

A Proposal for a Systematic Review of the Common Errors of Senior High School Students' English Writing Caused by Negative Influences of Chinese as L1

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Abstract: Understanding common errors in English writing is a popular topic in China as English learning is highly regarded in China. Many articles have done effective studies, like empirical studies, to learn about this topic. This article is a proposal for a systematic review which aims to analyze articles published between 2014 and 2024 looking into common errors of senior high school students' English writing caused by negative influences of Chinese as L1. I plan to review studies under this topic which used IELTS writing tasks considering the authority of IELTS. This systematic review will collect and analyze the information about the common errors previous studies have found and analyze the influence Chinese as L1 has on these errors through the review. Thus, it can provide an overall picture of the research of this topic and contribute to further study in improving method of learning English writing.

Keywords: errors, L1, SLA, writing, review

1. Introduction

The ability of English writing is an essential skill all around the world. In China, English writing is so meaningful and highly regarded. Most of the senior high school students in China are required to learn English writing at their critical years. However, negative influence of first language increases the difficulties of English writing in different aspects for these EFL students [1-5]. As a result, learning more about this problem might help us improve our English ability.

Negative influence of first language (which is also known as L1) on foreign languages (which is also known as FL) have always existed and been studied all these years. As early as 1953, Ulrich Weinreich put in the book *Language in Contact*, any language can influence other languages which coexist in one person's language system [6]. The influence was called interruption or effect. After this kind of influence was put forward, theories and discussions about contrastive analysis and transfer have slowly occurred. Selinker introduced the concept of language transfer into SLA in 1972 [7]. People paid much attention to L1 effect on L2 [8-12].

As a specific part of this framework, negative influences of Chinese as first language on learning English writing have been studied. It is normal that these English learners keep making mistakes and encountering with difficulties during their process of learning and part of these errors and difficulties are caused by influences of Chinese. Mainly, these influences are concentrated on

sentence structure, word choose, grammar, and spelling as well [13, 14]. These are common mistakes to be seen in written works instead of oral English and so on.

1.1. Negative influence L1 have on foreign languages

According to Rod Ellis' *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, on the basis of Contrastive Analysis a successful reappraisal of the role of the L1 in SLA examined the nature of language transfer in order to state the conditions which interference took place and the type of L1 knowledge that was used [15]. It includes a clear description of both positive and negative influence L1 have on FL. However, according to the topic of my research, only negative influence will be used here. To put it clearly, Rod Ellis clarified that the "L2" here can be defined as a language other than the learner's mother tongue [16].

As a reappraisal based on Contrastive Analysis, it contains three important developments of negative influence L1 have on foreign languages which contained in Contrastive Analysis hypothesis. Before the three points, we should know about the Contrastive Analysis mentioned above. As Robert Lado put in *Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach*, the less difference between L1 and target language, the easier the target language is learned [17]. However, this hypothesis was proved to be flawed, and there is this reappraisal. First, the difficulty, as predicted by Contrastive Analysis, caused by difference between L1 and the target language might be realized as avoidance instead of error [15]. It means that learners might avoid difficult parts of L2 to avoid making errors. As a result, the difficulty caused by negative influence of L1 might not be detected through errors. Second, the negative influence of L1 is actually more likely to appear when there is similarity between the first language and target language to a certain degree [15]. For example, the result of a study shows that false cognates are harder to learn than cognates and non-cognate words, as the similarities of the two different words from two languages make learners get confused and thus have more difficulties learning them [18]. Hence, as Rod Ellis put in this book, L1 interference occurs in certain aspects but not in others and I attempt to find these aspects [15]. Third, error is a multi-factor phenomenon which is the result of the interaction of L1's negative influence and other factors instead of the negative influence itself [15]. Many researchers have also done studies which prove that these errors can be caused by social distance and psychology distance and support this idea [19-21]. As a result, I need to pay attention to other factors which might lead to errors while exploring the errors caused by negative influence of L1.

1.2. Negative influence Chinese as L1 has on English writing

Under the general framework of negative influence L1 have on foreign languages, I need to look specifically into negative influence Chinese as L1 has on English writing in order to do this research.

Qiufang Wen found that negative influence Chinese has on English writing shows in multiple ways through experiments. Besides elements of writing like vocabulary and grammar, Wen also found aspects like Chinese writing ability influencing English writing ability and Chinese reading ability influencing English writing ability [22]. Later, a study about the relationship between Chinese writing proficiency and their English writing proficiency proved this idea [23]. Generally speaking, students with higher English proficiency rely less on L1 mindset than the students with lower English proficiency [9]. However, to be precise, Chinese mindset does not always influence English writing in a negative way. For example, using Chinese mindset while writing English sentences can lead to errors of the sentences, but using Chinese mindset does not really have negative influence on coming up with the structure and content of the English compositions. Many further studies have found supports from previous studies and data about specific elements in

English writing of Chinese students, like word selecting, grammar. They have proved the ideas and developed further studies upon them.

There are already plenty of studies about the common errors of senior high school students' English writing caused by negative influences of Chinese as L1 as the ones shown above. I attempt to review essays specially focused on writings in IELTS tests because it is widely taken in China and it is an English proficiency test widely recognized throughout the world with strong authority. This review aims to fill up the lack of systematic review on this topic of the latest ten years and provide an overall picture of our understanding of this topic over the latest ten years, which might benefit the following studies on relevant topics.

2. Research questions

- (1) What English writing errors in IELTS tests are specially made by those senior high school students who speak Chinese as L1 while native speakers won't make?
- (2) Which of these errors are caused by negative influences of Chinese as L1?

3. Method

This systematic review aims to explore studies from the last ten years that described negative influences of Chinese as L1 on English writing.

3.1. Literature search procedure

I completed the literature search using three online databases: Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science. The articles which I searched for are peer-reviewed articles written in English and contained combinations of the following key terms: (negative influence*, or negative language transfer*) and (Chinese as L1*, or Chinese*) and (IELTS writing errors*, IELTS writing task errors*, or English writing errors*) in the abstract. I limit the search to latest ten years (2014-2024) so that this research might have more time efficiency. To supplement database searching, I used reverse citation search of some articles I reviewed for introduction and theoretical framework. Through this search, I found 1901 articles.

3.2. Screening procedure

In the screening process, I plan to apply the inclusion and exclusion criteria (as shown in Table 1) to decide whether to include the articles in the study or not.

I am going to use Covidence, a literature review software, for screening. After uploading all articles into Covidence, I will first conduct an abstract review and then a full text review.

For screen criteria, I limit the search to last ten years (2014-2024) for time efficiency because languages are developing and changing as the time changes. In order to provide information for the further studies which aim to find ways to deal with errors and help people study English ultimately, I think it is better to provide information with time efficiency otherwise these errors caused by L1 negative influences might just change and the following studies might not effectively achieve their ultimate goals. The studies included are asked to use IELTS writing as an authoritative test because it is recognized all around the world and widely taken in China. Moreover, reviewing errors in one kind of test makes the result of the study more credible. The languages of the studies have to be limited to English and Chinese because this makes them more available to me and my target articles are mainly written in these two languages since my topic is only directly connect to these two languages. The empirical studies included in the review must make sure the errors they analyze are caused by the influence of Chinese instead of merely studying the common English writing errors

of those who speak Chinese as first language as it is required for my topic. This is because that some of these writing errors might also be committed by English monolinguals, which means that the errors are not related to the negative influence of Chinese. Other aspects in the criteria help to limit the included articles to the target group of people which this topic requires. For specific inclusion/exclusion criteria, please refer to the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Eligibility criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
- Published between 2014 and 2024 - Participants are senior high school students - Participants learnt Chinese as their L1 - Study is specifically and solely focused on English writing - Study used IELTS writing as an authoritative test - Study is written in English or Chinese - Empirical studies have to make sure the errors they analyze are specifically caused by the influence of Chinese	- Published before 2014 or after 2024 - Participants are not senior high school students - Participants speak other language than Chinese for L1 - Study focused on writing in other languages - Study did not use IELTS as an authoritative test - Study is written in other languages than Chinese or English - Empirical studies cannot make sure the errors they analyze are specifically caused by the influence of Chinese

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic review aims to study English writing errors caused by negative influence of Chinese as L1 which is under the general framework of the negative influence of L1 on L2 is a topic. I plan to search for articles in three online databases and screen for those eligible ones with the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

4.1. Limitations

In this study, using IELTS test as an authoritative test is a good choose, however, there are still some limitations. Although using this test can provide relatively reliable results, the genre of the tested English writing is limited. This is because the genre IELTS requires participants to write are limited to specific types such as data analysis and argumentative writing hence the data the studies collected might be limited as well. However, the limitation of writing genre can exist in almost any kind of tests because it is unpractical to test every type of writing during one test due to the time limit and so on. IELTS writing tasks are qualified to test the participants' integrated English writing proficiency. Moreover, the large numbers of studies about IELTS writing tasks makes the result of this study more scientific.

4.2. Meaning of this systematic review

By reviewing previous study about common English writing errors caused by Chinese as L1, not only can this systematic review get useful information for further study but also it can give an overall picture of previous studies in this area. As this systematic review is about finding errors, it can help further studies improve our strategy of learning English writing by figuring out solutions for these errors. It can summarize the result and experience of previous studies and help researchers to find their ways to achieve ultimate goals in further studies.

Learning English means knowing better about the world and being more powerful in making a difference in the world as learners can read more about the world and have a bigger chance to let the world see them, listen to them, or read their words. Meanwhile, writing is an essential part of English learning. We get to express our ideas through writing and improve integrated ability of using English. As a result, it is meaningful to look into an area which can help with learning English and keep on developing it.

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