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Chinese Language Interference of Smart Vocational School Students in Written English

Adib Jasni Kharisma

English Education Department, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara

Khairun Niswa

English Education Department, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara

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Abstract: This research aims at investigating and describing the interference of Chinese Language (L1) in Written English (L2) by Smart Vocational School Chinese Students. The present study is limited to the discussion of syntactic interference instead of others such as lexical, phonological, and discourse interference. Qualitative data were collected from ten Chinese students at Smart Vocational School. The data were analyzed by using Miles and Huberman theory – data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings of the present study are eight syntactic interferences occur in the English text written by Chinese students. They are the syntactic interference on parts of speech (noun, adjective, verb), syntactic interference on tense, syntactic interference on pronoun, syntactic interference on auxiliary, syntactic interference on article (definite and indefinite), syntactic interference on noun indicating possession, syntactic interference on noun plurality, and syntactic interference on impersonal ‘there’ as sentence subject. The interferences occur either as the L1 rule is applied in L2 or the deviation of L2 as its non-existence in L1.

Keywords: Interference, Chinese language, syntactic interference, L1, L2

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been conducted in order to succeed the learning of English as second language. Teaching strategies have been modified so well by the purpose of improving the students’ quality in acquiring the four skill of language – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Nevertheless, the issues of second language learning never remain the satisfactory of learners’ competency. The learners still find difficulties in expressing their ideas in English and even produce errors. When writing or speaking the second language (L2), second language learners tend to depend on their first language (L1) structures. If the structures of the L1 and L2 are the same, problems will be overcome. Yet, if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L2, thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2 (Dechert, 1983 and Ellis, 1997).

Ackrapong (2005) found out that the Thai students produce incorrect sentences when they are expressing their ideas in English. The Thai student writes “I closed (opened) the radio” instead of “I turned off (on) the radio”. This error occurs as the students transfer the properties of their first language in the second language. The meaning of “close or open” in Thai language is equivalent to the word “turn off (on)”. In addition, in Thai language, the

proper noun “*hair*” and “*furniture*” are countable while in English they are not (Nattama, 2002). Thus, the students often make mistakes when they are expressing these words in English. For instance, the Thai students tend to write “she has black hairs” instead of “she has black hair”, and to write “The room was full of furnitures” instead of “The room was full of furniture” (Nattama, 2002). Still in the context of Thai language, the influence of Thai (L1) in English (L2) is also found by Wannakarn (2001) when the students use phrase in English such as “Chicken fried” instead of the correct one “fried chicken”. The students literally transfer the structure of the L1 in L2. The students produce error as well when they are writing English sentence such as “I want to buy car” instead of “I want to buy a car”. The absence of article ‘a’ in the sentence is due to the non-existent of article (definite or indefinite article) in Thai language (Wannakarn, 2001).

The transferring of L1 structure in L2, when the learners are expressing their ideas, is one of their strategies as an individual process in learning (Dulay, 1982). This strategy can be clearly seen when Chinese students in Hongkong Baptist University write in English and produce errors. The Chinese students tend to write “His father took bath” instead of the correct one “His father took a bath”. This grammatical incorrectness occurs as the absence of article (definite and indefinite) in Chinese language (Hung, 2000). Thus, in every time the students modify noun, the students tend to produce grammatical errors. Another case of the influence Chinese language into English by Baptist University students is the use of verb and adjective. In Chinese, both verb and adjective can be used as predicator in creating sentence. The students tend to transfer this rule when they are writing in English, therefore produce grammatical errors. For example, the students tend to write “Kavin afraid to say” instead of the correct one “Kavin is afraid to say” (Hung, 2000).

According to Newmark hypothesis (1966), performers who are asked to produce before they are “ready” will fall back on first language rules (L1), that is, they will use syntactic rules of their first language while speaking or writing the second

language (L2). When the L1 and L2 rules are different, the resulting error is referred to “interference” (Khrashen, 1982). Ellis (1997) refers interference as ‘transfer’, which he says is ‘the influence that the learner’s L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2’. He argues that transfer is governed by learner’s perception about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. In learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules (Selinker, 1971, Seligar, 1988 and Ellis, 1997) with the use of their L1 knowledge.

The interference of L1 in L2 is also found by the researcher in Smart vocational School, the place where the present research is going to take place. Smart vocational School has 90 percent Chinese students. The researcher is one of the English teacher’s colleagues in that school and found out some preliminary data about the L1 interference. This happens when Chinese students tend to write “have three book” instead of the correct one “There are three books”. The grammatical error in produced by the Chinese students as the result of the interference of their L1. In Chinese, there is no impersonal “there” Chinese, and there is no different form between singular and plural noun (Claudia, 2004). Another example is when the students write a sentence contained a grammatical error such as sentence “A best friend is someone who always remember you even you’re far away with she/he”. Ross, Sheng Ma (2006) state that in Chinese the 3rd person singular does not affect the verb form. Therefore, the incorrect verb “remember” in the sentence above is affected by transfer of Chinese (L1) structure. The pronoun “she/he” is incorrect as the students transfer the structure of Chinese language (L1). In Chinese, the form of pronoun as a subject and an object is the same (e.g He as subject *ta* and as object *ta*) (Ching and Rimmington, 2004).

Beardsmore (1982) states that many the difficulties of the second language learner in phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L2 are due to the interference of habits from L1. The formal elements of L1 are used in the context of L2 and result error especially when the structures of the languages are different. The present study focuses on investigating

the interference of Chinese language (L1) in written English (L2). The researcher focuses on the written English (L2) that the students produced. On the other hand, the interference may affect the speaking or pronunciation, reading and so on. Yet, the researcher, in this occasion, merely focuses on the interference which occurs in written English (L2). The main reason is that the interference must be more obvious seen in written English rather than spoken one. In addition, in written English (L2) the learners must have more time to think the structures and words before they began to write. The question is why the interference still exists? Another reason is also due to the authenticity and easiness in analyzing the data compared to the transcription of the pronunciation. Nevertheless, other researchers are suggested to accomplish the investigation on how the Chinese language (L1) influences the speaking or reading the English (L2). In conclusion, this study particularly investigates the Chinese language (L1) interference in written English (L2) by the Smart vocational School students. The researcher specifies to investigate the syntactic interference. Lexical interference will not be investigated here. The syntactic interference means the interference of Chinese language rules, structure or grammar in written English. Obviously, the syntactic interference occurs when the learners use the L1 structures or rules in L2. The syntactic interference may occur in the use of noun, adjective, correlative conjunction, impersonal there, preposition, auxiliary, verb-tense, pronoun and so forth. The researcher will choose to conduct the study in the Smart vocational School since 90 % of the students are Chinese and the school uses English as language delivery in teaching and communication among students or teachers. In addition, the researcher has colleagues there which could be beneficial to the collection of the data, determination of the subjects and the application of the findings later.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Location

The Location of the research was conducted in Smart Vocational School at Grand Cemara Asri Jl. Cemara no. 88AD – 88 AE North Sumatera.

B. Research Design

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explain that qualitative research is descriptive. According to Ary et al. (2010:29), there are types to do qualitative research, they are basic interpretative studies, case studies, document or content analysis, ethnography, grounded theory, historical research, narrative inquiry, phenomenological studies (Nainggolan et al, 2021; van Thao and Herman, 2021) The data collected are in the form of words or pictures rather than number. In this case, qualitative method means to find out how a theory works in different phenomena (Purba and Herman, 2020).

C. Subjects

In the ongoing study, ten Chinese students were chosen as the subjects of the research. The ten students are senior high school students at Smart vocational School. Smart vocational School was purposefully chosen as the place where the study will accomplish since the school uses English as the language delivery during teaching learning process and communication among them. The researchers believe that the linguistic experience of the students for having been taught by good English environment will help the students to have better English in both pronunciation and structure. In addition, this school is closer than other similar school which is beneficial to the researcher in collecting the data and determining the subjects.

The subjects were selectively and intentionally chosen by the researcher without ignoring the criteria and qualities that the subjects needed to fulfill. The criteria include the performance of the students in Chinese language. The researcher will also consult with the students' Mandarin teacher in determining the subjects.

The subjects of the present study are 10 purposefully selected students at Smart vocational School. The details of the subjects will be as follows:

Table 1. The research subjects of the present study

No	Subjects' initial	Age	Parents' tribe
1	Chin	15	Chinese
2	Mich	14	Chinese
3	Cla	15	Chinese
4	KO	14	Chinese
5	Kla	14	Chinese
6	Cat	14	Chinese
7	Win	14	Chinese
8	Shel	14	Chinese
9	Ric	14	Chinese
10	Stev	14	Chinese

D. The Data

The data of this study were sentences in the English texts written by 10 selected students at Smart vocational School. The sentences will be dismantled out from the texts and put together under the same category of syntactic interference.

E. Source of the Data

The data of this study will be the English texts written by the Smart Vocational School students as the subjects. The texts will be written by the students without any topic limitation. The students will free to choose any topic to trigger them to write more. The familiarity of the students with the topic will be believed to produce more complete data. All students are going to write at least 200 words without any consultation with others during the writing.

F. Technique of Data Collection

The teacher will ask the students to write texts in English as their L2. The subjects are free to decide the topics. This condition will trigger the subjects to write more and expressing their ideas flawlessly. The teacher will suggest the students to write at least 200 words or more in a limited time and the researcher will supervise them to ensure the purity of the data and to avoid discussion among them. From the text written by each student, the researcher will list the grammatically error sentences and number them for further analysis steps.

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

DATA ANALYSIS

The Occurrence of Syntactic Interference of Chinese Language (L1) in Written English (L2) of Smart Vocational School Students

The interference of Chinese language in the English texts written was having analysed by all subjects, the followings are the syntactic interferences found.

Table 2. Syntactic interference of Chinese Language (L1) in written English (L2) of Smart Vocational School Students

No	Interference of L1 found	Subjects									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
		Ch	M	Cl	KO	Kl	Ca	Wi	Sh	Ri	St
1	Parts of speech	✓	✓	✓		✓					

2	Tenses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
3	Pronoun	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
4	Auxiliary (modal,tobe)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
5	Article (definite, indefinite)			✓							
6	Noun indicating possession		✓								✓
7	Noun Plurality	✓									
8	Impersonal 'there' as subject								✓		

Language interference is the use of features belonging to one language while speaking or writing another (Mackey (1968). In the present study, the writer investigates the error English sentences due to the use of Chinese features in English. In addition, Lott (1983) clearly justifies interference as 'errors in the learner's use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue'. It means that the use of grammar rules of Chinese language as L1 used in writing English as L2 and produces error sentence grammatically. Not all automatic transfer of L1 features in L2 is classified into interference. The use of L1 rules in L2 and the use is appropriate or correct in L2 is excluded from interference. Otherwise, if the transfer or use of L1 features or rules in L2 produces error sentences, Saville and Troike (2006) states that it is interference.

The Description of Syntactic Interference of Chinese Language in Written English of Smart Vocational School Students

The ten Subjects were analyzed and found out eight syntactic interferences of Chinese language in Written English, this section analyzes how these eight syntactic interferences occur.

Table 3. The Description of Syntactic Interference of Chinese Language in written English of Smart Vocational School Students

No	L1 interference on	Realization in Chinese (L1)	Realization in English (L2)	Description of interference
1	Parts of speech	-same form of adjective, noun, verb - same verb form for all subject	-mostly has its own form - verb corresponds to the Subject (3 rd singular)	-Does not change to correspond to its position as adjective, verb, noun -Does not respond to the subject (3 rd person), or after preposition
2	Tenses	-No existence of Tenses -to indicate state of action, adverb of time is used .e.g. today, yesterday, tomorrow	-each state has its own form - verb corresponds to the Subject (3 rd singular)	-maintain in infinitive to express past or perfect -in present, does not correspond to 3 rd person as subject
3	Pronoun	-same form of subject, object, singular and plural, possessive -3 rd person singular doesn't affect the form of verb / predicate	-each has its own form -3 rd person singular affect the form of verb/predicate	-doesn't correspond to its position as subject, object, possessive -in the subject, 'I' is placed before other pronouns

No	L1 interference on	Realization in Chinese (L1)	Realization in English (L2)	Description of interference
4	Auxiliary (modal, to be)	-non existence of auxiliaries -negation and question are free from auxiliaries	- Auxiliaries play important roles -Auxiliaries used to form negation, question, passive, progression, and so forth	-form question without auxiliary -To Be is omitted in passive -no bare verb used after modal
5	Article (definite, indefinite)	-non existence of article	-'a/an' is used before singular countable noun -'the' is used if the noun is clearly known	-uses that instead of 'the' - Omit using article 'a/an'
6	Noun indicating possession	- 'de' is used to indicate possession, instead of adding apostrophe 's	-Use apostrophe 's for noun indicating possession e.g. john's house	Omit using apostrophe 's. e.g. boy name, Juliet father
7	Noun Plurality	- No change of form between plural and singular noun	-formed by adding 's/es'	Maintain in the form of singular noun
8	Impersonal 'there' as subject	-non existence, 'have' is used instead	-use as impersonal	Uses 'have' instead of 'there'

FINDINGS

The language interference of Chinese language (L1) of Smart Vocational School students in written English (L2) occurs in several parts. Based on the data analysis above, the followings are the findings:

1. The Syntactic interferences of Chinese language (L1) in Written English (L2) were experienced by ten research subjects. The syntactic interference of Chinese language in written English occurs in the use of parts of speech, tenses, pronoun, auxiliary, article (definite and indefinite), noun indicating possession, noun plurality, and impersonal 'there'.

2. Based on the data analysis, the syntactic interference on the parts of speech occurs especially on adjective, noun, and verb. It occurs as the students, when they wrote in English (L2), applied the rules of part of speech in Chinese (L1), which is different from what it has in English. Therefore, the interference produces error English sentences. Besides part of speech, the syntactic interference on tenses (past tense, future tense, perfect tense and so on) occurs as the students violated the proper use of

tenses in English due to the contradictory of system in both languages (Chinese and English). To express the past activities, the Chinese students tend to avoid the alteration of the infinitive verb into verb ¹¹. In addition, as Chinese is a non-inflected

3. Language, the Chinese students skip the addition of inflection -s in the simple present tense, when the subject is the third person singular. For example, the words *go, take, move, wait*, and so forth are not correct instead of *went, took, moved, waited* when the students aim to express the past activities. Another syntactic interference is the interference on pronoun. In the data analysis, the interference happens in the use of subject and object, the position of pronoun as subject (e.g., *I and You*, instead of *You and I*), possessive pronoun and so forth. The interference occurs as the Chinese students use the L1 rules when they were writing in English. Syntactic interference on auxiliary occurs in making question, negation, passive, and before adjective and noun. The Chinese students tend to skip using auxiliary in making question, passive sentence, and

omit using bare verb after modal auxiliary (e.g., *must wisely choosing* instead of *must be wisely choosing/must wisely choose*, *can free* instead of *can be free*, *will ready* instead of *will be ready*). The syntactic interference of Chinese language on article (definite and indefinite). The using of article in the English sentence by Chinese students is commonly omitted as how it is in Chinese language. This interference has produced error English sentences. Through the data analysis, it is also found that the syntactic interference of Chinese language on noun indicating possession occurs as the effect of the different rule of expressing possession in Chinese and English system. In the analysis, the Chinese students produce error English sentences as they tend to omit using the apostrophe 's in the noun indicating possession. The students tend to write *the boy name* instead of *the boy's name*, *girl name* instead of *girl's name*, *the girl family* instead of *the girl's name*, *Juliet father* instead of *Juliet's father*, *Juliet mother* instead of *Juliet's mother*, *mom birthday* instead of *mom's birthday*. The next is the interference of Chinese language on noun plurality occurs as the Chinese students avoid using the plural form of noun, neither affixing *s* into the noun or change the form such as some of *teenager* instead of *some of teenagers*. Finally, the interference of Chinese language on impersonal 'there' occurs as the students use the word *must* replace what they mean as 'there'. The students write *still have days left* instead of *there are a few days left*.

DISCUSSION

There eight syntactic interferences found in the English text written by ten Chinese students occur on part of speech, tenses, pronoun, auxiliary, article (definite and indefinite), noun indicating possession, noun plurality, and impersonal 'there' as the sentence subject. These findings are relevant to what has been found by the Bhela (1999) who conducted the research on investigating the interferences of L1 in L2 writing. Different from Bhela who was using a series picture to be described by the students, the present study assigned the Chinese students to write an essay about the topic they are familiar with.

The findings of the present study have some similarities to what were found by Camilleri (2004) who was investigating the native transfer in Maltese students' English writing. In Maltese students' writing, she found out thirteen categories of L2 errors as the interference. Most of the eight categories of syntactic interference of Chinese language (L1) on written English (L2) were also found the Maltese students' writing. Nevertheless, the categories (preposition, spelling, idiom) which were found by Camilleri are not found by the researcher in the present study. In addition, the findings of the present study are also similar to the study of L1 interference in L2 translation by Thai medical students (Sattayatham and Honsa, 2007). Yet, the interference categories of conditional sentences, punctuation, connector are not found in the present study. The interferences found in both studies, Sattayathma & Honsa (2007) and the present study, found out the L1 interference of auxiliary, noun plurality, articles, and subjects.

In line with Bhella (1999), Camilleri (2004), and Sattayathma & Honsa (2007), the present study also found out that the difference in system especially grammar, the students transfer their first language into the second language by using their mother tongue system. For instance, the realization of parts of speech in Chinese (the form of noun, adjective, and verb) is not different, while in English the parts of speech (noun, adjective, and verb) mostly have different form. The Chinese students tend to avoid inflection and maintain the form of the word though it has experienced different part of speech. In English, a verb preceded by preposition must be put in *-ing* form, while in Chinese it is unnecessary. Thus, when the Chinese students apply the L1 concept, error in L2 is produced. In addition, the different concept of using pronoun in English and Chinese has led the Chinese students to produce error English sentence as they use inappropriate form of the pronoun in the subject of the sentence, object, and possession. The Chinese system recognizes the same form of pronoun in all subjects, object, possession, and even it does not distinguish the pronoun for singular or plural. In the present study, these different features have been the source of

syntactic interference on using pronoun in the English text written by Chinese students.

The L1 interference on tenses found in the present study was also found in the investigation of the causes of L2 writing errors in third year college students' written works by Jenwitheesuk (2009). Yet, unlike Jenwitheesuk (2009) who relied the interference of the L1 on the lack of syntactic knowledge of the students, the researcher of the present study found out the familiarity of the students to the L1 is another main factor of the interference. It means that the interference occurs is not merely caused by the lack of knowledge of the students, but more to the habit itself. The students mostly write and speak in Chinese language; therefore, they are ignorant to the appropriate grammar when they are writing in English. In this case, the syntactic interferences happen automatically and incidentally. Therefore, though the Chinese students have been reminded about the errors they made, they tend repeat it again.

CONCLUSIONS

Having analysed the syntactic interference of Chinese language in the English text written by the Chinese students, here are the conclusions:

1. The syntactic interferences found in the English text written by ten Chinese students are the syntactic interference on parts of speech (noun, adjective, verb), syntactic interference on tense, syntactic interference on pronoun, syntactic interference on auxiliary, syntactic interference on article (definite and indefinite), syntactic interference on noun indicating possession, syntactic interference on noun plurality, and syntactic interference on impersonal 'there' as sentence subject.
2. The syntactic interferences above occur as Chinese students applied the properties and features belonged to Chinese (L1) when they are writing in English (L2) or they produced error English sentences when the same rules are not found in Chinese language (L1). The interference on parts of speech occurs as the student does not change the part of speech to correspond to its position as adjective, verb, and noun. In addition, the part of speech does

not correspond to the subject (3rd person singular) or after preposition. The interference on tenses occurs as the student maintains infinitive form to express past or perfect. The interference on pronoun occurs as the student does not correspond to its position as subject, object, possessive, and the subject 'I' is placed before other subjects, which is not usual in English. The interference on auxiliary occurs as the student creates question without auxiliary, and To Be is omitted in passive. In addition, no bare verb used after modal, which is incorrect in English. The interference on article occurs as the student uses 'that' instead of 'the' and omits using indefinite article 'a/an'. Interference on noun indicating possession occurs as the student omits using apostrophe 's. Interference on noun plurality occurs as the student maintains in the form of singular noun, though it supposed to be plural. Finally, the interference on impersonal 'there' as subject occurs as the student uses 'have' instead of 'there'.

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