency of errors help teachers to set priority for teaching. Based on the results of contrastive analysis, teachers should select certain sentence structures from the frequency list to present in class via the overhead projector or power-point. Thus, it is helpful to point out

the errors by comparing them with the correct usage in the target language.

This study has some limitations which might have affected the findings and need a further study. Overall, the findings in this study did not demonstrate distinct decrease in the dropping of TP features when the data were further examined qualitatively. A possible reason could be that the all participants in this study were still at quite limited proficiency level, although they were divided into different groups for comparisons. Whether lower proficiency learners were more rushed to produce English and ran into problems in areas that were difficult for the teacher to understand is another issue for further research. Moreover, this interpretation might better be cautiously undertaken because the present study has not assessed the individual's learning development in a longitudinal way. A longitudinal study on the individual's language development would be necessary for future research if we like to investigate the interlanguage and language transfer more thoroughly. Furthermore, the investigation might have different results if the initiative task includes a longer passage involving several sentences that are related to each other.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Please Translate the following sentences into English:

1. 水果我最喜歡蘋果了。
2. 長頸鹿(Giraffe)的脖子(neck) 很長。
3. 那個人他媽媽生病了。
4. 那棟房子的窗戶很漂亮。
5. 那件T恤(T-shirt)太緊了(tight),我不喜歡。
6. 那份禮物(gift)是送給國王的,所以很珍貴(valuable)。
7. 非常高興在這兒遇見你。
8. 都市裡,人口(population)很多,交通(traffic)很繁忙(busy)。
9. 戰爭(war)可能(possible)很快會結束(end)。

10. 看起來他會贏(win)得比賽(game)。

Appendix 2. Sample of Participants' Production Patterns of TP Features

Groups	*Sample Sentences
Level A	<p>1. The fruit I most like apples. The fruit that I like apple very much is apple. The fruit I like very much is apple Fruit of apple is my favorite. All of the fruit I most like is apple.</p> <p>2. Giraffe the neck is very long. Giraffe's neck is very long.</p> <p>3. That man, his mother is sick. That man whose mother was sick. That person who's mother was sick.</p> <p>4. The house's window is very beautiful. The house window is very beautiful. The house windows are very beautiful. The house of windows are very beautiful.</p> <p>5. The T-shirt is too tight, I don't like. 6. The gift is for king, so very valuable. 7. Very happy to meet you. It's very glad of meet you. 8. In the city, population is very much, so/and traffic is very busy. In city, lots of population, and the traffic is very busy. 9. War maybe end right away. War is possible very quick end. 10. He looks like will be win the game. Looks like he can win the game.</p>
Level B	<p>1. All kinds of fruit I most like apple. 2. Giraffe the neck is very long. 3. That person his mother was sick. His Mom, she is sick. 4. That's house very beautiful in windows. The house's window is very beautiful. The house windows very beautiful. 5. The T-shirt is too tight, (so) I don't like. 6. The gift is give to king, so very valuable.</p> <p>The gift sent the king, so is very valuable. 7. Very happy to meet you here. 8. In city, population is very many, traffic is very busy. 9. War maybe/could (very quickly) end. 10. Look like he will the game.</p>
Level C	<p>1. fruit is my like Apple. My favorite fruit is apple. 2. Giraffe neck is very long. Giraffe the neck is very long. 3. That man, his mother is sick. That man whose mother was sick. That person who's mother was sick. 4. The house's window is very beautiful. The house window is very beautiful. The house windows are very beautiful. The house of windows are very beautiful.</p> <p>5. This T-shirt is so tight, I don't like___. 6. The gift is for King, so is valuable. That gift is presentation to the king, so valuable. 7. It's very glad of meet you here. Very happy to meet you here. 8. City population a lot of, traffic is very busy. 9. War is possible very quick end. 10. Looking on he will win the game.</p>