Extended Abstract

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<< An Error Analysis of Chinese Word Order as Relevant to First and Second Year Students at the Sabaragamuwa University >>

**<< Rangani Punmadara Maduwanthi
Department of Languages**

Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka >>

<< ranasingherangani@gmail.com >>

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Abstract

The number of students who are learning Chinese as a foreign language in Sri Lanka has been a dramatic increase in recent years. Chinese language is currently in high demand in Sri Lanka. Just as every other language; Chinese language also has its own specific grammatical features. Among them,Chinese word order is the most important. However, many Chinese learners experience difficulties with the Chinese word order. Basically, it has a word order similar to that of English. But it does not mean that all Chinese sentences have the same word order of SVO verb (V), the subject (S) and the object (O). And there are some similarities between Chinese and Sinhala languages. Therefore, some nonnative Chinese learners tend to make grammatical errors with that first language interference. This study has found four categories of word order errors committed by students. They are sentence structure errors, preposition errors, question errors and negative sentence errors (不 and 没有). Word ordering errors (WOEs) are the most common type of grammatical errors at the sentence level. The major purpose of this study is to a make a contrastive view of simple Chinese word order in a sentence and help learners identify their mistakes. This paper explores the difficulties of native Sinhala speakers in acquiring the Chinese word order. The data was collected from questionnaire method, writing task and long term class observation. This study indicates that the teaching methods, material and teaching aids used must be changed and updated.

KEY WORDS: First language interference, Grammatical errors, Mistakes, Simple sentence,   Word order

Introduction and research problem/issue

Chinese language is the most commonly used language in the world. In recent years, with the rapid economic and social development in China has raised their international status. With those factors

Chinese language has become one of the most highly demanded language in Sri Lanka. But non-native Chinese learners always make a lot of word ordering errors and generate ungrammatical sentences. This research identifies Chinese major word ordering errors committed by first year and second year students.

Research Methodology

Questionnaires and written essays were selected to collect data. A questionnaire was distributed among the Sabaragamuwa University First and Second year students. The population for this study consisted of 20 first year students and 20 second year students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and languages who were selected randomly. Participants speak Sinhala language as their mother tongue. They are learning Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language for their BA Language Degree Programme. Secondary data was collected using journal articles, research papers, books and web based material.

The questionnaire contained simple questions to test the basic Grammar patterns which were already taught to the first and second year students during their academic period.

The format of the questionnaire is as follows:

Negation Word Error
Sentence
I do not have money.
I do not have a sister.
He is not my Chinese teacher.

Verb and Adjective errors
She is beautiful.
Today is very hot.

Question Errors
What is your name?
Where are you?
Do you learn or not Chinese?
Where are you from?

Preposition Errors
I study Chinese at Beijing University.
He works in a bank.
I go to park with my friend yesterday.

Results and findings

The main purpose of the study was to explore and analyze the grammatical errors in Chinese word order committed by students. To illustrate these issues, the responses in the questionnaire of students were carefully studied. Their written documents and written essays were also examined.

Error categories

Grammatical Error Frequency Percentage Sentence structure errors (verbs and adjective with be verb) 66%, Question Errors 53% Negation Word Error (不 and 没有) 47.5 %

Preposition Errors 44 %.This study found two categories of errors could be identified as the most common errors: 1.Qustion Error; 2.Sentence Structure Errors (verbs and adjective with be verb). The frequency and percentage of these two categories are much higher than the other categories. It seems that most students have difficulty in making questions. Students were not familiar with the some appropriate prepositions and their usage. Also, students are especially confused with the building of a negative sentence. They have not a clear idea the difference between 不 and 没有.Students always try to put

a "be verb"when they make adverbial and adjectival sentences. It is due to their lack of a basic understanding of subject-verb agreement. Ex:

Negation Word Error		
Sentence	Student's answer	Correct sentence
I do not have money.	我 不有钱。/我钱没有。	我没有钱。
I do not have a sister.	我不有一个妹妹。	我没有妹妹。

Verb and Adjective errors	Student's answer	Correct sentence
She is beautiful.	她是漂亮。	她漂亮。
Today is very hot.	今天是热。	今天热。

Question Errors	Student's answer	Correct sentence
What is your name?	你叫什么名字吗？	你叫什么名字？
Where are you?	你在哪儿吗？	你在哪儿？
Do you learn not or Chinese?	你学不学汉语吗？	你学不学汉语？
Where are you from?	你是哪国人吗？	你是哪国人？

Preposition Errors	Student's answer	Correct sentence
I study Chinese at Beijing University.	我学汉语在北京大学。	我在北京大学学汉语。
He works in a bank.	他工作在银行。	他在银行工作。
I go to park with my friend yesterday.	昨天我跟朋友去公园。/ 我跟朋友去公园昨天。	昨天我跟朋友一起去公园。

Conclusions, implications and significance

A language is a unique entity. Each language has its own sentence word order. SOV is the word ordering structure of Sinhala. Subject can be used at the beginning of the sentence and the verb is placed at end of the sentence. And SVO is the Chinese syntactic structure. Therefore, in a Chinese sentence the object is placed after the verb. This study points out the similarities and differences between target language and the first language. This study provides some evidence that the four grammatical errors can be attributed to interference from the first language, lack of practice, lack of knowledge about differences between two languages. These types of errors could systematically be found at the beginning of second language learning or transitional stages before they achieve proficiency in the target language. Always, errors provide feedback. For second language learning, error correction is the best way to enhance students' language ability. The findings in this study have suggested some implications. Teachers should increase the number of exercises according to word order. And it is better to encourage students to read more Chinese material. Writing and reading help students become more familiar with grammar rules and write more accurately. Picture describing and essay writing are two useful methods to improve their writing skills. Also, it is necessary to urge students to think in Chinese while they are writing in Chinese. On the other hand, teachers should update their teaching methods in order to facilitate students. Furthermore, the study makes a useful contribution to providing instructions for the language learners who want to learn Chinese better.

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