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CHINESE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN WRITTEN ENGLISH

In United States, there are above 40% of the population are come from foreign country, so that there will be a large number of foreign students.

When some foreign student come into United States. Although there will be have many different that he had to learn to satisfy the American style living, but sometime he still has have their own custom, for sooner of later it will change, but he still feel that the American world just isn't right with them. Because many foreign student felt there are many different for them, like the way they eat, speak, write, live and work etc. So that why most of the foreign student feel that still stay into their own country is better than leaving their own country enter the other new nation. And it is the most foreign students' complain.

What you have read is a typical sample of the writing of a Chinese student at City College. These students are, in one way or another, still being influenced by their native language—either directly or indirectly. They come from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Some have grown up in Chinese communities in New York. Some speak Cantonese and Mandarin; some speak Cantonese and are learning Mandarin; some do not speak or write these languages but understand them when spoken to; some do not speak, write, or understand these languages, though their parents do; and if their parents do speak these languages, they tend to pick up the ungrammatical English that their parents speak. While these Chinese languages differ phonologically, the variations of word order and grammatical structure are so minor that, for all intents and purposes, they are grammatically the same.

This paper will focus on some key errors that these students make, many of which appear in the student writing sample above. It will

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present a body of contrastive material to help the teacher locate a number of persistent errors in writing by Chinese students which may be ascribed to a degree of linguistic interference. In dealing with these students, it is very important that the teacher have some knowledge of the causes of the interference problems. An English-Mandarin Chinese contrast table is presented first to show how specific structures in English are handled differently in Chinese. Two of the most common of these errors, *pronouns* and *pair correlative conjunctions*, are then analyzed in greater depth. The learning problems for students with these two particular features based on my experience are presented in each section. This is then followed by a suggested method of working with students which heightens the teacher's awareness of the problem.

In the following section, a contrast table is presented which indicates the important areas of interference that I discovered from writing samples of 102 freshmen Chinese students in the fall of 1972. A number of these errors occur in the student essay.

ENGLISH-MANDARIN CHINESE CONTRAST TABLE

ENGLISH	MANDARIN CHINESE
A. DIFFERENT FORMS FOR ADJECTIVES/NOUNS	
Adjectives use endings such as <i>-y, -ous</i>	One form for both adjectives and nouns.
Nouns use endings such as <i>-ence, -tion</i>	
1. His/Her sickness is very serious.	1. ta de bing hen yanjung. he/she [de] ¹ sick very serious.
2. He/She is very sick.	2. ta hen bing. He/or she very sick.
B. ARTICLES BEFORE NOUNS	
Mass nouns normally do not have articles.	Non-existent; numbers plus classifiers used instead.
Count nouns normally have articles; <i>a, an</i> —indefinite <i>the</i> —definite	
3. I have a book.	3. wo you shu. I have book.

¹In the literal, word-by-word translation into English, certain words are untranslatable, like *de, ben, jyan, dzai*. These words are bracketed in the text.

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4. The moon is very bright.
5. I have a piece of furniture.
6. Give me the book.

C. CONJUNCTIONS

Used to introduce dependent clauses.

7. The man who stole the money is here.
8. I don't like anything.
9. I know where he lives.

D. CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS (although/but, because/therefore)

Dependent and coordinate conjunctions are not used together.

10. Although he has money, he does not give me any.
11. Because he is very tired, he does not like to work.

E. IMPERSONAL THERE

Used as an introducer.

12. There are three kinds of weather.

F. NOUNS—INFLECTIONS

Used for number.

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4. ywe-lyang hen lyang.
moon very bright.
5. wo you yi-jyan jya-jyu.
I have one [jyan] furniture.
6. gei wo shu.
give I book.
or: gei wo neiben shu
give I that book.

Used as question words and indefinites.
That is used as a demonstrative pronoun only.

7. tou chyan de ren dzai jer.
steal money [de] person dzai here.
8. wo shemma dou bu syihwan.
I [shemma] all [negative] like.
9. wo jrdau ta ju dzai nar.
I know he live [dzai] where.

Used together as pair correlatives.

10. sweiren ta you chyan, keshr ta
bu gei wo.
although he have money, but he
[negative] give me.
11. yinwei ta hen lei, swoyi ta bu
syi-hwan dzwo shr.
because he very tired, therefore
he [negative] like work.

Non-existent; many times translated as "have."

12. you san jung chi-hou.
have three [jung] weather.

No external or internal changes;

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13. I have a book.
14. We have three books.
15. I have three dollars.
16. I have many books.

G. PREPOSITIONS (in, on, at)

Used to indicate time and place.

17. See you at three o'clock.
18. The book is in the box.
19. He is at the train station.
20. The book is on the table.

H. PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Adjectival prepositional phrase comes after a noun.

21. That person in the room is Robert.

I. PRONOUNS

Special forms for object pronouns: *him, her, them*, for example.

22. He gives the money to him.

Special forms for reflexive pronouns: *himself, herself, themselves*, for example

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numbers and classifiers or *hendwo* "many" used before the noun.

13. wo you yi-ben shu.
I have one [ben] book.
14. women you san-ben shu.
we have three [ben] book.
15. wo you san kwai chyan.
I have three [kwai] money.
16. wo you hendwo shu.
I have many book.

No Chinese equivalent for *in, on, at* when used as expressions of time. In expressions of place, there is *one* Chinese equivalent for *in, on, at*.

17. san dyan jung jyan.
three o'clock see.
18. shu dzai hedz litou.
book [dzai] box inside.
19. ta dzai hwoche jan.
he/she [dzai] train station.
20. shu dzai jwodz shang.
book [dzai] table top.

Comes before the noun with the use of *de* as a linker.

21. dzai fang-jyan de neige ren shr Lwofu.
[dzai] room [de] that [ge] person is Robert.

Object pronouns are the same as subject pronouns.

22. ta gei ta chyan.
he/she give he/she money.

Reflexive pronouns are the same as subject pronouns plus *dzji* 'oneself.'

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23. He gives money to himself.

Special forms for possessive pronouns: *his, hers, theirs*, for example.

24. He gave me his money.

J. VERBS—TENSE INDICATORS

Tense indicators.

25. He sings a song today.

26. He sang a song yesterday.

27. He will sing a song.

K. VERBS—AUXILIARY VERB DO

Used in questions and for emphasis.

28. Do you come from China?

L. VERBS—VERB TO BE

Used before adjectives, nouns, verbs, and pronouns.

29. He is very intelligent.

30. When he was sixteen years old, he went to work.

M. VERBS—VERB TO HAVE

Used as a main verb and as an auxiliary.

31. I have done my homework.

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23. ta gei ta dzji chyan.
he/she give he/she [dzji]
money.

Possessive pronouns are the same as subject pronouns plus the modifying particle *de*.

24. ta gei wo ta de chyan.
he/she give I he [de] money.

Non-existent; use time words.

25. ta jintyan changger.
he/she today sing song.

26. ta dzwotyan changger.
he/she yesterday sing song.

27. ta mingtuan changger.
he/she tomorrow sing song.

Non-existent.

28. ni tsung Junggwo lai ma?
you from China come [ma]?

Not normally used before stative verbs except for emphasis.

29. ta hen tsung-ming.
he/she very intelligent.

30. ta shrlyou swei de shrhou, ta chyu dzwoshr.
he/she sixteen year [de] time,
he/she go work.

Used as a main verb only.

31. wo yijing dzwo le wo-de gungke.
I already do [past] I [de]
homework.

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N. VERBS—INFINITIVE TO

Used with the base form of the verb.

32. She likes to sing.

O. WORD ORDER

-ly adverbs which occur in initial, mid, and final positions are normally placed after verbs.

33. I get sick very easily.

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Non-existent.

32. ta syihwan changger.
he/she like sing song.

Adverbs are used before verbs.

33. wo shr hen rungyi sheng bing
de.
I am very easy get sick.

Because Chinese students have special problems with pronouns and pair correlative conjunctions, a detailed analysis of these two features follows.

PRONOUNS IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH

The subject and object pronouns in Chinese are the same. The reflexive and the possessive pronouns are formed by adding *de* for possessive and *dzji* for the reflexive.

Pronoun referents used are either *tamen dzji*, *ta dzji*, or just plain *dzji*. When the subject pronoun is used in subject position and the possessive particle *de* is added, then it is possible for one to say:

1. a. tamen de wenti hen duo.²
- b. they [de] problem very many.
- c. They have many problems.

in contrast with,

2. a. tamen dzji de wenti hen duo.
- b. they oneself [de] problem very many.
- c. Their own problems are many.

In sentence 2, the implications would be "their own internal problems" as opposed to "their problems in general," which could include internal and external ones.

²Illustrative examples will be presented in the following manner: (a) Chinese romanization, (b) literal, word-by-word translation into English, and (c) free translation of the whole utterance into English.

In many cases, *dzji* "oneself" is used alone as a pronoun referent. If it is used without the pronoun, then it would stand for *ta dzji* "he oneself," *tamen dzji* "they oneself," *ni dzji* "you oneself," depending on the context.

Pronouns in Chinese are used at the beginning of a story. The reader is supposed to find out who is referred to from the context.

3. a. *tamen dwei wo lai shwo haishr syinde bing ren, wo swo jrdau de bugwo shr tamen de sying—au erson.*³
- b. They to me are still new patients, I [swo] know only they [de] last name—Olson.
- c. To me they are still new patients. The only thing that I know is their last name—Olson.

In Chinese, aside from the type of pronouns mentioned (those which take the place of nouns), words such as *jei* "this," *jeiyang* "this way," *nei* "that," *you sye* "some," *shei* "who" are also used as pronouns.

Shei "who" is also used as a pronoun to take the place of the object or complement position. However, there is no differentiation between "who" and "whom" in Chinese; neither is there between "whoever" and "whomever." Compare:

4. a. *ta shr shei?*
b. he is who
c. Who is he?
5. a. *ni ba shu gei shei?*
b. you [ba]⁴ book give who?
c. You gave the book to whom? OR
To whom did you give the book?

Questions like "Who gave you the book?" or "Who is that man?" are not especially difficult for Chinese students to learn; but questions like "To whom did you give the book?" or sentences like "The man from Argentina, whom you saw me with last night, has published a book of poems." are very difficult. Not only is the form "whom" confused with "who," but the object or complement position in English appears at the beginning of the question which does not hold true in Chinese.

³Wang, Wen Shing. *Syandai Wen-Sywe*. No. 32, 1967. Szjye Wen wu publisher, Taipei. p. 1 (trans.).

⁴*ba* is a marker in Chinese used to shift the direct object before the verb.

In English, it is very important to be consistent and clear in one's reference. In the following sentence, arrows connect the pronouns and their antecedents:

I asked Robert for the medicine but he did not know where he'd put it.

The Chinese translation of the above sentence will be,

6. a. wo syang Lwofu yau yau, keshr ta bu jrdau ba yau fang dzai nali.
- b. I toward Robert want medicine, but he not know [ba] medicine put in where.

Compare these two sentences:

7. a. Lwofo de fuchin you yige syin dzye, keshr Lwofu bu jrdau ta gan shemma.
- b. Robert [de] father have one new job, but Robert not know he do what.
- c. Robert's father has a new job and Robert doesn't know what he's doing.
8. a. Lwofu de fuchin you yige syin dzye, ta dzji ye bu jrdau ta dzai gan shemma.
- b. Robert [de] father have one new job, he oneself also not know he do what.
- c. Robert's father has a new job and he doesn't know what he's doing.

In sentence (7), since *Robert* is used in the second part of the sentence, the pronoun *ta* "he, she" refers to *Robert's father*. Also, *keshr* "but" is a more appropriate connector than *and* because of the two different subjects involved.

In the second part of sentence (8), *he* refers to *Robert's father*; thus, in Chinese *dzji* is used after the first *ta* to refer to "he oneself."

LEARNING PROBLEMS FOR STUDENTS

1. Since subject and object pronouns are identical in Chinese, pronoun referents have become a problem for Chinese students, especially when they have to refer to something previously mentioned.

I asked *he* to come.⁵

Give this to *they*.

⁵These are actual student sentences.

That would make *I* wonder and surprise.

Every parents always love the son and daughter have a great future.

2. Since Chinese students are not used to changes in inflection, another problem concerns plural reflexive pronouns. Errors like "ourself," "theyself," "themself," seem to be the most common ones.

Or how did the people thinking of *themselves*?

3. Another difficulty is how to use the correct pronoun reference in the sentence. Chinese students tend to make unclear, vague references with words like *it*, *this*, and *others*. In some sentences, the pronouns have no specific references at all:

But still *this* is not the only reason. (The *reason* was never stated.)

Their standard is much lower than *others*. (The *others* were not explained.)

In the other sentences, incorrect pronoun referents are used:

A people finish high school could be a salespeople but can't be a psychologist because *he* don't have the knowledge. Thus, I think a young person should go to college and learn as much as *they* can.

4. The unnecessary use of the reflexive pronoun is another common error.

They themselves went to the movie.

Whereas statements such as this are used in English only for emphasis of the personal pronoun, the Chinese student tends to introduce the form in normal unemphasized statements.

PAIRS OF CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH

In Chinese there are many pairs of correlatives which connect two clauses together into compounds or compound parts of sentences, such as subjects or verbs. The following is a partial list of the paired correlatives in Chinese:

1. a. *sweiren* ta hen you chyan, *danshr* ta hen bu kwaile.
b. Although he very rich, but he very not happy.
c. Although he is rich, he is not happy.
2. a. *Yinwei* ren duo, *swoyi* fan bugou chr.

- b. Because people many, therefore food not enough eat.
 - c. Because there were many people, the food was not enough.
3. a. *jryau ni neng lai jyou keyi le.*
 - b. so long as you can come, then alright [past].
 - c. So long as you could come, then it is all right.
 4. a. *jihran women dou meiyou chr dzaufan, na jyou sya lou chyua.*
 - b. In as much as we all have not eat breakfast, then go downstairs.
 - c. In as much as we did not eat breakfast, let us go downstairs and eat.
 5. a. *ta budan mei yubei gungke, ping chye hai yau chau bye ren de.*
 - b. he not only not prepare for his homework, but he also want to copy from others.
 - c. Not only does he not prepare his homework, but he also wants to copy from somebody else.
 6. a. *yaubushr sya yu, jyoushr sya sywe.*
 - b. if not rain, then snow.
 - c. If it is not raining, then it is snowing.

As the above examples illustrate, it is important for the teacher to know that the similarities between some correlatives in English and Chinese do not imply a similar system with interchangeable parts. It is probably important to point out that words like *although* and *because* typically function as subordinators (or subordinating conjunctions) in English and are not accompanied by a correlative in another clause. *Although* and *but* do not function as correlatives in English. *Although* signals that the statement made in the main clause is made in spite of, as a contrast to, or in opposition to what is said in the clause introduced by the subordinator *although*; *but* signals that the statement following it is made in spite of, as a contrast to, or in opposition to what is said in the other clause. Similarly, *because* signals cause; *therefore* signals result.

The use of one subordinator *only* is sufficient to signal in English what in Chinese requires a pair correlative conjunctions in these two critical cases. This problem might be why the Chinese students, when they attempt to transfer the concept into English, also transfer the grammatical formula by which it is expressed in Chinese.

In Chinese, the position of correlatives in a sentence depends upon whether the two clauses have different subjects or the same subject. If the two clauses have different subjects, then *sweiren* "although" occupies the pre-subject position, as in:

7. a. *sweiren wo syang chr, danshr ni bu joen.*

- b. although I desire to eat, but you not allow.
- c. I would like to eat, but you won't allow me.

If the two clauses have identical subjects, *sweiren* "although" occupies the post-subject position, as in:

- 8. a. wo *sweiren* syang chr, *danshr* hen bau.
- b. I although desire eat, but very full.
- c. I would like to eat, but now I am full.

LEARNING PROBLEMS FOR STUDENTS

Examples. At my night school, most students were adult, I just couldn't get along with the old guy, *because* they were always made fun of me, *therefore*, I dropped out in the next semester.

Although the most demanding job are not offered by the college, *but* going to college could prepare a young person in other field, such as more understanding toward the society and more social contact with other.

Because she is tired of cleaning the house and looking after the children *therefore*, she has devoted her life to go out to work.

The most common errors in pair correlatives found in the English writing of Chinese students are the use of *because/therefore* and *although/but*. These two pairs are used very frequently in Chinese. Whenever a *why* question is asked, the answer has to be *because/therefore*.

The Chinese consider the use of *because/therefore* and *although/but* as natural and normal. The tendency to use both in English is very strong among Chinese learners of English.

Chinese students also get confused with *since* and *although*, and sentences like the following occur very often.

Ex. *Since* this is a very common problem to all high school seniors, but also is very hard to explain deeply.

As one can see from the different contrasts presented above, writing English is very complicated for Chinese students. In trying out a number of approaches with them, I accidentally discovered a way to get students to think and to develop language awareness when they write. I was having a conference with one of my ESL students about one of his compositions. The student, serious about his study and aware of his need for language practice, wanted very much

to improve his English. In that particular essay where he described the educational system in Hong Kong, he had written, "There are private schools more than public schools in Hong Kong." Knowing that he had translated this structure from Chinese, I asked why he had made that error. Since he could not give me an answer at that moment, I told him to go home and give it some thought. The next day he wrote the following paragraph for me:

Why did I make this mistake? It is because I always use the Chinese writing to translate in the English writing. The Chinese always say that (there are private schools *more than* public schools). In Chinese [here the student wrote the sentence in Chinese characters]. In English the word "more" is before the noun "private school," but in Chinese, the noun "private school" is before the word "more." So it is why I make this mistake.

The student's ability to analyse this error by referring back to the word order in the mother tongue is a sign that he also may be able to develop the habit of self-correction in the process of composition itself, first, by a heightened awareness of the extent to which he is translating from the mother tongue, and then by an active seeking-out of appropriate English forms as the vehicle to express what he wants to express. All this implies a strong grammar component in any course that seeks to develop such a skill. It does not require the teacher to do contrastive grammar for many different languages because it is the student himself who finds or fails to find a form or pattern in the native language which he has misappropriated in writing the second language. However, a teacher's knowledge of different patterns in Chinese, Spanish, or non-standard English is, of course, useful. The above hypothesis about the student's projected ability to correct written work through conscious contrast with the structures of the mother tongue has been tried out successfully and should be tested more extensively. Contrastive analysis may still be an issue today in language teaching. However, the approach of asking students to think through the reasons for the error as a result of native language interference is worth pursuing.