

On Error Types and Error Origins:  
Pedagogical Implications from Essays of  
Intermediate/Advanced Chinese Learners at  
Harvard University

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# Chinese Language Program

## Non-heritage track:

1. Ba/Bb (Elementary Modern Chinese)
2. 120a/120b (Intermediate Modern Chinese)
3. 130a/130b (Advanced Modern Chinese)
4. 140a/140b (Advanced Reading in Modern Chinese)
5. 150a/150b (Formal Chinese Writing and Speaking)

## Heritage track:

1. Bx (Elementary Chinese for Advanced Beginners)
2. 120xb (Intermediate Modern Chinese for Advanced Beginners)
3. 130xa/130xb (Advanced Modern Chinese for Heritage Learners)

## Others:

1. 142a/142b (Advanced Conversational Chinese)
2. 163 (Business Chinese)



## Research Motivation

- . 2008 (Harvard Beijing Academy): 120a/120b
- . 2010-2011: Ba/Bb
- . 2011-2012: 130a, 130xb, Business Chinese
- . 2012-2013: 130xa/130xb, 142a, Business Chinese
- . 2013-2014: 140a/140b, Business Chinese



- . ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages), San Antonio, November 2014
- . Scanned essays from 130a and 140a/140b.
- . Error types
- . Error origins
- . Pedagogical implications



# Essays

. Numbers:

- 130a: 61

- 140a: 114

- 140b: 70



# Error types

- Liping Chang, National Taiwan Normal University
- 1st layer: difference in formal structures
  - A. M for Missing (omission)
  - B. R for Redundant (addition)
  - C. S for Substitution (selection)
  - D. W for Word order



# Error types

. 2nd layer: description of errors

A. Word: 1) v, 2) aux, 3) vs, 4) n, 5) pron, 6) conj, 7) p, 8) num, 9) det, 10) cl, 11) sp, 12) asp, 13) adv, 14) DE, and 15) que

B. Functions of word: 1) sub, 2) obj, 3) np, 4) vp, 5) pp, 6) mod, 7) time, 8) loc, and 9) tran

C. Morphology: 1) num/det+cl, 2) vo, and 3) plural

D. Sentence pattern: 1) rel(ative), 2) ba/bei/rang, shi, you, and 3) pattern

E. Blending: 1) form, and 2) sentence



# Research Results

- . 130a: 956 errors/61 essays, about 15 errors per essay
- 1. M(issing): 271
- 2. R(edundant): 165
- 3. S(ubstitution): 421
- 4. W(ord order): 69



# Research Results

Top 10:

1. Sv: 124 (\*谁办家务、\*至少要等于大学毕业以后、\*他的咖啡焚烧了他、\*如果一个人成为很胖、\*如果他真关照他的健康、\*还有其他的食物这个男人可以选到、\*我们一起走路到一条繁忙的道路、\*参加了一样的教堂、\*离我下次看你的时候越来越近)
2. Sn: 66(\*理想结婚、\*他是一位谋杀、\*这是特别贵的目的、\*很有人才的人、\*他是中国社会的表现)
3. Ssentence: 53(\*可能应该越来越算是他自己的问题、\*难道, 麦当劳怎么负责所有客人的身材、\*我要找最后一个人、\*我们队不会胜对手)
4. Rasp: 47(\*可是我发现了这样的女人很性感、\*那些青少年砸了东西闹事、\*我安慰了他, 问他为什么哭、\*弟弟来了波士顿探视她)
5. Sform: 39(\*很简单的来说、\*我不知道他是我的理想的女生、\*只有几个才会找到、\*对现在的情况来说、\*移民不是例外、\*我在一个小的声音说)
6. Rde: 38(\*我有很多爱好, 特别的是弹钢琴、\*事情发生的以后)
7. Mform: 34(\*想去哪里就去、\*所有这些因素都是由环境塑造、\*连加州的政府让他们在上课的时候用西班牙语)
8. Sadv: 29(\*他再推荐了我们去西班牙、\*我先觉得找北京的朋友很难、\*很快就开始聊中国的事情, 我就发现他以前住在北京)
9. Madv: 29(\*这些社区让新移民舒服、\*这一句话让我丢脸、\*美国移民的人口多)
10. Masp: 24(\*我发现她默默地哭、\*在美国的移民已经造成很多麻烦)



# Critiques

## . Definition of Pattern

A. fixed form: 对.....来说 (missing some part of fixed form)

B. pattern: (是).....的、(连).....也、(除了).....(以外)、一边.....一边.....

- “fixed form” should be incorporated into “pattern”
- “fixed form” may include “style”: \*/?我笑得很多



# Critiques

- Confusion of layers: which one should be prioritized?
  - A.\*他应该停吃汉堡(他应该别再吃汉堡了): Sv or Sform
  - B.\*少吃很有油的菜(少吃很油的菜, 少吃油很多的菜): Svs, Myou, Sform
- Minimal correction principle



# Critiques

. Perspective issue: before or after correction

A.\*我有一点儿都不知道(我一点儿都不知道):  
M(issing) or R(edundant)

B.\*赢了这一法律的战斗(赢了这一场法律的战斗):  
R(edundant) or M(issing)

• Before correction



## Error origins

- . Negative transfer
- . Target language (one in domain language to many counterparts in target language)
- . Wrong input (misguiding instruction)

A. \*虽然快餐是更方便, 买健康的食物不是一件很难的事情。

B. \*这不是对。

C. \*我建议了我们去给警察打电话。

D. at/in Agora, at/\*in Harvard University



# Pedagogical Implications

Errors: Washback to instructions, instructors, or even traditional theories. (e.g. adjective in Chinese?)

Error types of high frequency should be paid more attention to. (e.g. Sv, Sn, Ssentence, Rasp, Sform)

from "passive" to "preventive" (e.g. grammatical categories, transitivity, collocation)



# Concluding Remarks

- **T**rack (the development of interlanguage)
- **U**nify (international platform)
- **F**orward (the applications: teaching materials, test and assessment)
- **S**peak (oral output)



Thank you!

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