

An Analysis of Native Language Transfer in English Writing for Non-English Major Students

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Abstract

Writing is considered to be an effective way to convey thoughts and feelings by written languages, which play a vital role in measuring learners’ comprehensive competence. As well, English writing is regarded as an indispensable item in English examinations, but actually college students’ writing performance is far from satisfaction. And it is suggested that native language transfer is one of the principal factors leading to the undesirable result.

This essay adopts transfer theory, contrastive analysis and error analysis theory to serve the research. The purpose of the research is to explore the influence of native language transfer in English writing for non-English major students. It employed both qualitative and quantitative research including writing test, questionnaire and interview. The subjects in this research are 120 sophomores in Henan Polytechnic University majoring in Computer Science & Technology and Civil Engineering. The research is conducted from three aspects—lexis, syntax and discourse and there are great findings: compared with male students, female students depend less on native language in the writing process; due to native language transfer the number of errors students make in lexis ranks the first followed by errors in syntax and the then the errors at discourse level; the involvement of native language transfer varies with different stages of writing.

Key words: Native language transfer; College English writing; Non-English major students

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are a number of English learners in university, who are with limited vocabulary, lacking of systematic grammar and incapable of putting his or her English knowledge into use. As a result of that, they will be easily influenced by mother tongue transfer. Many studies of native language influence on second language acquisition show that second language learners tend to rely on structures of their native language to produce target language utterances and this can be both a help and a hindrance. Therefore, native language transfer can affect the process of English writing both positively and negatively. When asked to write a composition, many non-English major students would like to use the Chinese thinking pattern considering it easier than to use the English thinking pattern to organize the composition and then translate it into English. They are assailed by negative transfer and make little progress in English learning. At the same time, teachers often come across the errors made by students due to the influence of Chinese when they read the students’ English compositions. Consequently, more and more attention has been paid to this topic with the aim to find efficient methods for both learners and teachers. Language transfer, a complex procedure including individual differences, cognitive psychology, is a hot issue in second language acquisition. Linguists hold different opinions concerning the significance of mother tongue influence on second language acquisition.

Thus, starting from the 1950s, the history of language transfer moves in zigzags and by roundabout ways. Its development experienced four periods as follows: At the end of 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s the contrastive analysis theory was flourishing; in 1960s and 1970s the error analysis theory and interlanguage theory developed; in 1979s language transfer theory declines; in the 1980s it made a successful comeback and grew vigorously again. Over the past few years, researchers both at home at abroad have made significant progress in this field. It is strongly showed that transfer-related studies in China coincide with international concerns in the domain of second language acquisition. These studies are of great significance to language learning, especially in second language acquisition.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

When it comes to foreign language learning, we always would like to involve the theory of second language acquisition. Muriel Sacille-Troike points out that foreign language learning follows the early linguistic approach to second language acquisition (Cook, 1985). As a matter of fact, language transfer is an important factor in second language learning with great popularity. Corder (1981) mentioned two orders of application in applied linguistics: one is describing language and the others are comparing language, who explained comparison as contrastive analysis, error analysis and transfer analysis further.

1.1 Studies on Transfer

Transfer, a concept rooted from psychology, a phenomenon usually appearing in the language learning process, is known as cross-linguistic phenomena now. As for the significance of native language transfer in second language learning, some linguists are doubtful about its existence, while there are also many linguists who approve of its significance and have made deep researches in it (Odlin, 1989, p.3).

Actually, the concept of “language transfer” brought out first was by Lado in his work *Linguistics Across Cultures*, where he mentioned that in the circumstance of second language acquisition, individuals depend on their native language, what’s more, they intend to transfer the forms, meanings and the distributions of them of their first language and culture to the second language acquisition (1957, p.2). Following Lado, more and more linguists focused their attention on language transfer. Ellis (2009) once defined transfer as “a hypothesis that the learning of task A affects the learning of task B”, who even advocated that language transfer was maybe the most paramount terminology in both educational theory and practice. James (2001) considered that in the above definition of transfer of Ellis offered using first language and second language to replace task A and task B separately, it will be the definition of language transfer.

Gass and Selinker (1983) offer another definition of language transfer, in which it is a psychological process where the mother tongue is applied to the second language acquisition. According to Odlin (1989, p.27), transfer’s occurrence is for the existence of the differences and similarities in the target language and the other language that individuals (maybe imperfectly) acquired before. This concept now has been widely accepted by linguists. However, Odlin once admitted it is a vague concept, but to provide a more precise and correct definition for transfer is really difficult. And in this paper, the concept of transfer refers to the language influence arising from the Chinese language.

Positive transfer occurs when the prior first language makes the second language learning better and easier. Wolfgang Burtzkamm, an English linguistic professor of German, uses a metaphor to explain the significance of first language in foreign language learning process. Learners should not take off and cast the first language off the door as treating a coat after they walk into the door of foreign language learning. In consequence, the native language plays an important role in second language acquisition.

Negative transfer refers to the interfering effect of the first language in second language acquisition because of the differences existing between the two languages. It occurs when there are differences in forms or rules between native language and the second language, and learners are likely to carry the forms or rules in their first language over those in the target language blindly, especially when they anticipate some difficulties in target language expression. Consequently, the negative transfer often results in errors as well as incorrect forms and structures, which are just the results coming from the interference of the first language. As for the reason for which negative transfer occurred, Ellis (1999, p.37) gives the reason why second language learners would like to resort to the mother tongue is that they are lack of necessary target language resources to express themselves fluently. Negative transfer can be found at all levels of language patterns, such as the culture, lexis level, syntactical level as well as the discourse level.

1.2 Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

During the 1960s, behaviorist theory of language learning was challenged. In order to analyze the differences between the native language and the target language, contrastive theory was introduced into the research of second language acquisition. Contrastive Analysis is means to carry out linguistic study formulated by Lado in 1950s. The task of contrastive analysis is to compare the two or more languages to reveal the differences and similarities both in structure and effect between them.

The origin of contrastive analysis is regarded as a pedagogically oriented study. It is believed that the learner’s errors and difficulties could be predicted through

the contrast of native and target language. That is, teachers compared the native language with the foreign language of the students so as to find the real problems in the language learning process and to improve teaching efficiently. There is another definition of contrastive analysis, which is an inductive investigative approach based on the distinctive elements of a language. It involves the comparison of two or more languages or subsystems of languages in order to determine both the differences and similarities between them.

1.3 Error Analysis

Different researchers hold different views of error definition from different levels of language. According to Lennon (1991, p.182), error is a linguistic form or combination of forms which, in the same context and under similar conditions of production would, in all likelihood, not be produced by the speakers' native speaker counterparts. Compared with Friedenberg, Lennon emphasizes the errors in discourse level. Hu (2001, p.329) refers errors to the learners' misuse or misunderstanding of the target language, and they might be grammatical or pragmatic. From the definition offered by Hu, we get to know errors are from grammatical and pragmatic aspects. However, in spite of the different definitions they give errors, there is something in common that they all agree that errors deviate from a "selected norm" of language performance (Dulay & Burt, 1982, p.139).

Just due to the limitation of contrastive analysis, Error analysis was brought out in the 1970s. For instance, it was found that errors do not always occur in the different structures between native language and target language in practice. And many errors occur in the same or similar structures of the two languages. That is, what contrastive analysis hypothesis concerns about is only the learners' native language and the target language, but error analysis can provide a methodology for the study of learners' language. Frankly speaking, at the very beginning contrastive analysis hypothesis was conceived to be able to predict errors in language learning and thus be used as preventive assessment like medicine. But in fact its affect of prediction is proved to be limited. However, as we all know, error analysis can be used to examine the errors in learners' language, which is the same as pathological anatomy. Consequently, more and more attention was paid to learners' errors in linguistic practice.

1.4 Review of Previous Relevant Studies Both Abroad and at Home

More and more attention has been paid on second language writing in applied linguistics. The first serious attempt of the study in this field is the contrastive rhetoric. Take Kaplan's opinion for example. He argues the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the first language might interfere with writing in the second language (Connor, 1996). Therefore, we know that the early

search of contrastive rhetoric paid more attention to the interfering effects which hinder the text construction of the second language.

At the very beginning of 1970s, some researchers have begun to pay their attention from the written text to second language writing process. They found the second language writing process is similar to the first language writing process. Moreover, some certain features in writing like planning, revision (Cumming, 1989) and editing can transfer from the first language writing process to the second language writing process.

In a word, as a hot issue, the study of transfer in second language writing has been in its full wing both at home and abroad.

The research of mother tongue used in second language writing started with Lay's study with four native Chinese-speaking English second language writers. Results of this study showed that during the writing process, learners are likely to resort to their mother tongue Chinese to facilitate their English writing. Furthermore, the more native language switches, the better learners perform in their composition organization and ideas of expression (Lay, 1982). Following Lay's research, Friedlander studied the role mother tongue played in content generation during second language writing process. He found second language learners are likely to generate ideas when they are familiar with the topic. His result suggests that mother tongue makes the topic comprehension and content generation easier in the second language writing process.

It is known that in the course of second language writing, learners at different English level are different from the first language dependence. Jones and Tetroe (1987) found that proficient second language learners do not rely heavily on their native language to drive their second language writing, for they can make full use of the second language thinking pattern and knowledge to organize the text proficiently. However, most college students depend much more heavily on their native language during the writing process because they need the native language to continue the writing when it is difficult to find a corresponding expression in the second language. In such situation, there are two strategies college students usually resort to produce their writing.

Actually, many researchers at home have already carried out numbers of studies about the effect of transfer on second language writing. One of the famous researches is the study of language transfer on the process of English picture composition by think-aloud pattern carried out by Guo Chunjie and Liu (1997). In this research, it is found that learner's native language will affect the output of second language writing. Some aspects of the first language even serve as interlanguage in text planning process and in monitoring target language output. Wen and Guo (1998) made further research on native language transfer in second language learning, which is similar to

the research of Jones and Tetroe's. It is pointed out that learners with low score in composition depend heavily on native language than those with high score. Especially when they meet difficulties in writing, they are more likely to resort to their native language to make up for the inadequacy of the target language. At the beginning of the writing, they would like to use the first language to generate or transform their ideas. And then the mother tongue might be applied to control the whole writing process. Dai and Wang (2002) paid more attention to the problems of definition, comparison, prediction and generalization in the research of transfer. They suggested that the greater the differences between native language and target language, the more interference there will be in second language writing. There are also some researchers studying college learners' writing by analyzing phonology, lexicon, syntax and discourse. Wang (2004) studied the CET-4 compositions, found that first language interference easily arises in syntactic level.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the relationship between native language transfer and English writing for non-English major college students.

2.1 Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to find the answers to the follow questions:

- a) Native language always has a significant influence on English writing, how much do non-English major students depend on it in the writing process?
- b) What are the typical errors caused by native language transfer in college students' English writing?
- c) Does the involvement of native language transfer vary with different stages of writing (pre-writing, while-writing and after-writing)?

2.2 Research Design

2.2.1 Subjects of Research

The subjects in this research are 120 sophomores in Henan Polytechnic University majoring in Computer Science & Technology and Civil Engineering. They all have learned English for about eight years. Thus, they have acquired some foundational English knowledge and writing strategies. However, according to the data collected from the researcher's questionnaire, their average score of English in College Entrance Examination is only 77.43. It is known that the full mark of English in College Entrance Examination is 150, and the scores from 120 to 150 are considered to be high level. The scores from 120 to 90 are regarded to be at middle level and the scores less than 90 are thought to be at low level. Most students in the present

research admitted that their scores of English in College Entrance Examination are lower than 90. In addition, according to a survey that only 9.52% of them passed the CET-4 in December 2016. Therefore, they belong to low-proficient English learners.

2.2.2 Instruments of Research

With the aim to improve the writing ability of non-English major students, the author carried out the research in both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method adopted in this research is the interview, the goal of which is to find the strategies the subjects employed, the main difficulties they faced as well as the suggestions they desired during the English writing process. While the quantitative research methods include the writing test and questionnaires, the purpose of which is to identify, analyze and describe the problems caused by native language transfer in their English writings.

2.2.2.1 Writing Test

The writing test is used to test the language competence of the subjects. Besides, their language performance will also be reflected in their writings. In order to find the main problems that result from native language transfer, the author adopts the writing test in this research. By using writing test, the errors in the writing outputs will be identified, analyzed and described.

As for the choice of the writing test, the author collected the writing tests in CET-4 of the recent 10 years, finding that the main genre tested was argumentation. Therefore, the genre of the writing test for this research is decided to be argumentation. Since most of the subjects in this research have already experienced the CET-4, they are considered being familiar with the writing test in CET-4. Therefore, the author worries they might take the offering samples for reference, which will influence the test efficiency directly. Consequently, taking all the above factors into consideration, the author chooses a writing test in the genre of argumentative from a simulated test. The title of the writing is *Travel alone or Travel with a Companion*. They were asked to write from the following three aspects. First, the introduction of the two ways; s

second, the comparison between the two ways; last, to choose one you like with explanation.

2.2.2.2 Questionnaire

In order to achieve a better understanding of the students using writing strategies and obtain insights concerning the possible factors that affect their writing, the researcher of this thesis employed a questionnaire, which is borrowed from Wen Qiufang (2003), and on the basis of that, the researcher made some appropriate modifications. The questionnaire is conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the student's belief about language learning, and obtain a general panorama of the correlation between English writing and mother tongue, which is expected to find out whether those students depend much on native language as well as whether the frequency of first language transfer

vary with different stages of writing (pre-writing, while-writing and after-writing).

The questionnaire will use a Likert-type scale with five choices as follows: a) strongly agree; b) agree; c) undecided; d) disagree; e) strongly disagree.

Subjects in this research will be provided with Chinese version of the questionnaire with the purpose of avoiding misunderstanding of the questions and to ensure the quality of the data. The questionnaire is composed of two parts: Part A and Part B. Part A are some questions about personal information such as their scores in the National College Entrance Examination and their grades in CET-4 in December 2016 and so on. Part B includes fifteen question items about their attitudes about English writing.

2.2.2.3 Interview

The interview in this research is used as a supplement to confirm language transfer in the subjects' writing. During the interviews, questions concerning some errors and unnatural expressions will be asked in order to diagnose the problems of the subjects' interlanguage performance.

Some questions, which are similar to those in the questionnaire, are to confirm the answers to whether non-English major college students depend much on the native language. But the different ones in the interview serve as a supplement to obtain more details about the correlation between mother tongue and English writing in case the students have some other viewpoints that are not mentioned in the questionnaire. In order to make sure the efficiency of the interview, the sample in this interview is sampled randomly among the 120 students, and the selected student was asked to answer the questions on his/her own without others' advice.

Through the questionnaire and interview about the learners' writing strategies, the author intends to discover the effect of native language transfer on English writing for non-English major students. Moreover, the causes of writing achievements and writing problems are also expected to be researched so as to find more useful pedagogical implications for both English writing learning and teaching.

2.2.3 Data Collection

The subjects for this research were first asked to finish the writing task, titled *Travel Alone Or Travel With a Companion*. According to the requirements of CET-4, the subjects were asked to finish the composition in no fewer than 120 words within 30 minutes. Following the requirements in CET-4, such as no reference or no talking, the researcher controlled the test process completely. Moreover, the whole test was carried out in a normal class, and the students were able to undertake the task with no pressure. Therefore, the sample collected can reflect the spontaneous language use by and large. Finally, 120 pieces of writing tests were handed in.

After the writing test, a questionnaire about native language transfer on English writing is followed immediately. The students were required to finish the questionnaire within 10 minutes under the supervision and the guidance of the researcher. And all of them handed in their questionnaires on time. The researcher handed out 120 questionnaires and retrieved 120 pieces.

In addition, the interview was conducted during break time and their responses were recorded. Twenty students were selected randomly from the 120 students to be interviewed.

2.2.4 Procedures of Data Analysis

At the very beginning, the compositions of the writing test were collected. And then the researcher marked the writings and detected errors in them. The following work is to classify the identified errors to explore the answer of the hypothesis. As for the questionnaire and interview followed, they will be used to confirm the findings from the writings such as problems in writing, reasons they resort to the mother tongue as well as the difficulties they faced. Among the 120 retrieved questionnaires, 110 of them are valid, and the other 10 questionnaires are invalid for the incompleteness of the filling content. After counting the errors in writings and checking answers in questionnaire and interviews, the researcher will demonstrate the form of them in tables so as to describe and analyze the data with the help of Microsoft Excel. Therefore, the analysis of the data and the results of the research will be presented in the next chapter.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH

3.1 Findings From the Subjects' Writing

3.1.1 Descriptive Statistics of Errors

According to Carl James (2001, pp.179-185), the interlanguage errors can be divided into intralingual and interlingual errors. The intralingual errors refer to the problems, which are along the line of grammatical rule application. It usually results from the overgeneralization or over-use of the rules in target language. As a result, many structural variations that actually do not exist in the target language are created. In comparison, the interlingual errors usually result from the negative transfer at various levels such as substance level, lexical level, syntax level and discourse level. According to the classification of James, the researcher of this thesis classified the errors in the writing tests collected from the subjects into four categories as follows: substance errors, lexical errors, syntax errors and discourse errors. In addition, the descriptive statistics of the four types of errors to their frequencies that appear in students' writing will be presented in the following Figure 1.

Descriptive analysis of errors in four main categories and the frequency

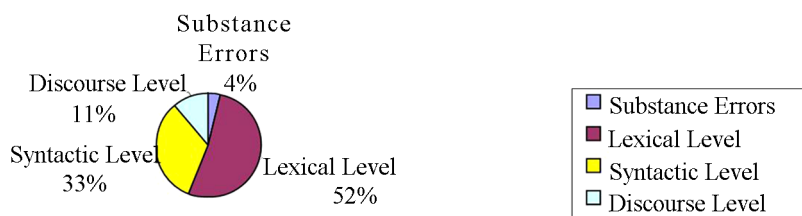


Figure 1
Descriptive Analysis of Errors in Four Main Categories and the Frequency Distribution

From Figure 1, we can see that among the four main categories, errors at the lexical level are just what non-English major students made most in their writings, which account for 52%. And errors at syntactic level rank the second, which take up 33%. Besides errors ranking the third are those at discourse level accounting for 11%, while substance errors are the least errors made by the subjects, which are only 4%. From the above statistics, it can be concluded that errors at lexical level are the biggest difficulty that college students faced in their writing. The error at syntactic level is also a problem for students in their English writing; it follows closely after lexical errors. For instance, learners performed unfavorably in participle forms of the verb, word order and so on. Moreover, Chinese thinking patterns to some extent influence the discourse development. All these

directly result in various errors in their compositions. According to theories of second language acquisition, abundant input devotes to ideal output. Thereby, there is an urgent need for students to acquire more knowledge so as to enrich the input. The final one is the substance errors, which usually relate to the errors that should be completely avoided such as errors in punctuation and capitalization. Although it only takes up 4%, more attention should be attracted to this so as to minimize it to the largest extent.

With the purpose of finding errors in learners' compositions specifically, the researcher classified the errors further, which can also offer an explicit direction for both English teaching and learning. All errors in these compositions retrieved from the subjects were classified into 15 specific types, which are as follows:

Descriptive analysis of error classification and the frequency distribution

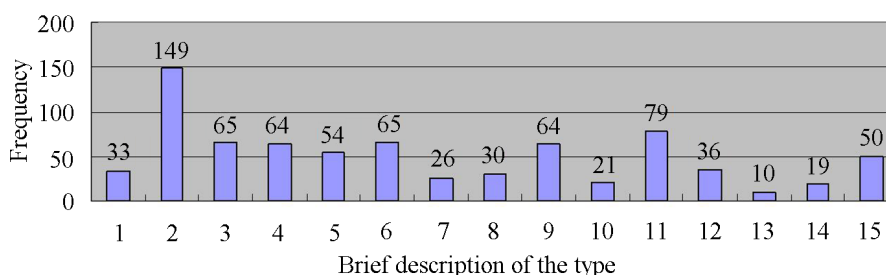


Figure 2
Descriptive Analysis of Error Classification and the Frequency Distribution

Note. 1 represents Chinglish sentences; 2 represents errors in lexical use and collocations; 3 represents errors in tense, aspect and mood of verbs; 4 represents omission and misuse of prepositions; 5 represents errors in gerund, infinitive and participle form of verbs; 6 represents misuse of word-class; 7 represents error in subject-predicate agreements; 8 represents misuse of articles; 9 represents omission and misuse of conjunctions; 10 represents errors in word order; 11 represents errors in spelling; 12 represents errors in punctuation and capitalization; 13 represents misuse of adjectives and adverbs in comparatives; 14 represents run-on sentences; 15 represents errors in the plural form of nouns.

From Figure 2, it is known that errors in lexical use and collocation are in the most prominent preposition, whose total number reaches as high as 149. Compared with errors of other types, it is far outweigh in the number in this test. It is almost twice as many as the number of errors at the second place (79). As for lexical use and collocation, teachers need to pay more attention to the

distinction of similar words, and there is, undoubtedly, a long way for learners to go in lexical use and collocation. The number of errors in spelling, accounting up to 79, is the second compared with that of errors in lexical use and collocations. Similar to errors in spelling, the total number of errors in punctuation and capitalization is also 36. Both of these two categories belong to substantive errors, the

rate of which need to be paid enough attention so as to minimize them by teacher's advice and learners' careful check.

Comparing with the above two types of errors, there are several other errors that need to be taken into consideration. Although their frequency is comparatively lower, all of their statistic numbers have been over 50, which can be proved as follows: errors in tense, aspect and mood of verbs (65), omission and misuse of prepositions (64), errors in gerund, infinitive and participle form of verbs (54), misuse of word-class (65), omission and misuse of conjunctions (64) and errors in the plural form of nouns (50). Among all these types of errors, three of them belong to lexical errors, and two are syntactic errors, while the last one is errors at the discourse level. Hence, it can be proved by these data that lexical problem is the biggest problem in students' writing followed by syntactical errors and discourse errors.

Besides, the numbers of errors below 50 are as follows: Chinglish sentences (33), errors in subject-predicate agreements (26), misusing of articles (30), errors in word order (21), misusing of adjectives and adverbs in comparatives (10), and run-on sentences (19). Although the number of errors in this group is not as high as the above two groups, it can still reflect the specific errors students usually make their writing. In this group, there are only two categories which belong to lexis, while the other four are syntactic errors. It can be concluded that students make fewer errors in writing than in other lexical aspects.

When it comes to the primary problems caused by mother tongue transfer, the researcher presented a more detailed descriptive analysis of error classification here, arranging the errors according to their frequency first and percentage second in descending order. Table 1 is the descriptive analysis of error classification as well as the frequency and the percentage in descending order.

Table 1
Descriptive Analysis of Error Classification and the Frequency as Well as the Percentage in Descending Order

Error classification	Frequency	Percentage
Errors in lexical use and collocations	149	19.48%
Errors in spelling	79	10.33%
Errors in tense, aspect and mood of verbs	65	8.50%
Misuse of world-class	65	8.50%
Omission and misuse of conjunctions	64	8.37%
Omission and misuse of prepositions	64	8.37%
Errors in gerund, infinitive and participle form of verbs	54	7.06%
Errors in the plural form of nouns	50	6.53%
Errors in punctuation and capitalization	36	4.70%
Chinglish sentences	33	4.31%
Misuse of articles	30	3.92%
Errors in subject-predicate agreements	26	3.40%
Errors in word order	21	2.74%
Run-on sentences	19	2.48%
Misuse of adjectives and adverbs in comparatives	10	1.31%
Total frequency and percentage of errors	765	100%

From the above table, it is found that errors in lexical use and collocation rank first which account for 19.48% and its number take up almost one fifth of the total number of all errors. Thus, it can be seen that lexical use and collocation are a big challenge for low-proficient learners. Teachers in college need to spend more time on the explanation of words as well as its collocation just as teachers in middle school do. At the same time, it is very necessary for students to work harder on lexical practice and reciting. Errors at the second place are spelling errors accounting for 10.33%, which is really beyond the researcher's expectation. As we know, spelling error is

just a kind of substance error and it could be avoided in writing by all means provided more attention was paid. As for the reason of this, to some extent, it is learners who should be responsible for these errors. In consequence, learners need to work harder on this aspect. Actually, besides the efforts paid by learners themselves, teachers can also improve their teaching methods such as bringing in dictation, which will be workable as an external stimulus for learners.

The percentage of errors in tense, aspect and mood of verbs as well as the number of omission and misuse of prepositions are both 8.5%. This proved that tense, aspect

and mood of verbs are one of the most difficult parts for English learners. Next, the percentage of omission and misuse of conjunctions as well as omission and misuse of prepositions are both 8.37%. Besides the syntactic errors, there is one thing worthy to be mentioned here, which is omission and misuse of conjunction taking up to 8.37% and it demonstrated that non-English major students' writing was affected by the Chinese thinking pattern. That is, it is hypotaxis that drives their writing process instead of parataxis.

The percentage of errors in gerund, infinitive and participle form of verbs is 7.06%. In fact, it is a common phenomenon for learners to present two verbs in one sentence. Thus, they do need to acquire more skills to change the non-predicate verb into gerund, infinitive or participle form. The percentage of errors in the plural form

of nouns takes up 6.54%, which are mainly resulted from language transfer, for the absence of noun plural form in Chinese. In addition, Chinglish sentences are also caused by mother tongue transfer. The subjects are inclined to organize their ideas in Chinese and then produce literal translation, which would often lead to the Chinglish sentence.

Although the percentage of the rest errors (misuse of articles 4.31%, errors in subject-predicate agreements 3.4%, errors in word order 2.75%, run-on sentences 2.48%, misuse of adjectives and adverbs in comparatives 1.31%) is all lower than 4, their significance should also be valued. Actually, these errors are mainly about lexical and syntactic problems, most of which concern about basic knowledge in English learning, though their percentage is not as that high as others.

Table 2
Errors Caused by Language Transfer in Male and Female Students

Variable	Number of students	Errors caused by language transfer	Average
Male	57	330	7.29
Female	63	435	6.9

The above table provides a clear picture of errors caused by language transfer in both male and female students. According to the table, it can be inferred that compared with male students, the female students performed better in English writing. Nevertheless, there are not so many differences between errors made by male and female students. In consequence, it seems that it is rather common for low-proficient non-English major college students to make errors caused by language transfer. As for the reason for such a shade of difference between male and female students, various kinds of factors devoting such a result will be further explored in the future research.

3.1.2 Descriptive Analysis of the Errors

After a thorough description of errors arising in the subjects' writing with the influence of mother tongue transfer, some typical errors in the test will be given further explanation from lexical, syntactic and discourse level as follows.

3.1.2.1 Errors at Lexical Level

It is admitted that, lexis plays a crucial role in language learning. Some learners even regard it as the most important part for English learning, which provides the very reason that why more and more methods for vocabulary memorization are springing up recently. As a result, much attention has been paid to lexis. According to Engber's classification of lexical errors, lexical errors consist of lexical choice and lexical form (Engber, 1995, p.146). Lexical choice is to select either a proper word individually or combined lexical items in a certain context. And lexical form refers to errors in the form of

derivation as well as spelling errors.

(a) Errors in word choice

Since English and Chinese are totally different languages, the use of the words is also different. Sometimes, although there are some words with the same meaning, the contexts they are applied to be dissimilar because of the differences in their denotation and connotation to some extent. Most of the time, in order to express the ideas fluently and completely, low-proficient learners would like to use words with the same meaning as their mother tongue to produce their writing mechanically. However, when they fail to find the corresponding word in English occasionally, they will choose a similar word they know instead to maintain the undertaking writing according to their Chinese thinking pattern. Tan (1999, p.52) once in his Spotting English errors pointed out that learners are usually confused with numerous mixing up words and expressions. What's worse, they often find it difficult to distinguish the words from another. Therefore, various errors in word choice come out owing to native language transfer in word meaning. Some examples of the students' writing about such errors will be presented here.

- a) They have their self thought. (own)
- b) The happiness should be shared with your lovers. (boyfriend or girlfriend)
- c) Traveling alone can take us true joy. (bring)
- d) Some person likes to travel alone, and some likes to travel with another people. (other)
- e) You don't dare when you are alone. (are not scared)
- f) They will become more dependent and brave. (independent)

- g) Whatever, to choose what you love and love what you choose. (However)
- h) When we are going to travel, we can date our best friends, classmates as well as our families. (travel with)

The above errors are the result of inappropriate word choice. As McNeil (1990, p.147) claimed, learners are likely to be obsessed by similar words, and they can not distinguish the words and apply them to different contexts appropriately. Consequently, to some extent, native language transfer can interfere with the choice of similar words in English writing process.

In Example 3, the subject just translated the word “带来” into “take”, ignoring the distinction of the two words. According to the meaning of the context, it can be inferred that the word “take” here should be replaced by “bring”. The word “bring” refers to that someone carries something from other places to the place around the speaker. On the contrary, “take” means someone delivers something from the place around the speaker to other places far from him or her. That is, “bring” is from there to here, while “take” is from here to there. In Example 6, judging from the second adjective “brave” we can see that the subject would like to express something positive. Therefore, we know that it should be “independent” that a person is not dependent on other people or things for help, money or support instead of depending on others. The words “dependent” and “independent” look alike at first sight, but in fact they are antonyms. In sentence 7, it is obvious that the word “whatever” should not be present in such a sentence, because “whatsoever” can only be used in the negative sentence and interrogative sentence. Therefore, it should be replaced by “however” contextually.

The reason for learners to make errors in similar word choice is that they overlook the distinct connotation of the words. Connotation refers to an idea that is implied or suggested. When it comes to connotation, we have to mention another relevant item – denotation. Denotation is the most direct or specific meaning of a word or expression. Learners may be clear about of the denotation of the word they used in their writing, but they may not understand its connotation. It can be concluded that learners are likely to focus on words’ denotation and this will often result in errors in their English writing. Therefore, teachers need to give more explanations both about denotation and connotation in the word learning process.

(b) Errors in the plural form of nouns

It is known that nouns in English include two categories: One is proper nouns, and the other is common nouns. In addition, the common nouns are further divided into countable nouns and uncountable nouns. Countable nouns refer to things that can be modified by a numeral and occur in both singular and plural form. As a matter of fact, countable nouns can be counted. However, uncountable noun is a type of common noun which refers

to some group of countable nouns, substances, feelings and types of activity that can not be modified by a number. That is to say uncountable nouns are always in the form of singular. When the countable noun is made into its corresponding plural form, the plural morpheme “s” or its allomorph is added to its end. On the contrary, there is no plural form for nouns in Chinese. The subjects will put the adjectives like “many”, “much” and so on before the noun to express the plural meaning. In addition, when it is used to refer to person, the word “们” is used to follow the person, which is totally different from the plural usage in English. As a result, with the influence of native language transfer learners tend to make errors in noun plural form. There are some instances cited from the subjects’ writings.

- a) Travel can bring us more experience. (experiences)
- b) Traveling alone and traveling with a companion have their own advantage. (advantages)
- c) The companion can give us some advices. (advice)
- d) Traveling with a companion has lots of good aspect. (aspects)
- e) I will have more time to go to other place. (places)
- f) When we talk about travel, different people have different idea. (ideas)
- g) Traveling with companion, you will not be alone. (companions)

In Example 1, the subject made an error in word “experience” because he or she forgot that the word “experience” can both be a countable noun and an uncountable noun. When it refers to knowledge or skill which comes from doing or telling something for a long time rather than from the book, it is uncountable. But it will be countable provided it is something that happens to one and has an effect on one’s mind and feelings. Since there is no noun plural change in Chinese, errors would be made under the influence of native language transfer. In Example 3, it is obvious that the subject wanted to express that the companion can offer them some suggestions. But he or she was confused with the word “advice” and “advices”. Advice is an opinion given by one person to another on how one should behave or act, while advices usually refer to information that comes from the far distance. Therefore, the word used here should be “advice”, which is uncountable when it is the synonym to suggestion, though it is modified by plural determiners. In Example 7, the word “companion” can not be used here in this form in that it can either be used as “companions” or “a companion”. In addition, native language transfer will always interfere the noun plural form in person in the process of their English writing. Some learners usually can not distinguish uncountable nouns from countable nouns. What’s worse, learners often forget to change nouns into plural forms in their writing, though they know how to change the word in fact. Therefore, they need more

practice to review what they have learned while writing compositions.

(c) Errors in derivation

Derivation is a process of forming new words by the addition of a word element, such as a prefix, suffix or combing form, to an already existing word. Prefixion and suffixation are the two main processes of derivation. But when it comes to errors in derivation, it is often referred to problems in word-class. Actually, most words can be changed into its corresponding noun, adjective or adverb by adding a suffix, such as “help”, “helpful”, “helpfully” and “helpfulness”. And it can also be changed into its antonym by adding a prefix or a suffix. For instance, “helpless” is the antonym of “help” by adding a suffix “less”. The flexible derivation of words makes it easy for English learning. But it may interfere the language learning for Chinese learners for the absence of such a counterpart. A large number of learners, especially the low-proficient English learners, focus their attention only on semantic content of words instead of on word-class. As a result, errors in derivation turn to be a common phenomenon in subjects’ writing. Take some examples from the subjects’ writing for example.

- a) That will bring us happy. (happiness)
- b) Traveling alone is a good advise. (a good suggestion/ a piece of good advice)
- c) Traveling with a companion is security. (safe)
- d) Traveling alone can freedom arrange our time. (make us arrange our time freely)
- e) So we should choice the way that suits us. (choose)
- f) Traveling with a companion will improve your confident to fight against the danger. (confidence)
- g) When I am faced with the dangerous,... (danger)
- h) It must be a freedom and happy travel. (free)

From the above sentences, it is demonstrated that learners are often confused with the word-class. Take Example 1 for example. Here the student intends to express “bring sb sth”, so it is obvious that the word “happy” should be replayed by “happiness”. It is the same as Example 6 and Example 7, where the adjective underlined should be replaced by a noun to comply with the rules of English. In Example 2 the verb is employed as a noun. Similarly, this student focuses on semantic meaning ignoring the word-class. In this sentence, there is another problem, the learner’s confusion of the two similar words “advice” and “suggestion”. Taking the 4th sentence for example, in which the learner expressed “自由安排时间” as “freedom arranges our time”. Here the word “freedom” is used to modify the verb arrange, so it should be changed into the adverb “freely”. In example 8, concerning the word “freedom”, its Chinese meaning “自由的” is maintained to drive the writing but this expression fails to keep to the English rules. Thus, it is obvious that the word “free” is needed here rather than the

word “freedom” in the above sentence. From the above analysis, we can get to the idea that Chinese thinking pattern can devote to errors in word-class directly when learners resort to literal translation strategy in writing process. In consequence, it is the absence of derivation in Chinese language system that devotes to the above errors in word-class.

3.1.2.2 Errors at Syntactic Level

Transfer at syntactic level is mainly referred to syntactical rules in learners’ native language which can affect second language acquisition. The generation of syntactical errors usually lies in the fact that learners would like to resort to their native language to drive the writing when they face or predict difficulties in their writings, hence syntactic errors are produced. Although transfer at syntactic level has long been controversial, it is affirmative that a large amount of syntactical errors has been found in word order, subject-verb agreement, omission, and tense, voice and aspect of verbs.

(a) Errors in tense, voice and aspect of verbs

The forms of verbs Chinese and English employed in their expression are completely different, though both of them have tense and voice form in syntax. Compared with verbs with various changes in English, words in Chinese don’t have so many transformations. As a result, under the influence of Chinese thinking pattern and cultural background the differences between the two languages result in errors and interfere language learning. There are some examples about errors in tense, voice separately as follows:

As we all know, there are three basic tenses—present, past and future in English, each of which has a perfect form, a progressive form and a perfect progressive form. Moreover, coupled with tense transformation verb changes are also necessary. But in Chinese it is much simpler than that. For instance, the adverb such as “着”, “了” is used to express past meaning without the change of verb, which is completely different from the rule of English system in tense.

- a) The harder you work the more salary you (will) get.
- b) We stay there for almost a week. (have stayed)
- c) Traveling alone is so dangerous for me that I couldn’t do it myself. (can’t)
- d) I never think we could get along so well. (thought)
- e) We can’t come to an agreement on the way of travel at the very beginning. (couldn’t)
- f) It is the funniest tour I experienced. (have experienced)

In Example 1, as an adverbial clause of condition was employed before the independent clause, the verb form in the main clause should be used in the future tense to express some happenings in the future. In Example 2 the adverbial clause “for some time” often goes with perfect

form tense. Therefore, the verb “stay” in this sentence should be changed into the perfect form. Example 3 talks about the student’s feeling of traveling alone objectively, thus the verb here is required to appear in present form. Sentence 4 and sentence 5 have the same problem in using present tense incorrectly, for both of the actions occurred in the past. In the last example, sentence 6, the superlative form of an adjective should usually come with the perfect tense.

According to the requirement of grammar, the voice of a verb depicts the relationship between the action and the participants which can either be the subject or the object in the sentence. The verb will be in the active voice, provided the subject is the doer of the action, while when the subject is regarded as the target of the action, it is required to be in the passive voice. Actually, there are active voice and passive voice in both Chinese and English, but the rules of which are totally different. In a transformation from an active-voice clause to an equivalent passive –voice construction in Chinese, the preposition such as “被”, “受” is employed rather than the change of the verb form. On the contrary, when it comes to passive voice in English, the verb transformation is very necessary to appear with the structure of “be+ past participle of predicate”.

- a) There built a new park this spring. (A new park was built there this spring.)
- b) The price of travelling with a companion has been risen. (has risen)
- c) The preparation of Word Horticultural Exposition in Xi’an has completed. (has been completed)
- d) The happiness isn’t belonged to me. (doesn’t belong)

In Example 1, the learner wants to express “今年春天这里建立了一座新公园”. As the lack of the specific subject of the action, the passive voice is more advisable than the active voice in this sentence. Such kind of error obviously comes from the fact that the frequency of active voice is much preferred than that of passive voice in Chinese thinking pattern. In Example 2, the word “rise” cannot be used in the passive voice on account of being an intransitive verb. Therefore, the verb “rise” should appear in its active voice. Besides sentence 2, the similar error is also found in sentence 4. In sentence 3, although the passive voice is applied, the structure of passive voice fail to be achieved for lacking the word “be”.

(b) Errors in subject-verb agreement

In English, agreement refers to the determination of grammatical inflection on the basis of word relations. Subject-verb agreement means the form of predicate verb needs to match its subject in person and number. That is, if the subject is the third person, a singular noun or a sentence, the predicate verb should be changed into its corresponding singular form by adding the suffix “s” or “es”. But there is no such transformation in Chinese. As Lian (1993) once concerned that the

predicate is free from the restriction of the subject in Chinese. Consequently, no matter whether the subject is singular or not, the person is the first person or third person, the predicate verb is still in the same form. From the compositions collected from the subjects, it is found that predicate-verb agreement error appears in writing frequently. It is easy for them to lose sight of the corresponding transformation of the verb. Here are some examples to show this point:

- a) One thousand yuan are not a small number for a student to do travel. (is)
- b) Every boy and girl enjoy the travel. (enjoys)
- c) I appreciate the person who are independent. (is)
- d) Someone like traveling alone but other people like traveling with a companion. (likes)
- e) Every person have his opinion. (has)
- f) Some people like to travel alone while some like to travel with a companion. And each have its advantage. (has)
- g) Once you are in danger, your companion can help you, which mean that you can help each other. (means)
- h) Different people have different opinions, which often give rise to discussion. (gives)

Sometimes some nouns like yuan take odd forms and can fool us into thinking yuan is plural. However, as money is uncountable, it is singular in fact and thus the link verb needs to be changed into its singular form “is”. In Example 2, “every boy and girl” is singular in form though it includes both the boy and the girl, hence the predicate verb should be changed into “enjoys”. Example 3 is a compound sentence including an attributive clause. And “who” which equals to “the person” is the subject in the attributive clause. Therefore, the link verb in the attributive sentence should be changed into “is” instead of “are”. Sentence 8 is also a compound sentence involved an attributive clause, or rather a non-restrictive attributive clause. The subject in the attributive clause is the whole anterior sentence, so the predicate here should appear in a singular form “gives”.

(c) Errors in word order

Chinese and English share a lot in word order such as the subject +verb +object pattern, which is, of course, helpful for syntactical learning. But the differences resulting in errors will be highlighted here. Generally speaking, there are three main manifestations of syntactical divergences in English and Chinese. First, the adverbial phrases especially the time adverbials are often closer to the beginning of the sentence in Chinese except for the emphasis on the time adverbial. However, it is completely different in English in that there is no strict word order for adverbial in English, which can appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the sentence. That is, the position of adverbial is flexible in English structure. Second, Chinese is left-branching while English is right-branching. Consequently, it is very

common that some modifiers such as adverbs, phrases and clauses are usually located before the subject in Chinese. In contrast, such modifiers often follow the subject in English. Third, there is no change for word order either in affirmative sentence or in interrogative sentence in Chinese. But in English, the word order will be influenced by the two forms of the sentence. Consequently, all these differences mentioned above can easily lead to errors. Here are some examples collected from the writing test.

- a) Last week in the park we had a picnic.
(We had a picnic in the park last week.)
- b) I don't like have many people's place.
(I don't like the place with many people.)
- c) They can each other help. (help each other)
- d) You also can make many new friends by traveling alone. (can also)
- f) You with your companion can together deal with problems.
(You can deal with problems together with your companion.)
- f) We can talk with each other many things.
(We can talk many things with each other.)
- g) One can enjoy the nature beautiful quietly.
(beautiful nature)
- h) I think that it depends on what do you want to do.

In sentence 1, it is obvious that this student is affected by the Chinese structure –time adverbial + place adverbial + manner adverbial +subject + predicate + (complement). But according to the English word order, the sentence should be expressed as “We had a picnic in the park last week.” In Example 2, following the English idiomatic expression the modifier adverbial has better be located after the object. In sentence 3, “each other” is a pronoun acting as the object of “help”, therefore, it should follow the predicate verb. Example 4 and example 5 deal with the position of adverb in a sentence. Compared with locating them before the verb in Chinese, they should be put backward the verb. Example 8 concerns about the word order of interrogative sentence as a subordinate clause in a compound sentence. The object in this sentence is served by an interrogative sentence, thus the word order in the clause needs to be transformed into noun order in affirmative sentence.

3.1.2.3 Errors at Discourse Level

Discourse is regarded as the construction of a series of sentences and paragraphs as a whole, which appears in logical structure with grammatical rules. It is well known that Chinese tend to be parataxis and English is prone to be hypotaxis. That is, Chinese is divergent in structure, while English is convergent. In fact, Chinese sentences and paragraphs are connected by the logic meaning, though it seems loose and divergent in structure. In contrast, English sentences and phrases follow strict

rules to form the structure, such as the completeness of sentences rather than so many omissions in Chinese sentences. In this research, errors at discourse level are mainly found in forms of the composition organization and cohesion. Here are some examples from the writings of the subjects to illustrate this point:

(a) Negative transfer in topic sentence

The topic sentence is a grammatical term to describe the sentence in a paragraph which summarizes the main idea of that paragraph. It usually, not always, appears at the very beginning of the paragraph, which offers an insightful view of the following statement. But learners in Chinese are usually impacted by their thinking patterns to provide his or her claim indirectly without a topic sentence. Here is an example:

(b) Travel alone or travel with a companion

In modern time, many people like to travel with their friends, in other words, it's travel with a companion. But some people always like to travel alone.

The above expression is the first paragraph in the composition selected from one of the low-proficient non-English major subjects. Let alone the errors at lexical and syntactical level, it is clear that a topic sentence is urgently wanted here. Actually, the lack of topic sentence in a paragraph is not an isolated phenomenon in all the collected compositions. According to the statistics from the writing test, 46 out of the 120 writings collected from the subjects are lack of a lucid topic sentence.

In the above example, this learner just listed some facts about traveling modes people favored. But there is no clear topic sentence in this paragraph. In the following paragraph, the student offered both advantages and disadvantages for the two modes of traveling in a circular way. And there still exists the same problem, that is, the lack of a topic sentence. It is clear that the learner is influenced by Chinese spiral thinking pattern to state his or her idea indirectly and periphrastically. Therefore, more attention needs to be paid on English straight-line thinking pattern such as going straight to the point and showing a topic sentence at the very beginning.

(c) Negative transfer in cohesion

Cohesion is the grammatical and lexical relationship within a text or sentence. It is regarded as the links that hold a text together and make a text meaningful. Among the five types of cohesive links operating in discourse, the misuse of conjunctions is the most typical error in the compositions of the subjects.

According to Wikipedia, a conjunction is a part of speech that connects two words, sentences, phrases or clauses together in grammar, while a discourse connective is a conjunction joining sentences. Conjunctions play a crucial role in English discourse construction. Chinese learners often produce loose sentences because they are likely to be influenced by rules of Chinese language system having no proper conjunction. Here are some examples:

a) On the other hand, choosing the second way, you will find it is interesting.

b) No matter traveling alone or traveling with a companion, we can have a relaxation and build up our bodies. Otherwise travel alone is too dangerous. (However)

It is admitted that, the phrase “on one hand..., on the other hand...” is a relative collocation. However, in example 1, there is only the latter part of the phrase with the absence of the anterior part, which needs to be completed. In the second sentence, the coordinating conjunction is improper because there is no hint for the following sentence to be the result of the last sentence. Consequently, “However” is more suitable for this context.

3.2 Findings From the Subjects’ Questionnaire

The purpose of questionnaire is to find out whether the frequency of native language transfer varies with different stages of writing. Thus, the answer was explored from three stages—the pre-writing stage, the while-writing stage and the after-writing stage.

3.2.1 The Pre-Writing Stage

The research of pre-writing stage involved two questions, Question 1 and Question 2, the result of which is presented as follows:

In Table 3, Question 1 researches the involvement of native language in the analysis of the writing requirement. From the table above, it can be asserted that low-proficient English majors depend heavily on their native language in analyzing the writing task—about 45.45% subjects resort to Chinese completely and almost 49.09% subjects mainly apply their native language to analyze the writing. And

question 2 deals with the involvement of native language in planning the content and designing the overall frame. In this process the subjects depending mainly on Chinese amount to 50% and those who depend on their native language to design their compositions completely take up 30%. It can be concluded that they usually generate their own opinions in their native language though they read the requirement in English.

Table 3
Answers of Question 1 and 2

	1	2
Strongly agree	45.45%	30.00%
Agree	49.09%	50.00%
Undecided	0.00%	10.91%
Disagree	5.45%	9.09%
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0.00%

The role that pre-writing stage played in the writing process is of paramount significance. It decides the direction and structure of the composition directly. The phenomenon that almost all learners would like to resort to their native language to analyze the requirement and plan the content indicates that low-proficient learners depend heavily on their native language in pre-writing stage.

3.2.2 The While-Writing Stage

Questions in this part mainly concern about the native language involvement reflected by strategies the subjects employed as well as their performance in the while-writing stage. The results from question 3 to question 10 are as follows:

Table 4
Answers From Question 3 to Question 6

Percentage Questions	3	4	5	6
Strongly agree	35.45%	16.36%	6.36%	11.82%
Agree	49.09%	40.91%	31.80%	48.18%
Undecided	9.09%	19.09%	20.00%	13.64%
Disagree	6.36%	18.18%	31.80%	22.73%
Strongly disagree	0.00%	5.45%	10.04%	3.64%

In Table 4, Question 3 tries to find out whether the subjects will apply the writing strategy that the point of view is produced by Chinese first and then it is translated into English. In fact, the students adopting this strategy entirely account for 49.09%, and subjects of 35.45% use this method to a complete extent. It is obvious that a great many low-proficient learners depend heavily on their native language to drive the writing.

Question 4 tests subjects’ impression about the impact of native language on writing in the while-

writing process. The students take up to 50.27% (16.36% completely in Chinese and 40.91% mainly in Chinese) confirm the positive effect of their native language. However, about 19.18% of the subjects regard mother tongue interfering with the English writing. Of course, there are some subjects (19.09%) who can not give a clear idea of the function of native language performing in the while-writing process. All in all, what the role of native language played in the while-wring stage is considered to be helpful.

Question 5 concerns about whether the students will use a topic sentence straight forward to begin his or her writing in each paragraph or not. From the table above we can find that the frequency mother tongue will be employed in writing account for the same percentage of 31.80% as its counterparts. Generally speaking, English is used more often than Chinese in paragraph construction, which is different from other elements in the writing process.

Question 6 asks whether simple sentence will be applied more often than compound sentences. As Chinese is featured by parataxis while English is featured by

hypotaxis, learners would like to use more simple sentences and less conjunctive devices during the writing process in theory. Actually, it is also proved by the fact that subjects taking up to 60% (11.82% use simple sentence completely, and 48.18% mainly resort to simple sentence) use simple sentence due to the influence of the habits of the native language. Of course, there are some subjects accounting for 22.73% who'd like to present more compound sentences in their writing. Hence, the Chinese expression habits do affect the way they carry their expressions.

Table 5
Answers From Question 7 to Question 10

Percentage \ Questions	7	8	9	10
Strongly agree	12.73%	4.55%	20.00%	20.91%
Agree	45.45%	38.18%	49.09%	43.64%
Undecided	15.45%	8.18%	9.09%	13.64%
Disagree	21.82%	38.18%	17.27%	16.36%
Strong disagree	4.55%	10.91%	4.55%	5.45%

In Table 5, Question 7 asks whether the subjects will attempt to choose some corresponding English expression with Chinese. 12.73% of the subjects completely depend on the translation of Chinese to carry the work, while 45.45% of the subjects mainly depend on their native language to transform information. About 21.82% mainly use English to propel their writing.

Question 8 explores whether some conjunctions or cohesive devices will be employed on purpose to make the composition be logical. One thing to be mentioned is that students mainly using cohesive devices purposely and not on purpose to take up the same percentage of 38.18%. In addition, many learners in the writing process tend to employ more English for having acquired the rules and features of English.

Question 9 concerns whether the subjects will switch to Chinese to look for a synonym when they are confronted with words they forget. About 20.00% of the subjects agree to the question entirely, and 49.09% of them strongly agree to turn to native language for help. But this percentage is really a great number for learners who resort to Chinese for help when they are confronted with

difficulties. In a word, learners would like to drive back to their native language when they come up with difficulties.

Question 10 deals with the native language involvement in adjusting sentences and paragraphs with the help of their native language. On the one hand, about 20.91% of the subjects resort to native language completely to rectify their writing. Besides, students accounting for 43.64% mainly depend on Chinese to do the adjustment. On the other hand, subjects up to 21.81% undertake their work by means of target language.

To sum up, students at this stage still depend largely on their native language to drive their writing such as the application of substitution strategy of forgotten words. But what makes it different is that the frequency learner depending on native language in the while-writing stage is much less than that in the pre-writing stage.

3.2.3 The After-Writing Stage

Besides the investigation of native language involvement in pre-writing stage and while-writing stage, the involvement in after-writing stage is also researched. Therefore, questions from 11 to 13 concerns about the after-writing stage, the results of which are demonstrated as follows:

Table 6
Answers From Question 11 to Question 13

Percentage \ Questions	11	12	13
Strongly agree	7.91%	4.55%	9.09%
Agree	25.00%	18.18%	26.36%
Undecided	21.55%	19.09%	13.64%
Disagree	37.27%	43.64%	44.55%
Strongly disagree	8.27%	14.55%	6.36%

According to Table 6, it is known that Question 11 tries to find out whether learners will translate what they have written into Chinese to check the content. From the table above, it is obvious that the gap between the five statistics is not so wide as that in the other two stages. Almost 7.91% of the subjects completely agree with the means to check their work after their writing, and the percentage of learners mainly in Chinese takes up to 25.00%. In addition participates in this research mainly using English to check accounts for 37.27%, which are the option in the five they choose most. It is clear that learners use more English rather than the native language in the after-writing stage.

Question 12 concerns about native language involvement in applying the grammatical knowledge to revision, which is the opposite of Question 11 in a way. And the result is consistent with what have been found in Question 11. The percentage of completely using English is 14.55% and 43.64% of them mainly employ English to carry out their revision. More than twenty percent of the subjects resort to Chinese to improve their writing. It is revealed that learners are inclined to apply English to their revision in the after-writing stage.

Question 13 deals with the native language involvement in sentence construction so as to find out whether they will construct simple sentence into compound sentence intentionally. Almost half of the subjects would like to reconstruct compound sentence by acquiring the English features and rules.

In brief, learners depend less heavily on their native language in the after-writing stage. They prefer English better for the revision of finished expression. Therefore, English plays a crucial role in the after-writing stage.

3.2.4 Two Related Questions Affecting English Writing

In this questionnaire research, Questions 1 to 13 are questions mainly about the native language involvement at different stages of writing, while Question 14 and Question 15 are two related questions affecting English writing which served as a supplement for the first 13 questions. It is expected to detect some clues about the effect of native language transfer on English writing.

Question 14 attempts to explore the result that compared with some written patterns in English, whether it is more popular to translate the content organized by native language into English. It is showed that more than 80% of the subjects prefer the English written patterns better. That is one of the very reasons why learners made fewer errors at the beginning and the end of the composition instead of other parts.

Question 15 is about the question whether lexical problem is the main difficulty learners encountered during their writing or not. 57.27% of the subjects agree with this view, and 38.18% of them admit that lexis is a big problem for them, while 4.55% of the students have other problems in their writing. Obviously, lexis is the biggest

problem learners encountered in their writing process. The specific difficulties will be explored in the following interview.

3.3 Findings From the Subjects' Interview

Although many findings have been gotten from the writing test and questionnaire, there must be something that hasn't been involved in the above two implements, so it comes to the interview. The interview here is used as a supplement to confirm the involvement of language transfer in the subjects' writing. Actually, there is a great number of findings in the interview.

The interview includes three questions. The first question concerns about the way to generate ideas either in Chinese or in English. Almost all the answers collected from the subjects are generating ideas in the way of Chinese, and there are only two students in favor of the English way, which proves that low-proficient learners depend heavily on native language in planning content. Actually, the result is consistent with the findings in the questionnaire. Therefore, it is confirmed that native language is responsible for the planning of the content, and maybe it is the most difficult part for learners to be changed by language acquisition.

The second question surveys subjects' belief about whether the writing process will be influenced by Chinese thinking patterns, and if so, which aspects will be affected. All of them agreed that they were impacted by Chinese thinking patterns more or less in the writing process. As for the affected levels, it mainly lies in lexical level. All the subjects found it difficult to apply syntax they learned in their writing and six out of them regarded lexis as a bigger problem. Here comes the question. It is why the difficulties the subjects mentioned are different from the results in their writing test that the number of lexical errors is more than that of syntactic errors. The reason for this is likely to lie in two possible aspects. On one hand, the students are too optimistic about their lexis acquisition. However, in fact, they tend to make so many errors when they come to lexical utilization. On the other hand, as the syntax is considered to be difficult, learners are likely to resort to the patterns they are familiar with. Moreover, it is found that they are inclined to apply simple sentences so as to avoid the complex compound expressions they are uncertain about. Finally, as for composition organization, sixteen out of the twenty subjects admitted that the discourse organization was not a problem for them as some similarities do exist between Chinese and English in paragraph organization.

The third question investigates the main difficulty learners encountered in their writing, which is considered to be the supplement to Question 15 in the questionnaire. Five students regard lexis is the biggest difficulty for them as they don't know the words needed for their expression and the specific context the word is applied to as well. Twelve subjects hold the opinion that the syntax is the most

difficult part in writing process. The reasons for this are as follows. On one side, they think there are great differences between Chinese syntax and English syntax. What's more, negative transfer will often lead them up to errors. On the other side, how to apply the syntax they learned to proper context is a big problem they are confronted within their expression. That is, learners don't know how to use the syntax correctly though they know its meaning. Three of the subjects admitted that they have difficulty in generating ideas and employing necessary writing strategies. They even claimed that it is also difficult for them to write in their native language logically and definitely, which suggests that Chinese writing competency impacts English writing directly in a way.

CONCLUSION

The present thesis aims to explore the effect of native language transfer on English writing for low-proficient non-English major students. The research was carried out on the basis of language transfer, interlanguage theory, contrastive analysis theory and error analysis theory as well. Numerous previous theoretical studies and empirical studies have paved a good way for the present research. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative research methods are employed to undertake the research. The findings of the research are as follows:

Firstly, low-proficient non-English major learners depend heavily on native language transfer in English writing no matter whether they are male or female. It is proved by the data collected from the test that learners are likely to resort to native language to produce their English writing.

Secondly, what can be found from the writing test is that there are fifteen main specific errors resulted from native language transfer. All these errors were collected and analyzed. Surprisingly, errors in lexical and collocation are found to be the most frequent errors in the test, which is followed by spelling errors. And the proportion of errors in tense, aspect and mood of verbs is also higher than what is expected. It is also shown that errors in lexis which is supposed to be the last to occur, in fact, prove to be a great problem for low-proficient learners. Maybe it can provide a clue for the question why low-proficient learners perform so badly in their writing. Actually, the reason lies in the fact that they even haven't acquired the basic English knowledge. In order to explore the errors further, the researcher divided all the errors into four levels—substance errors, lexical errors, syntactical errors and errors at the discourse level. As was expected, errors of lexis are still the biggest problems for them, behind which syntactical errors follow closely. It is indicated that both teachers and learners need to pay more attention to lexis, which was always believed to be the easiest part in English learning.

Thirdly, the involvement of native language transfer does vary with different stages of writing. The answers gotten from the questionnaires show that in the three writing stages learners depend on native language transfer to the maximum in pre-writing stage. Although they read the requirement of the test in English, they are more likely to apply their native language to analyze the task and plan the content as well as the overall frame. And in the course of while-writing stage learners depend heavily on mother tongue transfer in their English writing. Some Chinese writing strategies are employed to drive the English writing continually and the Chinese thinking patterns are also used from time to time to adjust the English sentences and paragraphs. Among the three stages, students depend minimally on native language transfer in after-writing stage. On one hand, since the English writing has finished, learners would like to utilize their English knowledge to check their compositions just as they read the requirements before they started their task. On the other hand, usually there is not enough time for some learners to check their compositions. Therefore, the application of native language transfer in this part is not so much as that in other two stages.

Finally, according to the writing test it is obvious that there are quite a considerable number of errors in compositions of the subjects. In order to detect the reasons leading to these problems, the answers are explored in the questionnaires and interviews. The findings show several possible explanations. Most learners reported that they usually fail to employ a proper sentence pattern to express their meaning. The underlying reason for this is that learners do not fully acquire the use of the certain sentence pattern or even the word in their learning process. In addition, some learners admitted that they don't know how to produce the English word corresponding with their opinions generated in Chinese. There is one thing worth to mention that learners having the above problem are those who usually perform badly in class dictation. Hence, limited vocabulary, of course, interferes their English writing. Moreover, it is found that some of the subjects even have difficulty in Chinese writing process, who are in great need of strategies to drive the writing orderly and logically.

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