Negative Language Transfer:
An Analysis of Negative Transfer Errors by English-speaking Learners of L2 Chinese

Mengya Wang
Carthage College

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of negative transfer in Chinese learning. The error analysis method was used in this study by measuring and comparing the types and number of negative transfer errors in Chinese writing and translation tasks conducted by two of groups students at different Chinese proficiency levels. Two students in an elementary Chinese 201 class and two in an intermediate Chinese 301 class were selected. According to the quantitative findings, the lowest number of transfer errors was found in lexical subsystem. Next was semantic transfer errors. The largest number of transfer errors was found in the syntactic subsystem which resulted from the students’ lack of grammatical knowledge in Chinese. The result also indicated that it is impossible to say whether L1 transfer increases or decreases with the development of L2 proficiency. Qualitative interviews conducted with the selected students gave insights about students’ awareness of negative transfer, grammar learning strategies and experience, and attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction. The interviews revealed that students are aware of negative transfer in different degrees, and explicit grammar instruction and constant practice could minimize the transfer errors.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

With the increasing economic and political development and global influence of China, there has been a considerable increase in the number of mandarin Chinese learners in North America. Among university students in North America, there is reportedly a growing demand for learning Chinese (Wu, 2010). In the United States, there are Chinese programs in more than 550 elementary, junior high and senior high schools; a 100% increase in two years. At the college level, enrolment in Chinese-language classes has increased 51% since 2002, according to the Modern Language Association, a language and literature education organization (Niu, 2016).

However, for native English speakers, Chinese might be one of the most difficult languages to learn. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has created a list showing how long a native English speaker would need to learn a specific language. There are five categories ranked from easiest to the hardest based on how many classroom hours a learner needs. Category 1 languages are those Western European languages that are most cognitively similar to English, such as, French, Spanish, and Italian. In general, native English speakers take between 23 and 30 weeks (575-750 classroom hours) to gain proficiency in these languages, according to the FSI study. In contrast, Chinese is included in Category 5 which is regarded as one of the most difficult languages to learn for native English speakers. In general, it takes 88 weeks (2200-2500 classroom hours) to
gain proficiency in Chinese, because it is significantly different from English in many aspects that affect acquisition.

Chinese and English languages are quite different in many aspects, such as writing system, phonological system and grammar structure. First, Chinese and English are different as writing systems. According to the definition of language family, Chinese belongs to hieroglyph writing and English belongs to alphabetic writing. This means that Chinese does not have an alphabet, but rather uses a character or symbol made up of strokes for its written language. Because of this fundamental difference, English native speakers may have great difficulty learning to read Chinese texts and writing characters correctly. In addition, the Chinese phonological system is also a challenge to English native speakers. Chinese is a tone language. It uses the pitch (highness or lowness) of a phoneme sound to distinguish word meaning. In contrast, changes of pitch in English are used to emphasize or express emotion, not to give a different word meaning to the sound. It’s very challenging for English native speakers to master the tones, due to the fact that mispronunciation could lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication. A third reason Chinese is difficult to learn is that there are also various differences in grammars. For instance, in Chinese, questions are produced by intonation; the subject and verb are not inverted as in English. A Chinese sentence can omit a subject, such as “Tomorrow have no homework.” (Danling Fu, 2003, p.135).

As stated above, there are many differences in the mode of expression, thinking pattern, grammar, pronunciation, and writing between English and Chinese. In fact, English is often considered an obstacle to learning Chinese. Native English speakers tend to make errors caused by the inappropriate and incorrect shift from their prior knowledge
of English to the comprehension and production of Chinese. In psychology, transfer refers to the influence from old knowledge to new knowledge. That is to say, when a person studies a new knowledge, his old knowledge will influence the process of his new knowledge learning, and the influence is called transfer. In the field of linguistics, the phenomenon of cross-linguistic influence is called language transfer.

Language transfer or cross-linguistic influence in L2 acquisition is viewed as effects of the first language (L1) on the acquisition or use of L2 (Odlin, 1989). It has been proven that L1 has both positive and negative influence on every aspect of L2 learners’ interlanguage: discourse, lexicon, semantics, syntax, morphology, phonetics, and phonology. Weinreich (1953, in Cook, 2003, p. 1) used the term ‘interference’ for the language transfer phenomenon, which considered the influence of L1 as an obstacle to the learning of L2. He found that L2 learners have a tendency to use their L1 patterns or rules that will lead to an error or inappropriate form in L2 learning process. In contrast, the positive view of L1 influences on L2 was represented by the theory of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). The CUP model proves that there is a positive transfer between L1 and L2 in several areas, for instance, phonemic awareness, word recognition, the use of cognates, and general comprehension (Cummins, 1983).

Further, researchers have been paying attention to the cause of language transfer. Language distance or typology describes how different one language is from another. This concept is considered as one of the most important determining factors in language transfer in the sense that the more similar the languages are, the more likely the L1 is to facilitate the development of L2 (see Kellerman, 1995). Vice versa, the greater the differences are between languages, the more likely the L1 is to interfere the development
in L2. For example, French is typologically close to English, so when native English speakers learn French, their English is at some point to facilitate the learning of French. Chinese and English are typologically different, so English is often reviewed as an obstacle to learning Chinese.

Apart from language distances, L2 proficiency is another deciding factor in language transfer. Studies, which have focused on the relationship between the L2 proficiency and language transfer have produced contradictory results. Some studies (Ringborn, 1987; Möhle, 1989; Poulisse, 1990) claim that high proficiency in L2 could minimize language transfer errors by demonstrating that more proficient L2 learners tend to transfer less elements from their L1 than less proficient L2 learners. On the other hand, other studies claim that there is no clear relationship between L2 proficiency and language transfer errors. Compared to the low proficient L2 learners, the rate of transfer errors of high proficient L2 learners sometimes has reportedly decreased, while at other times, they have been reported increases (Sanchez, 2003; Celaya, 2007).

In addition to the proficiency of L2, proficiency of L1 may serve as a predictor and foundation for that of L2. Carroll (1973) suggested that aptitude for learning a L2 is a “residue” of L1 skills (Carroll, 1973). With better language capability, high-proficiency L1 learners are more capable of understanding and analyzing errors made in L2 learning, especially transfer errors, which are only caused by L1 interference. Errors are always considered to be a crucial component in the L2 learning process. Learner’s correct sentences do not necessarily give evidence of the rules of the new language and the rules he has developed at given stages of his language development (Corder, 1987). This can be done only by the errors he makes when learning L2. Therefore, error analysis is an
inevitable occurrence both in teaching and learning. Error analysis originated in the United States in the 1940s. The researchers found that learner errors are not random mistakes but evidence of rule-governed behavior (Adjemian 1976; Corder 1976; Nemser 1971; Selinker 1972). The method of error analysis was put forward to provide insights into the complicated L2 learning processes as well as a systematic way for identifying, describing and explaining learners' errors. With the help of error analysis, teachers can help L2 learners develop their metacognitive awareness of errors they have made, providing them a deep insight into the underlying processes that are involved in language learning. Thus, error analysis reveals the reasons behind the errors and helps L2 learners avoid making them again. Error analysis also gives teachers ideas and information about individual learner weakness. It also assists instructors to design more effective teaching strategies and to select more meaningful and appropriate materials based on the finding of errors.

Errors analysis is more often used to reveal errors founded in writing than speaking, because the errors L2 learners made in speaking may be the result of ignorance of rules. If in this case, they can correct them later. However, the errors made in writing are usually the result of unawareness, because writing is a production skill where students have time to arrange their output and therefore can clearly show areas of incomplete knowledge. By analyzing errors in writing, the researchers have a deep insight of the cause of errors. The study conducted by Sarfraz (2011) to examine the errors made by 50 undergraduate Pakistani students in written essays, found that the overwhelming majority of student errors are resulted from their L1 interference. Sarfraz also pointed out that most of the errors are caused by the lack of L2 grammar.
In the past few years, there has been a significant body of research regarding error analysis in writing. By analyzing these errors, it provides both teachers and students a clear picture of the language development and also gives them indications as to the learning process. Now, Error analysis is widely used as an effective method for understanding the cognitive process students is using in language learning process and helping teachers decide which might be targeted for correction.

**Statement of the Problem**

The rationale for this research study arose during the instruction of a college Chinese class. In Chinese classes, learners tended to translate their English into Chinese. As a result, the sentence structures they produced in Chinese often strongly resembled the structures of English. The language transfer phenomenon appeared throughout the entire semester.

The language transfer could be classified as positive or negative transfer. Positive transfer refers to the fact that learners use their former knowledge, in this case English, to avoid making errors in their Chinese learning. In contrast, negative transfer refers to the fact that learners use their former knowledge in ways that result in errors. For the reason that positive transfer is not interference and is hard to distinguish, this research study will focus on the negative transfer appearing in Chinese writing tasks and the method and the result of error analysis.

There has been extensive research on language transfer; it has taken a great deal of research to study the language transfer in western languages, like Spanish, French, German. In recent years, more Asian researchers have been interested in negative transfer
between English and non-western languages, like Chinese, Japanese, Korea in order to help the Asian students learn English. However, there is little research investigating negative transfer in Chinese classes. A better understanding of negative transfer to Chinese and its implications for instruction could assist both the instructor and student when teaching and learning Chinese.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the influence of negative transfer in Chinese learning by utilizing the errors analysis method. The researcher will measure and compare the types and number of negative transfer errors in Chinese writing and translation tasks conducted by students in an intermediate Chinese 201 class and advanced Chinese 301 class. Through the comparison, the researcher will categorize all instances of negative transfer in order to determine the most common errors—at the lexical, syntactic, semantic, or discourse levels. For each group of students, the author will count the number of errors in each group to see whether L2 proficiency could minimize negative transfer errors. After that, the researcher will conduct interviews to investigate whether raising a metacognitive awareness of transfer errors can avoid negative transfer errors. After conducting interviews and utilizing the errors analysis method, the author intends to offer effective teaching and learning strategies perhaps not yet revealed in previous research.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the most common language transfer errors made by low and intermediate proficient students?
2. What is the relationship between Chinese proficiency and the frequency of negative transfer errors?

3. How do students understand the negative transfer errors and how might they avoid them?

The first two questions are answered with results from student writing tasks. The third question draw on student interview responses.
Chapter Summary

The introductory chapter presented the topic and outlined its background. In order to explain the problem, research regarding the status of Chinese as foreign language learning in the United States (Wu, 2010), the linguistic difference between Chinese and English, the nature of language transfer (Odlin, 1989), the influence of L2 proficiency in language transfer (Ringborn, 1987; Möhle, 1989; Poulisse, 1990), the error analysis method (Adjemian 1976; Corder 1976; Nemser 1971; Selinker 1972). Chapter 2 will outline the study’s scientific foundation by reviewing related theories.
Chapter 2

Literature Reviews

Overview

The purpose of this study is to better understand the influence of negative transfer in Chinese learning by utilizing the errors analysis method. This chapter will introduce the theory underlying to this study. Drawing from a wide body of scholarly literature, this chapter will present the concept of language transfer and the common types of transfer errors. This review of literature will include two of the most important factors of language transfer; the application of the error analysis method; and the use of awareness raising teaching strategy instilled in grammatical instruction to minimize negative transfer errors.

The Concept of Language Transfer in L2 Learning

Although the study of language transfer has long been an important topic in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, there has been no consensus regarding the processes by which it works. This difficulty could be reflected in the evolution of the term used to define the process. Until the 1950s, language transfer was considered simply as a negative effect. Some linguists and psychologists promoted the idea that language transfer arises from “learners’ laziness, sloppiness” and “lack of mental clarity” (Cahan, 1926; Jespersen, 1912). Weinreich (1953) defined language transfer as linguistic interference, which considered L1 influence as an obstacle to L2 learning. Later on the positive view of L1 influence as an obstacle to L2 learning. Later on the positive view of L1 influences on L2 was represented by the theory of Common Underlying Proficiency (Cummins, 1983). It was claimed L1 has a positive effect in the
process of phonemic awareness, word recognition, the use of cognates, and general comprehension. Supporting studies were conducted by Cook (2001), Dewaele (1998), Odlin (1989), and Pavlenko (2000) to confirm that transfer can facilitate and accelerate L2 learning.

In the 1980s, the term transfer was introduced by Fries and Lado, and gradually came to replace interference, which conveyed both negative and positive effect (Isurin, 2005). Odlin’s (1989) offered a generally accepted definition of transfer which is broad enough to encompass many different viewpoints: “transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (p. 27). Within this definition, two types of transfer were suggested: positive transfer and negative transfer.

Positive transfer occurs when L1 and L2’s structures align well with each other and provide a correct transition, thus facilitating L2 learning. An example of positive language transfer is cognates. This occurs when words in two languages share a similar meaning, spelling, and pronunciation. For example, “je vais au cinéma ce week-end regarder un film,” the words 'cinema', 'weekend', and 'film' should be recognizable for English native speakers, because they are cognates from French and English. The result of the study conducted by Ramirez, Chen, Gave and Kiefer (2010) indicated that the knowledge of Spanish-English cognates help Spanish children learn L2 English vocabulary.

Negative transfer occurs when L1 and L2 do not match well in structure and meaning and the ability to transfer L1 knowledge to L2 learning is not available. In this case, L1 can function as interference resulting in negative transfer errors. For example, a
French learner of English may produce ‘I like very much coffee’ instead of ‘I like coffee very much’ because of the transfer of French pattern “j’aime bien le coffee.” Wang and Geva (2003) found that Cantonese-speaking children had difficulty distinguish between the phonemes /s/ and / θ/ because the latter one doesn’t exist in Cantonese. At the same time, they found that this type of phonological error disappeared as the children become more proficient in their L2.

**Transfer Error**

Unlike developmental error which occurs in the processes of L2 learning regardless of learners’ L1 backgrounds, transfer error is expected for learners of a specific L1 learning a specific L2. Richards (1971) pointed out that a variety of errors are made by learners from different language backgrounds. Transfer error which exists in all linguistic subsystems is an important topic of study in SLA. A large body of research has proven that transfer error exists in different linguistic subsystems: lexical, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, etc. (Aleeva, 2012; Montrul, 2010; Sorace, 2004; White, 2009). These researchers also indicated that the types and frequency of transfer error vary considerably in different L1 backgrounds.

**Phonologic Transfer Error**

The phonologic transfer is the most frequent and apparent form of error. L1-based accent as the most obvious phenomena can be found at every stage of L2 learning. Suter (1976) and Purcell & Suter (1980) have confirmed that non-native speakers pronounce an L2 is, at least to some extent, dependent on their L1. Some errors are produced due to lack of certain L2 phonemes in the learner’s L1. For example, Wang and
Geva (2003) found that Cantonese-speaking children had difficulty distinguishing between the phonemes /s/ and /θ/ because the latter one doesn’t exist in Cantonese.

*Lexical Transfer Error*

Lexical transfer which is considered as the influence of lexical knowledge in one language on the use of the word in another language has been largely investigated in SLA (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008, p. 72). Two main types of lexical transfer can be distinguished: transfer of form and transfer of meaning (de Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Ringbom, 2001, 2006). Transfer of form refers to the fact that when L1 and L2 share similar word form, the L2 learner has a tendency to use L1 word to learn L2. The French word “vinaigre” has been adapted to English orthography ‘vinegar’ but retains the meaning. This could be referred to or translated as 'True Friends' (Zeeland, 2012). In this case, it shows positive transfer and facilitates L2 learning. When they are 'false friends' that a word form in L1 is identical or very similar to a word form in L2 but the meanings differ, lexical transfer error occurs (Ringbom, 1987). An example of a false friend is the English *embarrassed* and the Spanish *embarazada*. The English word means to feel uncomfortable or shy, while the Spanish one means to be pregnant. Another type of lexical transfer is transfer of meaning. It involves loan translations or calques which means a word or phrase borrowed from another language by literal, word-for-word. Language learners of different language backgrounds use it to fill the gaps in the target language (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Loan translations or calques occur when compound words, idioms, and lexical collocations are translated word-by-word from L1 into L2. For example, Beer Garden is a calque of the German *Biergarten*, and Adam's Apple is a calque of the French *pomme d'Adam*.
Sometimes, it facilitates L2 learning, but inappropriate and incorrect borrowing L1 words can also cause errors (Ringbom, 1987).

Compared to error caused by incorrect transfer of form (false friend), error resulted from incorrect transfer of meaning happens more frequently between English and Chinese. Zhai Haixia (2009) and Wu Mingjun (2004) indicated that a majority of lexical errors made by Chinese learners of English are caused by word-by-word translation from Chinese to English. For example, many words which can be used together in Chinese may not be collocated in English. In Chinese, to take medicine is “吃药” (eat medicine) Chinese students often translate this phrase word by word into English, thus producing the false phrase “eat medicine” (Wu Mingjun, 2004).

**Semantic Transfer Error**

Semantic transfer occurs in the form of semantic extension (Pavlenko & Jarvis, 2002) and conceptual shift (Strike & Posner, 1992). Semantic extension refers to the fact that the meaning of L1 word is expanded in L2. This extension can lead to semantic transfer errors. For example, when Spanish learners want to translate the Spanish verb “hacer” into English which has a broader semantic meaning than “do” and “make”, they produce errors. Ringbom (1978) examined errors made by Finns in learning English and found that the majority of errors could be attributed to an extension of the semantic range of lexical items in English.

There is meaning asymmetry between Chinese and English. One example is color terms. Many Chinese color terms have different extended meanings from those of English. Except for its original meaning, Chinese hong (red) conveys a wide range of
meanings. For example, it means flush/blush: 脸(face)红(red) and wedding: 红(red, wedding)白(white, funeral)事(events).

Conceptual shift is another important dimension in semantic transfer which means the learner’s L1 knowledge can determine the choice of linguistic structures or grammatical categories in L2. Sjöholm (1995) discovered Swedish speakers would rather use one-part verbs than phrasal verbs when speaking English, even though English has both options (cancel ~ call off; interrupt ~ cut in). He assumed that the reason could be the lack of phrasal verbs in Swedish. However, Sjöholm found that use of phrasal verbs increases as a learner’s language proficiency expands. Another study of conceptual shift was conducted by Wong (1983). She compared the frequency of the use of "make" constructions in the written compositions between Chinese learners and other learners and discovered that there is a relatively greater number of "make" constructions in Chinese learners’ compositions. She claims that the preference of "make" structures is directly relatable to Chinese, which has few causative verbs and where the most frequent structure contains an explicit marker of causation (shi, "make") + complement. The absence of causative verb in Chinese will lead to the learners to produce the sentence like "They might make their friends get very upset about this", instead of "They might upset their friends very much about this", where "to upset" in English is a causative verb.

**Syntactic Transfer Error**

The next category of transfer involves the transfer related to syntax. Syntax means sentence structure which forms the sentence. Due to this definition, syntactic transfer refers to L1 influence at sentential level of L2 sentence (Odlin, 1989). There have been extensive research studies about syntactical transfer. Liu (2001, p.3) stated: "In terms of
linguistic transfer on the syntactical level, Ravem (1971) documented that the learner's NL played a certain role in the formation of his second language syntax. Hakuta (1974) also demonstrated that there is a firm relationship between L1 transfer and the emergence of structure in second language acquisition. In addition, Larsen-Freeman (1975) evidenced such a relationship through the learner's learning of English grammatical morphemes. To Gass (1979), transfer helped us to see the grammatical element universal in human languages.

An extensive body of linguistic studies has proven instances of syntactic transfer error in SLA. Takahashi (1969) conducted a study to investigate the use of preposition in English learning. He found that the use of prepositions is the greatest problem for English learners. Spanish learners of English have more difficulty with English prepositions that don’t have Spanish equivalents as compared to these which are equivalent in Spanish. A study conducted by Gass (1996) revealed that word order in L2 is influenced by the structural differences of the word order in L1. In addition, Meriläinen (2008) pointed out that language distance is a deciding factor in syntactic transfer. The greater difference the languages have, the more likely it will be that syntactic transfer errors will occur.

In the study conducted by Gransors and Palmberg (1976), they listed numerous errors in English word order in a composition task performed by native speakers of Finnish, a flexible SVO (subject+verb+object) language. One example of syntactical transfer error is “This weekend got F. any fish.” (This weekend F. caught no fish). Granfors and Palmberg attribute such errors to the flexibility of Finish word order; in the same study, native speaker of Swedish, a more rigid SVO language, made far fewer
errors. A further discussion about the influence of language distance on language transfer phenomena will be in next section.

Syntactic transfer error is prevalent among Chinese learners of English. The result of studies by Chen (2004), Yu (2009), Wong (2007) and Yuan (2014) showed that syntactic errors produced by Chinese English learners has been manifested in the area of word order, plural making, the use of article, the use of prepositions, the use of determiner (the) and the use of auxiliary verbs (do, be, have).

Factors Influencing Language Transfer

Language transfer is a complex phenomenon in which involves the interplay of a number of factors that can either facilitate or impede learning L2. In recent years, researchers began a new study investigating which factors could result in language transfer and how they interact with each other. Language distance (Kellerman, 1983; De Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Cenoz, 2001), proficiency (Ringbom, 1987; Williams & Hammarberg, 1998; Tremblay, 2006), frequency of input (Hatch and Wagner-Gough, 1976), age and grade (Celaya & Torras, 2001; Navés et al., 2005) and individual difference in terms of personality (Guioras, 1972) have been taken into account as potential factors in language transfer phenomenon. Among them, language distance and proficiency as the two most deciding factors have been studied extensively.

Language Distance

Language distance or typology has been regarded as an important factor for both positive and negative transfer. Ellis (1994) has noted, “Language distance can affect L2 learning both positively and negatively (p.338) ”. It can assume that the more similar the
languages are, the more positive transfer occurs, on the other hand, the greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative transfers can be expected. Evidence for this claim comes from the research conducted by Håkan Ringbom (1980) where native speakers of two different languages, Finnish and Swedish, were learning English as a L2. The result of his study revealed that L1 (Finnish), a language more closely related to the target language (English), could be easier for Finnish students studying English, especially at the beginning of the learning. One could hypothesize that the greater language distance is, the more transfer errors occur. Not only could language distance decide the frequency of transfer error, but they also determine the pattern of it. Richards (1971) pointed out that errors made by leaners from different language backgrounds vary. Zobl’s study (1992) which examined whether the background of L1 leads to different ungrammatical patterns in L2 revealed that learners from different language backgrounds exhibit different errors patterns

**Proficiency**

A wide body of literature has demonstrated that a L2 learners’ proficiency has a significant influence on language transfer (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989; Takahashi, 1996). However, there has been conflicting evidence relating to the relationship between the L2 proficiency and language transfer. The positive correlation between L2 proficiency and L1 is highly evident for most languages. A study by Wang and Wen (2002) revealed that lower proficiency writers switch more often from L1 to L2 than higher proficiency writers. Wolfersberger (2003), who only studied low proficiency L2 writers, found that these writers frequently used their L1 during prewriting and made use of translating from their L1 to their L2 in order to compensate for their limited ability
to write in their L2. Murphy (2003) pointed out that beginner learners showed more instances of lexical transfer than advanced learners and are more likely to use L1 transfer as a strategy to fill lexical gaps when they lack L2 knowledge.

Although these positive evidences have been proven, the negative correlation between L2 proficiency and L1 also is evident. Celaya (2007) observed that some types of lexical transfer such as borrowings decreased from 5th to 7th grade, but other types such as calques (literal translations) increased slightly. In the area of writing, several studies reported that high proficiency writers switched more between their L1 and their L2 than do low proficiency writers (Wang, 2003). Centeno-Corte’s and Jiménez (2004) found that advanced L2 learners used their L1 more often than intermediate L2 learners, when problem solving became too difficult. The study of syntactic transfer from Chinese to English was conducted by Zhu (2004); the results from both the individual interviews and tests showed that although the syntactic transfer errors were more likely found among lower-intermediate students, many upper-intermediate students tended to translate their L1 into L2, and this tendency to think in Chinese was no less than that of lower-intermediate students.

In another study (Bu, 2012) indicated that the relationship between language transfer and L2 proficiency is complex and it is impossible to say whether L1 transfer increases or decreases with the development of L2 proficiency. The result demonstrated that there are cases in which L1 pragmatic transfer errors decrease with the increase of L2 proficiency such as the learners’ use of imperatives, and cases in which no clear relationship is found between L1 pragmatic transfer and L2 proficiency in terms of internal modifiers and external modifiers.
The Application of Error Analysis in Second Language Learning

In the 1940s and 1950s, contrastive analysis hypothesis dominated the field of error analysis. Ferguson (1965) pointed out that the major problem in L2 learning is the interference caused by the grammatical and lexical differences between L1 and L2. Lado (1957) held the view that by comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences of two languages, it is possible to predict and explain learners’ errors and learning difficulties. Based on these convictions, the contrastive analysis hypothesis was introduced as an excellent basis preparing instructional materials, course planning and the development of actual classroom techniques (Ferguson, 1965). Contrastive analysis was used to predict error. However, as time went on, shortcomings of the contrastive analysis hypothesis became apparent. First, not all errors are predicted by contrastive analysis hypothesis. It exaggerated L1 influences and ignored other factors that hindered SLA, such as learners’ individual differences (Schachter, 1974). Second, contrastive analysis predicts some errors which do not occur (Zobl, 1980). The criticism and evident shortcoming of contrastive analysis caused researches to reorient their interest in error analysis.

In the 1950s and 1960s, linguistic researchers began to investigate errors through a new lens that focused on analyzing actual errors produced by L2 learners, instead of hypothetical errors based on a comparison of the two language structures. They stopped viewing error as reflections of limitations of language. Rather they began to embrace error regarding it as an important evidence of how language is learned and a precious source of how language is taught. Corder (1967, p.217) noted: “A learner’s errors are significant in that they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or
acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language.”

Error analysis has also been involved in pedagogical issues. First, it gives textbook writers ideas and information about the weak areas of students and helps them design more appropriate and effective textbook; second, it provides teachers with information about how much the students have learned and which areas the students have difficulty with, so they can devote special care and emphasis to these difficult areas, design remedial exercises on these trouble spots, select more meaningful and appropriate textbook or material and design more effective teaching strategies based on these finding errors. Error analysis is not only helpful to teachers, it is also beneficial to students because it provides them a clear picture of the language development and may give them indications as to the learning process. Richards (1992) explained that the study of errors are used in order to (1) identify strategies which learners use in language teaching, (2) identify the causes of learners’ errors, and finally (3) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in development of teaching materials (cited in Khansir 2008).

Although error analysis has many merits, it has not escaped criticism. The procedure for error analysis includes 5 steps (Corder 1974): (1) collection of data, (2) identification of errors, (3) description of errors (4) explanation of errors, and (5) evolution of errors. The procedure has turned out to be problematic in the process of identification of errors. The distinction between “errors” and “mistakes” is highly problematic (Corder, 1974). Errors take place when learners lack knowledge or
competence and mistakes occurs when learners fail to perform their competence. Mistake should be eliminated from the analysis, but it is hard to distinguish between them.

Covert error is another difficult problem (Corder, 1971). It is deceptive, because it is formally acceptable in grammar, but it do not mean what the learner intended it to mean. For example, “I want to know the English” is a formally correct sentence, but it would be a covert error if the learner wanted to express the meaning “I want to know English”. Another difficulty with error analysis lies on avoidance phenomenon (Schachter, 1974). Error analysis doesn’t take into account a learner’s avoidance of using certain linguistic structures to prevent errors. For example, the learner may not use relative clauses because he knows that he gets them wrong. Instead, he might use two simple sentences which he is certain he will get right. Avoidance can lead to the absence of errors—but absence of errors in this case does not mean the learner’s language usage is correct.

**Raising Learner’s Awareness through Explicit Grammar Instruction**

Over the years, the idea regarding whether grammar should be a primary focus of language instruction has been debated. Krashen’s (1981) claimed that language should be acquired through natural exposure, not learned through formal instruction. Hossein Nassaji and Sandra Fotos (2004) cited formal grammar lessons would develop only declarative knowledge of grammar structures, not the procedural ability to use forms correctly, and that there was no interface between these two types of knowledge since they existed as different systems in the brain. Therefore, the form-focused instruction defined by Ellis (2001) as "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (p1-2) was replaced by the
meaning-focused instruction, which focuses on meaning by providing exposure to rich L2 input and meaningful use of the L2 in context. Explicit grammar instruction was regarded as not only unhelpful but also detrimental in meaning-focused instruction. However, current research in SLA has led to a reconsideration of the role of grammar in the L2 classroom. Schmidt (1990, 1993, 2001) suggested that conscious attention to form is a necessary condition for language learning. Ellis (1997) found that the meaning-focused instruction itself was inadequate to solve all the problems and suggested that grammatical forms of instruction is necessary if learners are to develop high levels of accuracy in L2.

Recently a new method for teaching grammar was introduced in L2 classrooms. Awareness Raising (AR) is designed to raise the learners’ language awareness and help learners notice something about the language features that they might not notice on their own. Unlike the traditional grammar teaching, the aim of AR is not to enable the learners to perform a structure correctly but simply to help them to know about it. Enhancing learners’ language awareness is necessary, because without an explicit and conscious awareness of the processes involved in learning a language, learners will not be in a position to make informed decisions about their own learning (Sinclair, 1999). The AR approach includes activities which attempt to equip the learners with an understanding of a specifically grammatical feature. Willis (1996) stated that these AR activities encourage learners to think about samples of language and draw their own conclusion about how the language works, ultimately internalize the grammatical system of their L2.

To Ellis (2003), explicit instruction of grammar contributes to the process of integration when the learner is developmental ready. Odlin (2003) cited that stimulating
and raising language learners’ awareness of the similarities and differences across languages will help with certain difficulties in L2. The comparison of L1 structures to those of the L2 for pedagogical purposes was first proposed by James (1980) who pointed out that teachers should present the systematics of L2 and juxtapose them to the correlating systematics of L1 in the same class session. The explicit comparisons make L2 learners aware of linguistic relationships and trigger the noticing of relevant L2 feature in their input.

In reference to this study, it is necessary to ask whether noting this difference between L1 and the L2 can facilitate more proficient L2 acquisition. Evidence comes from the study conducted by Seyyed (2014). His study investigated the effects of AR through comparing written performances produced by sixty Persian students of English. The students were divided into four equal groups, two experimental groups and two control groups. Two grammatical features were chosen for instruction. Three kinds of tests were used as the pre-tests. Afterwards, the experimental groups were taught through AR grammar teaching method by comparing the differences between their L1 and L2, but the control groups were taught through traditional grammar method. After four weeks of instruction, the participants were given post-tests. The resulted revealed the experimental group performed significantly better than the control group through comparing the mean score of the pre-tests and the post-tests performance between control group and experimental group.

Another evidence of the affective effectiveness of AR comes from a case study of Chinese students of English conducted by Zhang (2014). In this case study, fifty-eight
students were given AR teaching intervention. Questionnaires and interviews were employed to collect data. The pre-questionnaires were developed before the grammar teaching treatment. The post-questionnaires and interviews were conducted after the treatment. The finding of this study revealed that a majority of students had a positive change in feeling regarding learning grammar and applied more affective cognitive strategies to learn grammar after receiving the AR treatment.
Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the scientific basis of the present study. The review of literature regarding language transfer introduced the development of the study of language transfer indicating it can either facilitate L2 learning (positive transfer) or hinder it (negative transfer). Transfer error introduces the types of transfer error indication. It is a necessary product in the language transfer field which can be found in different linguistic subsystems: lexical, semantic, syntactic, and phonetic. The researcher then explained the two main factors that cause and affect language transfer: language distance and proficiency. This section of the literature review explored the evolution and application of errors analysis method in SLA and discussed its advantages and shortcomings. The final section of the literature review introduced a relatively new way grammar teaching method termed Awareness-Raising. It requires teachers to consciously and purposely make learners notice the different grammatical features and structures cross L1 and L2 in order to reduce the occurrence of error. The next chapter will present the methodology and procedures of this study.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Overview

The present study examined the influence of negative transfer in Chinese language learning by utilizing the error analysis method. This chapter provides an explanation of the steps taken in the investigation. Information regarding the methodological design, a description of the sample, and the procedure of the experiment were embedded in this discussion.

Design

For the purpose of this study, a mixed-method design was used. The quantitative analysis compares the number and the types of negative transfer errors in Chinese writing tasks completed by students in an intermediate Chinese 201 class and an intermediate Chinese 301 class. The qualitative part seeks to understand the negative transfer errors from different aspects, such as participants’ awareness of negative transfer, grammar learning strategies and experience, attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction. The interview questions were reviewed by researcher’s supervisors. The researcher made changes based on the feedback in order to improve validity and credibility. The entire study was designed and carried out by the researcher.

Population

The researcher selected participants who have studied Chinese as their foreign language; therefore, two students from Chinese 301 class and two from Chinese 201 class were selected. The participants from Chinese 301 were at the same proficiency level and
they all had already been exposed to an immersion experience in China. One female student was adopted from China at the age of six. The two female students from Chinese 201 were also at the same proficiency level and they had never been to China before. One of them was adopted from China after birth. All participants speak standard American English as their native language and were raised in the United States. They reported that motivation to study Chinese stemmed either from sheer curiosity, prior experience with the language, or family reasons. None of them reported that their motivation was due to an obligation to meet a college foreign language requirement.

Convenience sampling, a sampling method that selects participants because of their convenient availability, was used in this study because the researcher was the instructor of the 2 participants of Chinese 301 class and has known the other two participants of Chinese 201 class. The researcher completed the IRB process and the participants were informed of the procedure of the study and their participation in this study was voluntary.

**Instrument**

The instruments include two writing and translation assignments, as well as an interview.

*The Writing and Translation Assignment*

The translation assignments (see Appendix A1 and A2) are from Lesson 12 and Lesson 13 of the workbook of Integrated Chinese Level 1, Part 2. All vocabulary and grammar were either already learned, discernible from the context, or had been assigned and practiced in previous classes. The writing assignment is the storytelling (see
Appendix A3). The participants were required to write a story based on four pictures. All assignments were conducted after the class session.

First, the researcher only gave participants one translation task and one writing task. After correcting these translation and writing tasks, the researcher found that participants made more transfer errors in translation task than composition task. The reason might be that the students have a tendency to translate word by word in translation task rather than the composition task. Moreover, there might exist an avoidance phenomenon in the composition, which is using certain linguistic structures to prevent errors. Therefore, the researcher gave them one more translation task in order to collect more data.

*Interview Guide*

A semi-structured interview was conducted concerning participants’ awareness of negative transfer, grammar learning strategies and experience, attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction. The interview questions are listed as Appendix A4 and in Table 1 below. The participants answered most of these questions, but as for question 2, none of them could answer it. As to question 5, all of them claimed that formal grammar instruction should be taught in a general Chinese class, but as for what percentage grammar should be taught in class, none of them could give an accurate percentage.
Table 1 Interview Questions

1. When you speak or write Chinese, do you think about what you want to say in English and try to come out with a Chinese sentence?
2. How do you decide whether you can use what you know about English grammar to speak or write Chinese grammar?
3. Have you ever translated word to word? If yes, were you right or wrong most of time?
4. Do you think formal grammar instruction in Chinese can help you minimize those wrong translations from English to Chinese?
5. Do you think formal grammar instruction should be taught in a general Chinese class? If yes, at what percentage should grammar be taught? Which level should grammar be taught? (Elementary, Intermediate, or advanced level, or all)
6. What is your prior experience of learning Chinese grammar?
7. How did your teachers help you learn grammar?

Procedure

Data collection was carried out over the course of eight weeks. After one month of teaching, the researcher selected two participants in her class (Chinese 301) who were at the same proficiency level. After observing Chinese 201 class and had discussed with the instructor of Chinese 201, the researcher selected two participants who were at the same proficiency level in Chinese 201.

Participants from both classes were assigned homework on Friday that included translation and composition (storytelling). On Monday, the instructor collected their homework and started to analyze them. The researcher did not inform the participants of the use of the homework in order to not interfere with their performance and to help ensure the reliability and validity of the data.

From the first assignment, the researcher found that the participants made more transfer errors in the translation section of the study. To collect more data, the researcher assigned the second translation assignment to the participants. After collecting and
analyzing all assignments, the researcher interviewed the participants individually in an empty classroom on campus. First, the researcher informed participants of the purpose of this study and asked them if they would be willing to participate in the study. Moreover, they were asked to consent to an audio recording of their voice and were informed about measures to keep data confidential, who would have access to the data, and when the recording would be deleted. After building initial rapport, the researcher started to interview the participants. A total of 4 interviews were held with 1 male and 3 female participants. The interview data was stored on the researcher’s work computer which was kept in a secure location at all times.

**Data Analysis Strategy**

The method of error analysis was applied in this study. The procedure for error analysis includes 5 steps (Corder 1974).

The first step is to collect data. The assignments that included two translations and one storytelling composition were collected from 4 students.

The second step involves identifying errors. The purpose of this step was to find the errors that the students made in their homework and then distinguish the developmental error from transfer error. Developmental error takes place regardless of learner’s L1 backgrounds. This study only examined the transfer error which is considered a deviation from English-based influence in the form of lexicon, semantics, syntax and etc.

The third step involves categorizing the transfer errors. Based on the Chapter 2 literature review (Corder, 1974; Richards, 1974; James, 1998; Selinker, 1972 in Richards, 1974; Richards & Sampson, 1974), the researcher categorized the transfer errors into the
following categories: syntactic transfer error (coordination, sentence structure, nouns and pronouns, and word order), lexical transfer error (word choice), and semantic transfer error. Table 2 displays the type, definition and example of the errors.

The fourth step involves explaining the errors. The researcher compared the difference between Chinese and English in the form of lexicon, semantics and syntax in order to explore the cause and the reason of the errors in depth.

Errors were evaluated in the fifth step of the procedures. The purpose of this step was to find a way to minimize the errors in the future. An interview was conducted in this study to seek a way to reduce the transfer errors.

Table 2 Rubric of the Category of Transfer Error

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Error</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example of Error</th>
<th>Analysis of Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lexical Error</strong></td>
<td>The influence of lexical knowledge in L1 on the use of the word in L2.</td>
<td>黑 (black tea)</td>
<td>black tea (黑茶) in Chinese is red tea (红茶).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semantic transfer</strong></td>
<td>The meaning of L1 word is expanded or narrowed in L2.</td>
<td>我感到蓝。 (I'm feeling blue.)</td>
<td>English adjective “blue” has more semantic meaning than □ (blue) in Chinese. Chinese blue doesn’t convey the meaning of sadness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Syntactic Error</strong></td>
<td>The influence of the grammatical structure of L1 on L2.</td>
<td>我回家明天。 (I will go home tomorrow.)</td>
<td>In English, the time phrase is placed either at the end of the sentence or at beginning of the sentence, but in Chinese, it is placed either before the verb or at beginning of the sentence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interviews were analyzed and the findings were summarized. First, the researcher audiotaped interviews and then transcribed all of them. According to these transcripts, the researcher first wrote down notes and comments, identifying any segment of data that might be useful and then grouped these comments and notes constructing categories. The schemes encompassed the awareness of negative transfer, grammar learning strategies and experience, attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction and perceptions of the relationships between Chinese and English. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis are presented in chapter 4.
Chapter 4

Results

Overview

The purpose of the present research was to better understand the influence of negative transfer in Chinese learning by utilizing the errors analysis method and conducting interviews. The types and number of negative transfer errors in Chinese writing and translation assignments completed by students in an intermediate Chinese 201 class were compared with assignments completed by students in advanced Chinese 301 class. The numeric results were summarized in Table 3, explained and discussed below in relation to the research questions. The analyses of participants’ responses during the interviews provided insights into their awareness of negative transfer, grammar learning strategies and experience, and attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the most common language transfer errors made by low and intermediate proficient students?

Four compositions and eight translations completed by two Chinese 201 students and two Chinese 301 students were collected. The results were subdivided into three subsystems: lexical, semantic and syntactic. The findings were summarized in Table 3, which presents the number of errors in each area, along with the percentages based on the total number of occurrences of items in each subsystem.
Table 3 Number of Transfer Errors per Linguistic Subsystem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsystem</th>
<th>N of Transfer Errors</th>
<th>% Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantic</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 indicates that the largest number of transfer errors was found in the syntactic subsystem, with 18 instances representing 60% of the total amount of transfer errors. Next was semantic transfer errors, at 8, accounting for 27% of the total transfer errors. Lexical transfer errors occurred only 4 times, for 13% of the total transfer errors.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between Chinese proficiency and the frequency of negative transfer errors?

The data set yielded 14 main categories of transfer errors, which were categorized into 3 subsystems: lexical, semantic and syntactic. Chinese 201 students made 14 transfer errors and Chinese 301 students made 16 transfer errors. The following tables show the numbers of transfer errors in the area of lexical, semantic and syntactic made by both Chinese 201 students and Chinese 301 students.
Chinese 201 students made more lexical transfer errors than Chinese 301 students and made the same amount of semantic transfer errors with Chinese 301 students. However, Chinese 301 students made more syntactic transfer errors than Chinese 201 students, because they tended to use more complicated sentence structure in the composition.

*Research Question 3: How do students understand the negative transfer and how might they avoid them?*

The researcher interviewed the same participants regarding their awareness of negative transfer, grammar learning strategies and experience, and attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction. A total of four interviews were conducted. Student 1 (S1) is from Chinese 301 class and was adopted from China at the age of 5. She has learned Chinese for eight years and been to China twice and lived with a host family for two months. Student 2 (S2), from Chinese 301 class, has studied Chinese for three years. He has been to China once and lived with a host family for one month. Student 3 (S3) is from Chinese 201 class and was adopted from China after birth. She has been studying
Chinese for six years. Student 4 (S4) is from Chinese 201 class and has been studying Chinese for four years. Neither student has been to China before. The researcher summarized these four interviews.

**The awareness of negative transfer**

All students stated that they translated word by word, and reported that the literal translation was more frequent at the elementary level rather than intermediate and advanced level. S1 claimed that she continued to translate literally from English to Chinese, but she was aware of the transfer phenomena. “The minute I spoke it out, I knew it sounds weird.” She explained it was because she was adopted from China when she was five and realized she has a subconscious knowledge of Chinese. S2 stated that sometimes he could recognize the transfer phenomena, but most of the time, he couldn’t consciously recognize it until the teacher pointed out. “I do translate word by word from English… quite often…..in most cases, I couldn’t recognize them, but sometimes I could tell what I said was very English. But I didn’t know how to fix it…..so I like teacher pointing them out and correct me.” S3 stated that she was aware of the transfer phenomena and forced herself to think and rearrange the sentence in the appropriate Chinese way instead of using a direct translation from English. “Sometimes, I have to rearrange the sentence and said no that’s English and I have to go to Chinese.” S4 claimed that she was not aware of the negative transfer. When she didn’t know how to express in Chinese, she just translated word to word from English to Chinese. Sometimes, it provides a correct transition, and sometime it causes a wrong transition. “Chinese is so different. Although I have learned it for several years, I still think in an English way. So when I don’t know how to say something in Chinese, I just go back to English and put all
the words I know together. But I don’t know whether it is right or not.”

As to how to minimize the negative transfer, all students stated that practice is the most efficient way to reduce these errors. S3 claimed that she used the textbooks’ grammar rule and sentence structure as a template and that she practiced it in order to minimize English interference. S2 claimed that an immersion experience in the target language country could also minimize the transfer errors. His J-term Trip to China last summer also helped him to formulate sentences appropriately in Chinese. “I don’t know how it happened. After I came back from China, I feel more confident to speak Chinese, and more fluently. Probably making less mistakes…. in your class, right?” For language learners, they are strongly advised to experience immersion living and studying abroad. At Carthage, all language majors are required to study abroad at least one semester, because immersion experience helps students acquire second language skills and learn the academic subject matter and concepts unconsciously. Meanwhile, the advantages of immersion experience are that "general language skills are enhanced, general cognitive development and academic achievement are enriched, and appreciation of the culture and the people represented by the target language is strengthened and broadened” (Holobow, 1988, p. 2).

**Grammar learning strategies and experience**

All students stated that grammar instruction was very important in language learning. S1 stated that she didn’t learn much grammar at high school. At that high school, the teacher only focused on vocabulary learning, so she had a wide range of vocabulary, but she didn’t know how to use it and where to appropriately place it in the sentences. Last summer, she went to a summer school to learn Chinese. There, she
acquired many grammatical structures and knew how to use the vocabulary she had learned before in a sentence. “The teacher mainly taught us grammar patterns, sometimes, she compared these Chinese grammar patterns with English patterns. I found it was very useful, it helped me better understand.” Since then, she started to learn grammar by herself. In college, she has learned the grammar from the teacher and the Internet. S2 also claimed that grammar was very helpful. “In Chinese, because you must get everything from the context. You really need to know the grammar. Otherwise, you might say something that is completely wrong or doesn’t make sense. I encountered this when I was in China this summer. I put the character together, but others couldn’t understand me or completely misunderstood me.” He said that he had learned the grammar from the teachers in the class and self-studied after the class. And he also learned it from conversations with native speakers. S3 stated that grammar was very crucial when learning Chinese. Sometimes, it is boring to just practice these grammatical structures, but it is a necessary step. She learned the grammar from the textbook and teachers. S4 stated that grammar was very important. At high school, her teacher taught them one or two grammatical structures and some words in one class session, and let them practice the grammar repeatedly.

Attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction

As to the question “Do you prefer to learn grammar explicitly or implicitly?”, students held different opinions. S1 stated that at the initial stage, the teacher should teach the grammar explicitly. At the high level, the grammar instruction could be less explicit. She said that she didn’t realize that she learned the grammatical structures at high school until the teacher at summer school pointed them out and wrote them down on the board.
She thought that at the initial stage, if the teacher taught the grammar implicitly, the students couldn’t realize and remember them. S2 stated that the teacher should teach the grammar explicitly. “I can not understand the grammar implicitly. If you say a new sentence structure, I may know all the characters, but I don’t know when I might use it. I want the teacher to write the grammar down and practice these sentence structures again and again.” He also claimed that he preferred that teachers point out and correct his mistakes immediately. “When I say something wrong, my host family, they correct me and retell me what I said wrong, I think it’s helpful.”

S3 stated that she preferred the explicit way, because “You have a guideline to make the sentences.” She pointed out that implicit grammar instruction might be more applicable to languages which are similar to English, like Spanish and French. Students are more likely to internalize these grammar structures by themselves. However Chinese is so different from English, so it is hard for them to notice and internalize them. At high school, her teacher gave them a paragraph, helped them analyze it, explained the sentence structures in it, and had them practice the structures repeatedly. S4 claimed that both were important. On the one hand, she wanted the teacher to help her notice the language features that she might not notice on her own and to correct her mistakes immediately. On the other hand, she didn’t want to practice the grammatical structures repeatedly. She thought that students should acquire grammatical knowledge implicitly rather than simply memorizing it.

**Data Analysis**

Examining the assignments, the researcher found three types of transfer errors. The data analysis yields 12 types of negative transfer errors. The following negative
transfer errors were identified in the data set and grouped according to the linguistic subsystem:

1. Lexical transfer:
   Loan translation: The use of literal translations of compound words, idioms, and lexical collocations from English.
   a. In Chinese, Mr. Wang is usually referred to as Wang xiansheng (Mr.), where Wang is the surname.
   Chinese expression intended: Wang xiangsheng (Wang Mr.)
   English expression used: xiansheng Wang (Mr. Wang)
   b. In Chinese, “tang” (soup) collocates with the verb “he” (drink).
   Chinese expression intended: he tang (drink soup)
   English expression used: chi tang (eat soup)

2. Semantic transfer:
   Semantic extension: The meaning of L1 word is expanded in L2.
   Semantic narrowing: The meaning of L1 word is narrowed in L2.
   a. English adjective “old” has a broader semantic meaning than lao (old) in Chinese.
   In English, the antonym for old could be young and new. However, in Chinese, the antonym for young is lao and the antonym for new is jiu.
   Chinese expression intended: zhe jian T-shirt hen jiu. (This t-shirt is old.)
   English expression used: zhe jian T-shirt hen lao. (This t-shirt is old.)
   b. English verb “play” has a broader semantic meaning than wan (play) in Chinese.
   Chinese expression intended: da lanqiu (beat basketball)
   English expression used: wan lanqiu (play basketball)
Chinese expression intended: ti zuqiu (kick football)

English expression used: wan zuqiu (play football)

3. Syntactic Transfer:

Negation: reliance on English negation pattern to express negation in Chinese.

   a. Negation 1: In English, there is only one negator “not” which is applied to all
   verbs to express negation. However, in Chinese, there are two verbs “bu” and
   “mei”. “bu” is applied to all verbs, except the verb “you”(to have). The verb “to
   have” has its own negation word which is “mei”. Therefore, to say “not have”,
   you should say “mei you” instead of “bu you”.

   Chinese expression intended: wo mei you qian. (I don’t have money.)

   English expression used: wo bu you qian.

   Negation 2: In English negator “not “ is used in both present and past tenses, but
   in Chinese, the negator “bu” is used in present tense and “mei” is used in past
   tense.

   Chinese expression intended: wo mei you chi wanfan. (I haven’t had dinner or I didn’t
   have dinner.)

   English expression used: wo bu chi wanfan. (I don’t have dinner.)

Word order transfer: reliance on the word order rules in English in Chinese expression.

   a. Time 1: In English, among timing phrases, the sequence is that “smaller time”
   comes first, followed by “bigger time.” For example, 8:00 pm next Monday.

   However, in Chinese, it is other way around which is next Monday 8:00 pm.

   Chinese expression intended: xiazhouyi wanshang 8dian jian. (See you next Monday
8:00 pm)

English expression used: **wanshang 8dian xiazhouyi jian.** (See you 8:00 pm next Monday.)

Time 2: In English, the time phrase is placed either at the end of the sentence or at beginning of the sentence, but in Chinese, it is placed either before the verb or at beginning of the sentence.

Chinese expression intended: *wo mingtian qing ni chifan.* (I tomorrow treat you to a dinner)

English expression used: *wo qingni chifan mingtian.* (I treat you to a dinner tomorrow.)

b. Location 1: In English, the “smaller location” comes first, followed by “bigger location”. For example, Kenosha, WI. In Chinese, it is other way around which is WI, Kenosha.

Location 2: In English, the location is placed at the end of the sentence, but in Chinese, it is placed before the verb.

Chinese expression intended: *wo zuotian zai zhongguo canguan chifan.* (I yesterday at Chinese restaurant had dinner.)

English expression used: *zuotian, wo chifan zuotian zai zhongguo canguan.* (Yesterday, I had dinner at Chinese restaurant.)

c. Prepositions: In English, prepositions come before nouns and pronouns to expressing time, place, direction, objective, reason, means, dependence, passivity, comparison, etc. In Chinese, some prepositions go after nous and pronouns.

Chinese expression intended: *zhongwenke zhiqian, wo you tiaowuke.* (Chinese class before, I have dance class.)
English expression used: zhiqian zhongwenke, wo you tiaowuke. (Before Chinese class, I have dance class.)

Sentence structure transfer: reliance on English sentence structure in Chinese expression.

a. Misuse of shi (to be): In Chinese, adjectives such as “interesting” and “funny” can function as verbs, so “interesting” is “to be interesting”. You say “this book interesting” instead of “this book is interesting.” Also, you need to add the word “hen (very)” before adjectives to provide rhythmic balance. Therefore, the correct sentence is that “this book very interesting”.

Chinese expression intended: zhongguocai hen haochi. (Chinese food very delicious.)

English expression used: zhongguocai shi haochi. (Chinese food is very delicious.)

b. Ignoring Chinese measure words: In Chinese, when a quantity is involved, you must insert a measure word between the number of the object and the name of the object. However, there is no concept of measure word in English. Therefore, it is common for native English speakers to ignore the measure word in the sentence.

Chinese expression intended: 2 ge (measure word) xuesheng (students)

English expression used: 2 xuesheng (students)

c. Overuse of conjunction “he” (and): In English, in order to make sentences move from one to another, native English speakers make full use of conjunctions. But Chinese people use few conjunctions.

Chinese expression intended: zhe jia canguan de cai hen haochi, wo feichang xihuan. (The food of this restaurant is good, I like it very much.)
English expression used: zhe jia canguan de cai hen haochi, he wo feichang xihuan. (The food of this restaurant is good and I like it very much.)

d. Missing conjunction: Chinese often use a pair of conjunctions at the same time to reveal the logical relationship between two or more parts in a complex sentence, so whenever you use because, you have to add so after; whenever you use although, you have to add but after.

Chinese expression intended: Yingwei (because) wo bu xihan chi la, suoyi (so) wo bu chi Sichuancai. (Because I don’t like spicy food, so I don’t eat Sichuang dish.)

English expression used: Yingwei (because) wo bu xihan chi la, wo bu chi Sichuancai. (Because I don’t like spicy food, I don’t eat Sichuang dish.)

Chinese expression intended: Suiran (although) ta shengbing le, danshi (but) haishi qu shangban. (Although she was not feeling well, but she still went to work.)

English expression used: Suiran (although) ta shengbing le, ta haishi qu shangban. (Although she was not feeling well, she still went to work.)
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of the data analysis. A summary of the quantitative data was provided in Table 2, 3, 4, and 5, and explained. The largest number of transfer errors was found in the syntactic subsystem, then the semantic subsystem and last the lexical subsystem. The qualitative findings emerged in 3 categories: the awareness of negative transfer, grammar learning strategies and experience, and attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction. Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, the research questions were answered. The next chapter discusses the meaning of these findings, the study’s limitations and future directions.
Chapter 5
Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to better understand the influence of negative transfer in Chinese learning by utilizing the errors analysis method and conducting semi-structured interviews. Several conclusions can be drawn from this study.

Analysis of the errors showed that the largest number of transfer errors was found in the syntactic subsystem. According to the definition of syntactic errors, it results from the students’ lack of grammatical knowledge in Chinese. The researcher found that some syntactic transfer errors were made by all students no matter what their proficiency levels were, for example, misuses of shi (to be). As mentioned above, Chinese adjectives can function as verbs: “She is pretty” in English should be “She very pretty” in Chinese. Both Chinese 201 students and Chinese 301 students made this transfer error. However, some syntactic transfer errors were made only by Chinese 201 students, for example, the use of negator. The verb “you” is very special because it has its own negation word “mei”. Therefore, to say “not have,” you should say “meiyou” instead of “buyou”. This is basic grammatical rule in Chinese. Chinese 201 students still made this error, but it never happened to Chinese 301 students. In the present study, some syntactic transfer errors were only made by Chinese 301 students. These errors were from complex grammatical structure in their compositions. For example, in Chinese, the word “because” has to be used in conjunction with “so”. Influenced by their English, students often missed the conjunction word “so”. Since Chinese 201 students did not use complex grammatical structures, they did not make such transfer errors. However, it does not mean that
Chinese 201 students will not make the same error.

As for the relationship between Chinese proficiency and the frequency of transfer errors, the result of this study was consistent with Bu’s study (2010). His study indicated that the relationship between language transfer and L2 proficiency was complex and it was impossible to say whether L1 transfer increases or decreases with the development of L2 proficiency. According to the result of present study, with the development of Chinese proficiency, the syntactic transfer errors increased, the lexical transfer errors decreased, and the semantic transfer errors remained the same. The researcher found that the increase of syntactic transfer errors was caused by the fact that Chinese 301 students used more complicated sentence structures in their compositions than Chinese 201 students did. This finding is in accordance with the study of Centeno-Cortés and Jiménez in 2004. Their study indicated that advanced L2 learners used their L1 more often than intermediate L2 learners, when problem solving became too difficult. As for lexical transfer errors, Chinese 201 students made more errors than Chinese 301 students. The reasons might be that with the development of their Chinese proficiency, Chinese 301 students developed more sense of Chinese than Chinese 201 students and translated less often from English to Chinese lexically. Murphy (2003) pointed out that beginner learners showed more instances of lexical transfer than advanced learners and were more likely to use L1 transfer as a strategy to fill lexical gaps when they lack L2 knowledge.

According to the result of interviews, students translated and still translate word by word from English to Chinese. As for the awareness of negative transfer, one student reported that she was not aware of it, because when she translated from English to Chinese, sometimes, it worked; sometimes, it did not. She could not distinguish positive
transfer from negative transfer. The other three students reported that they were aware of it. However, even if they could recognize these negative transfers, they didn’t know how to correct them.

Explicit grammar instruction could be a good way to reduce transfer errors. All students reported that grammar should be taught in Chinese class in an explicit way. Raising students’ language awareness and helping them notice the language features that they might not notice on their own is very crucial in their language learning process, especially in Chinese, which is quite different from English. Because compared to others Roman languages, students are less likely to notice these language features by themselves, let alone self-correction. Therefore, all students prefer that the teachers raise their awareness of transfer errors and correct them immediately; otherwise they will keep making the same errors. According to the interviews, the students also stated that practice was the best way to reduce the errors and they requested teachers to design more activities to practice relevant grammatical structures. Immersion experience in China and practicing regularly with Chinese native speaker can also minimize transfer errors. Because if students can think in Chinese way instead of English way, they will not be influenced their English. Immersion experience can help them develop a sense of Chinese. At Carthage, there are more than 20 Chinese native speakers, including TLEs, exchange students, students and professors. The teachers should pair them with Chinese students.

Limitations

Limitations in this study revolve around questions of validity and reliability of the findings with a focus on methodological issues.

A first limitation to this study originates from the participants. First, motivation of
the language learners has a significant role in the process of language learning. Motivation is usually associated with commitment, enthusiasm, and persistence to achieve goals. Wlodwoski defined motivation as “the processes that can (a) arouse and instigate behavior, (b) give direction or purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior” (1985, p. 2). It is common to hear that the success or failure of a language learner to master a second language (L2) depends on their motivation. In this study, three of the four participants are Chinese majors and one is a Chinese minor. Two have already been to China and are attached to the Chinese culture. The other two haven’t been to China. And two 301 participants are going to study abroad next semester, so they are motivated to learn Chinese this semester. In general, four participants have different levels of motivation, which might influence the validity, and reliability of the findings.

The second limitation involves language proficiency. Even though the participants are in the same class, some of them have learned Chinese longer than the others. It is common sense that the longer you have learned a language, the more familiar you are with it. Moreover, two participants were adopted from China and one was adopted at around five, which means that Chinese is the first language she learned. A number of researchers have found that children have an innate ability to acquire the rules of any language, and that this ability diminishes by adulthood (Curtiss, 1995; Johnson and Newport, 1989). Therefore, these factors could affect the validity and reliability of this study. The third limitation is the relatively small number of participants, which would decrease the validity of this study.

Further considerations regarding the reliability and validity of this study stem
from the study’s method. The researcher assigned one composition (story telling) and two translation assignments to the participants after class. The results showed that the lowest number of transfer errors was found in lexical subsystem. It is possible that the participants used a dictionary to translate these words. Compared to syntactic transfer and semantic transfer, the lexical transfer is easy to avoid with the help of a dictionary. Therefore, outside supports may have decreased the validity of the study. Second, some participants wrote longer compositions and used more complicated sentence structures than the others perhaps due to different motivations. As is well known, the more you write, the more errors you tend to make. As for the translation, it appeared that the avoidance phenomenon might have occurred. Some participants used certain linguistic structures that they were familiar with instead of using unfamiliar structures to avoid making mistakes. All of these occurrences could influence the reliability and validity of this study.

Implication to Language Teaching and Learning

Despite these potential limitations, the outcome of the study has implications. This study gives the teachers of Chinese the guidance as to what regular transfer errors appear at different learning stages. The qualitative data delivered useful insights about how students evaluate Chinese teaching, their own learning strategies. According to the result of interviews, there are several implications for Chinese teaching and learning. First, to help students understand the languages, teachers should make students aware of the difference between mother tongue and the target language, particularly at the beginning stage. Teacher could compare the difference between two languages in terms of their grammatical structures. With the help of the comparison, students can better
retain these grammatical structures. Second, although the anti-grammar policy started in the L2 classroom and teachers may have reduced the attention to the grammar. However, grammar instruction is still very important in Chinese instruction. As such, the teacher should help students to develop linguistic awareness through explicit grammar. Without an explicit and conscious awareness and understanding of specific grammatical features, that student may not notice on their own, and they may continue making the same mistakes. Third, teacher should encourage students to think in Chinese way instead of English way. To think in English way is the main cause of transfer errors. First, teacher should provide students with enough input in class and encourage and push students to talk with native speaker outside class. For example, the teacher can assign the homework that involves native speakers, such as asking the students to interview Chinese native speakers.

**Further Research**

According to the results of the quantitative data, the highest number of transfer errors was found in the syntactic subsystem in Chinese learning. Based on the result of the qualitative data, the participants claimed that explicit grammar instruction would minimize the negative transfer errors. To gain insights into this phenomenon, future research could be narrowed down to the nature and implications of syntactic transfer with an emphasis on analyzing the effectiveness of applying explicit grammar instruction in Chinese learning by using both qualitative and quantitative enquiries that involve a higher number of participants.
Conclusion

The purpose of the present research was to better understand the influence of negative transfer in Chinese learning by utilizing the errors analysis method and conducting the interview. The researcher measured and compared the types and number of negative transfer errors in Chinese writing and translation tasks conducted by students in an intermediate Chinese 201 class and advanced Chinese 301 class. Through the comparison, the researcher categorized all instances of negative transfer in order to determine the most common errors—at the lexical, syntactic, or semantic levels. After that, the researcher conducted interviews to investigate their awareness of negative transfer, grammar learning strategies and experience, and attitudes and perceptions of grammar instruction.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. The largest number of transfer errors was found in the syntactic subsystem, followed by the semantic subsystem and the lexical subsystem. This study provides useful teaching techniques. The teacher should raise students’ language awareness and correct their mistake immediately and consciously through explicit grammar instruction.
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Appendix 1

Translation Task 1

Translation Task

Mrs. King was born in 14\textsuperscript{th}, Jan. 1998. We first met in Beijing, China. Since then, we have become good friends. She likes Chinese food and thinks that it is very delicious. Yesterday, we had dinner at Chinese restaurant and I treat her, because it was her birthday. When we got there, there wasn’t even a single customer. The restaurant looks very old and dirty. The waiter asked us what we would like to eat. I ordered a plate of dumplings. Mrs. King said he was hungry and thirsty. She ordered a bottle of cold water, a tofu dish, and a sweet and sour fish. The waiter said they didn’t have cold water, and they only have hot tea and she wanted us to order one more dish. We said we’d already ordered enough food. But the dumplings were all sold out and the fish was too sour. The waiter not only seeds the food slowly, but also gave the wrong change. The service there was really terrible. We’d better not go there any more in the future.
Appendix 2

Translation Task 2

Translation Task

A: I asked Mr. Wang and other 2 Chinese students to have dinner with me next Monday. Do you want to join us?
B: Great, What time?
A: How about 8 p.m.?
B: What are you going to make?
A: Something light. Because Mr. Wang doesn’t like spicy food, I’d better not make Sichuan dishes.
B: You can make beef in soy sauce, and sweet and sour fish. I think they will like. You are very good at cooking and I like your dishes.
A: You are a vegetarian, aren’t you? I ‘ll make some vegetarian dumplings and a cucumber salad for you.
B: Good. See you at 8.pm next Monday.

Name:
Appendix 3

Writing

Write a story based on the four cartoons below. Make sure that your story has a beginning, middle and end. Also make sure that the transition from one picture to the next is smooth and logical.
Appendix 4

Interview Questions

1. When you speak or write Chinese, do you think about what you want to say in English and try to come out with a Chinese sentence?

2. How do you decide whether you can use what you know about English grammar to speak or write Chinese grammar?

3. Have you ever translated word to word? If yes, were you right or wrong most of time?

4. Do you think formal grammar instruction in Chinese can help you minimize those wrong translations from English to Chinese?

5. Do you think formal grammar instruction should be taught in a general Chinese class? If yes, at what percentage should grammar be taught? Which level should grammar be taught? (Elementary, Intermediate, or advanced level, or all)

6. What is your prior experience of learning Chinese grammar?

7. How did your teachers help you learn grammar?