THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERLANGUAGE
An Analysis of a Chinese Student's English Writing

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This study analyzed the morphosyntactic errors in six English writing samples, from different genres, by one 13-year-old Chinese immigrant student learning English as his second language in Grade 6. The analysis was conducted according to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) surface strategy taxonomy. The results revealed that the top eight most commonly occurring types of the learner's morphosyntactic errors were: (1) misformation of verbs, (2) misordering of words, (3) omission of articles, (4) omission of verbs, (5) omission of conjunctions, (6) misformation of sentences (run-on), (7) omission of prepositions, and (8) misformation of plural noun agreement. The sources of these errors can be categorized into what Richards (1974) characterized as (a) interlingual errors, and (b) intralingual and developmental errors. The interlingual errors reflect the learner's inappropriate application of knowledge of his or her first language (L1), while the intralingual and developmental errors show the learner's inadequate knowledge of grammatical rules of his or her second language (L2). This study further found that the pattern of occurrences of the researched learner's morphosyntactic errors was actually systematic and logical, possibly reflecting his construction of what Selinker (1972) described as an "interlanguage," a new language system that is related to but also distinct from both the learner's L1 and L2.

Keywords: Chinese ESL students, Chinese learners of English, English writing, grammatical errors, grammatical rules, interlanguage

The considerable influx of Chinese immigrants to the United States is a statistically prominent phenomenon. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, between 2000 and 2010, the Asian population was the fastest growing racial group in the United States, with an increase of 43% (from 10.2 million to 14.7 million), which was more than four times that of the total U.S. population (9.7%, from 281.4 million to 308.7 million) (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shahid, 2012). Of the Asian groups, the Chinese immigrant populace was the largest (Hoeffel et al., 2012). Not surprisingly, Chinese students from immigrant backgrounds currently constitute one of the largest groups of English language learners (who are acquiring and learning English as their second language) in U.S. public schools. Many of them face academic, cultural, and linguistic challenges. To meet these students' learning needs effectively, it is imperative that teachers possess adequate knowledge of this student population, including their socio-demographic backgrounds, immigrant experience, and schooling history, as well as language and literacy development in both their first language (L1) and second language (L2). For instance, it is critical that teachers are able to analyze the Chinese immigrant students' writing in English. Knowledge gained can inform the teachers how best to support these students' L2 learning.

Purpose of the Study

Writing in English is a highly decontextualized, complex process, as this written mode of communication depends on non-contextualized cues (e.g., lexical, syntactic) (De Temple, Wu, & Snow, 1991). It is even more complex for writers learning to compose in English as their L2. Unlike the writing processes of L1, which involves just one language, those of L2 entail two languages, both of which may be used for cognitive operations when learners compose in their L2 (Wang & Wen, 2002). As a learning process, it is natural and common for L2 learners to apply their knowledge of L1, which can result in grammatical errors in L2 due to a negative transfer from L1. In fact, Krashen (1980) hypothesized that L2 learners will continue to apply L1 grammatical rules when learning an L2 until they have acquired sufficient proficiency in L2 rules to apply them correctly.

In this study, I analyzed the morphosyntactic errors in six English writing samples, from different genres, by one 13-year-old Chinese immigrant student learning English as his second language in Grade 6. Specifically, I sought to understand the types of errors produced, their sources, and their significance in relation to this learner's knowledge of L1 and L2. The study is guided by the following theoretical framework and literature review.

Theoretical Framework

Selinker's (1972) idea of "interlanguage" (IL) served as the primary theoretical framework for the study. Viewing grammatical errors produced by L2 writers in a positive light as evidence of their active mental processes and learning strategies, Selinker suggested that the errors are not random but are actually systematic and logical, reflecting a new language system that L2 learners are developing. Adapted from Weinreich's (1953) idea of "interlingual," Selinker's IL theory refers to the distinct language system with unique rules constructed by the learner that reflects neither those of his or her L1 nor those of his or her L2, but of both languages by interlingual identifications, in such a way that the learner tends to perceive certain features to be the same between the two languages (Tarone, 2006). In this connection, IL represents an intermediate language structure that falls along a continuum between L1 and L2 and demonstrates the learner's approximation of L2 proficiency. Furthermore, an IL is idiosyncratic to the learner's language experience and evolves over the process of his or her L2 learning, reflecting the reality that the learner is developing L2 proficiency, but has not yet fully mastered it (Selinker, 1972).

Sources of Morphosyntactic Errors in English Writing by L2 Learners

It is common for L2 learners, especially those with limited English proficiency, to make morphosyntactic errors when composing in English. Richards (1974) proposed that the sources of these errors can be characterized into two categories:

1. Interlingual errors: Errors that are the result of a cross-linguistic interference or negative transfer of the learner's L1, reflecting the inappropriate application of L1 knowledge to L2 learning.
2. Intralingual and developmental errors: Errors that are rooted within the structure of L2 itself, resulting from the learner's faulty hypothesis and overgeneralization of L2 grammatical rules due to his or her limited knowledge of L2.

Common Morphosyntactic Errors in English Writing by Chinese Learners[1]

Although research on Chinese learners of English has generally focused on university college students of English as a foreign language (EFL) (e.g., Darus & Chiang, 2009; Zheng & Park, 2013) or middle-school EFL students (e.g., Zhai, 2008), it has provided evidence of some of the most common morphosyntactic errors (e.g., verb inflections, copular verb, word order, prepositions, articles, plural noun agreement, run-on sentences, conjunctions) produced by these learners in their L2 writing, confirming linguistic differences between Chinese and English.

Verb inflections. Unlike English, Chinese is an uninflected language with no inflectional endings to convey information, such as tense, person, and number. For instance, the same verb in Chinese can be used for all subject-verb agreements and for all tenses. Here are two examples of the same verb in Chinese used for different subject-verb agreements:

1. 我去上学。
   Literal translation: I go school.
2. *Non-literal translation:* I go to school.
   他去上学。
   Literal translation: He go school.

Non-literal translation: <u>He goes</u> to school.

Similarly, the same verb in Chinese can indicate different tenses depending on the time markers used, as illustrated in the following two examples:

1. 我昨天去上学。
   Literal translation: I <u>yesterday go</u> school.
   Non-literal translation: I <u>went</u> to school <u>yesterday</u>.
2. 我明天去上学。
   Literal translation: I <u>tomorrow go</u> school.
   Non-literal translation: I <u>will go</u> to school <u>tomorrow</u>.

Although "了" (*le*) in Chinese can be used with action verbs to signal the past tense, it cannot function in the same way with other types of verbs (i.e., adjectival, stative) (Ross & Ma, 2006). Instead, in Chinese, the safest way to specify tenses is to use time markers, such as "昨天" ("yesterday," as in the preceding Example #1), and "明天" ("tomorrow," as in the preceding Example #2). Given the linguistic difference between Chinese and English in indicators of tense, it is common to find verb conjugation errors in English writing by Chinese learners (Chen, 1998).

Copular verb. A copular verb is commonly defined as a verb that links a complement (adjective or noun) to a subject. The English copular verb "to be" and all its forms (e.g., "am," "is," "was," "were") are shown to be equivalent to the Chinese copular verb "是" (*shì*). While a copular verb is necessary in an English sentence that has an adjectival predicate, an adjective in Chinese can take the function of an intransitive verb or a main predicate of the sentence, so a copular verb is not needed (Sun, 2006). Due to this linguistic difference, we may find Chinese learners of English omitting a copular verb when composing in English. The following are two examples of Chinese sentences with no copular verbs needed:

1. 我很欢乐。
   Literal translation: I very happy.
   Non-literal translation: I <u>am</u> very happy.
2. 她的妹妹13岁。
   Literal translation: Her younger sister 13 years old.
   Non-literal translation: Her younger sister <u>is</u> 13 years old.

Word order. Syntactically, Chinese, like English, also carries the sentence structure of subject-verb-object (SVO), but the word order of other elements (e.g., attributives, adverbials) is different. For instance, in Chinese, an attributive usually precedes the noun or pronoun that it modifies, but in English, an attributive can either precede or follow the noun or pronoun (Li, 1998). The two Chinese sentences below illustrate the attributive position of an adjective as determined by the word order:

1. <u>他写的那篇</u>文章有很多教育的意义。
   Literal translation: <u>He wrote that</u> article has a lot of educational value.
   Non-literal translation: <u>That article he wrote</u> has a lot of educational value.
2. <u>我参加的那个</u>会议非常有意思。
   Literal translation: <u>I participated that</u> meeting very interesting.
   Non-literal translation: <u>The meeting that I participated in</u> was very interesting.

The following are two examples of word order in Chinese adverbial phrases of place and time, respectively:
1. 我在中国拜访了我以前的老师。
   Literal translation: I <u>in China</u> visited my former teacher.
   Non-literal translation: <u>In China</u>, I visited my former teacher.
   <center>or</center>
   <center>I visited my former teacher <u>in China</u>.</center>
2. 他去年在我的学校。
   Literal translation: He <u>last year</u> at my school.
   Non-literal translation: <u>Last year</u>, he was at my school.
   <center>or</center>
   <center>He was at my school <u>last year</u>.</center>

These examples demonstrate that a literal translation from Chinese to English by keeping the same word order would sound awkward. To address this issue, the translation must be adjusted to suit the word order in English.

Due to differences in word order beyond the SVO structure between Chinese and English, Chinese students may exhibit difficulties in word sequence in English.

Prepositions. Unlike in English, some sentential structures in Chinese do not require a preposition. Here are two examples:

1. 我会等你。
   Literal translation: I will wait you.
   Non-literal translation: I will wait <u>for</u> you. [the "for" preposition needed in English]
2. 我需要去学校。
   Literal translation: I need go school.
   Non-literal translation: I need <u>to</u> go <u>to</u> school. [the "to" preposition needed in English]

Due to the fact that there are contexts where a preposition is not necessary in a Chinese sentence, Chinese learners of English may commit prepositional errors in English writing. For instance, Chinese students may find selecting the correct prepositions in English challenging, resulting in errors in the omission, addition, and/or misformation of prepositions (Darus & Chiang, 2009). Darus and Chiang (2009) explained that at times, when Chinese learners of English are uncertain which preposition to use or cannot find a relevant substitution for a particular preposition from L1 to L2, they might omit or misuse the preposition; at other times, they might add unnecessary propositions due to an overgeneralization of grammatical rules in L2.

Articles. English has an article system (i.e., *the* as the definite article and *a/an* as the indefinite article). Such an article system, however, does not exist in Chinese. The following are two examples:

1. 我需要带书去学校。
   Literal translation: I need bring book to school.
   Non-literal translation: I need to bring <u>a</u> book to school. [the "a" article needed in English]
2. 我们去公园。
   Literal translation: We go park.
   Non-literal translation: We are going to <u>the</u> park. [the "the" article needed in English]

As Chinese learners are unaccustomed to an article system due to its absence in Chinese, as demonstrated in the preceding two examples, it is understandable that they may omit articles in English writing.

Plural noun agreement. In English, nouns have singular and plural (including irregular) forms. In contrast, in Chinese, nouns do not have separate singular and plural systems, but the information is

conveyed by the numeric word preceding the noun. Here are two examples:

1. 我有一本书。
   Literal translation: I have one book.
   Non-literal translation: I have one book.
2. 我有两本书。
   Literal translation: I have two book.
   Non-literal translation: I have two books.

In English, there are singular and plural forms, as illustrated in the above two examples (i.e., "book" and "books"). In contrast, in Chinese, these forms are the same no matter the quantity indicated. For example, "书" means "book" in Chinese as well as "books" in English. Thus, it is not surprising to find Chinese learners of English neglecting to make the nouns plural where needed.

Run-on sentences and conjunctions. A run-on sentence, as defined by various dictionaries (e.g., *Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Oxford English Dictionary*), is one that contains two or more independent clauses (i.e., complete sentences) not joined by the correct conjunction (e.g., "and," "or," "but") or appropriate punctuation (e.g., semicolons, dashes). The attributes that characterize run-on sentences, however, are considered acceptable in the Chinese language. For instance, the use of comma splices (i.e., a comma used to connect two independent clauses) with no conjunctions in sentence segmentation is common in Chinese. In fact, Liu (2011) claimed that the bulk of Chinese writings contain multi-clause phrases separated only by commas (about 75% of Chinese sentences). As commas in Chinese sentences serve multiple functions, including operating similarly to the function of the period and even a conjunction in English sentences (Xue & Yang, 2011), it is not unusual to find Chinese learners of English producing run-on sentences and omitting conjunctions in English writing (Zheng & Park, 2013). Here are two examples of run-on sentences in Chinese:

1. 我喜欢粉红色, 她喜欢红色, 他喜欢蓝色。
   Literal translation: I like pink, she like red, he like blue.
   Non-literal translation: I like pink, she likes red, <u>and</u> he likes blue. [the "and" conjunction needed in English]
2. 他数学考试得100分,他是个用功的学生,每天花几个小时学习 数学。
   Literal translation: He scored 100 on the math test, he is a hardworking student, everyday spend   several hours study math.
   Non-literal translation: He scored 100 on the math test. He is a hardworking student who spends several hours every day studying math. [making the run-on sentence into two separate sentences in English]

Method

Given the significant influx of Chinese immigrant students in U.S. public schools and the linguistic challenges facing these students in learning English as their L2, it is imperative that educators understand the nature of their writing in English to better meet their language learning needs. In an effort to contribute knowledge to the literature of second language writing, this study analyzed the English writing of one Chinese immigrant L2 learner in Grade 6.

Research Questions

The present study sought to address these three research questions:

1. What are the most commonly occurring types of morphosyntactic errors in a Chinese learner's English writing?
2. What are the sources of these errors?
3. What is the significance of these errors in relation to the learner's knowledge of L1 and L2?

Participant

To address the aforementioned research questions, this study examined the English writing samples of Ming, a pseudonym for a 13-year-old Chinese student in Grade 6, who immigrated from mainland China to the United States nearly three years ago. He attended Grade 4 and Grade 5 in a public elementary school and was attending Grade 6 in a public middle school, all located in a northeastern city's Chinatown, where he was residing with his intact family (both parents and a younger brother) from a working-class background. Ming's middle school comprised students from mostly Chinese backgrounds. A typically developing adolescent, Ming was also an

articulate speaker of Cantonese Chinese. He maintained proficiency in his native language by speaking with his family and friends in Chinese, reading Chinese, and writing letters in Chinese to his grandparents in China. Furthermore, recognizing his lack of English proficiency, Ming preferred to socialize with Cantonese-speaking Chinese peers, with whom he could communicate in their common language.

Data Collection

Over a period of three months in his English as a Second Language (ESL) class, Ming had produced many pieces of writing in English in six genres: (1) personal narrative, (2) personal letter, (3) creative writing, (4) book report, (5) procedural writing, and (6) expository writing. For the purpose of the current analysis, I selected six representative samples, one from each genre. To avoid the effect of longer writing samples having a higher chance of committing more grammatical errors, I intentionally chose six writing samples with similar length, resulting in five of them containing nine sentences and one with 13.

Data Analysis

To analyze Ming's writing samples, I adopted Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) surface strategy taxonomy, which suggests four main ways by which L2 learners of English may modify the morphosyntactic forms of the target language:

1. Omission: The absence of an essential item that must be included in a correctly formed sentence.
   Example: He [is] very happy.
2. Addition: The presence of an unnecessary item that must be excluded in a correctly formed sentence.
   Example: He will be to very happy.
3. Misformation: The use of the incorrect form of a verb, morpheme, or structure in a sentence.
   Example: They was [were] very happy.
4. Misordering: The incorrect positioning of a verb, morpheme, or structure in a sentence.
   Example: I think [about] every day about my grandparents [every day].

Two individuals, consisting of the author, who is a Chinese-English bilingual, and a native English speaker, conducted independent analyses of the writing samples. Discrepancies in the identification of morphosyntactic errors were discussed and resolved between the two analysts by reexamining the writing samples until a consensus was reached. After classifying the specific error types within each category and tallying the frequencies of occurrence for each type across the writing samples, I then rank ordered those error types that accounted for at least 5% of the total number of incidences.

Results

Table 1 shows the eight most commonly occurring types of the 125 morphosyntactic errors found in Ming's English writing and provides examples of these morphosyntactic errors from his writing samples. It is important to note that there were sentences that did not contain simply one type of similar errors, but were complicated with a combination of multiple types of errors. Furthermore, across all of Ming's writing samples, there seems to be an overgeneralization of English grammatical rules, as demonstrated in his misformation of verbs (e.g., "I am teach" for "I am teaching"), the addition of unnecessary prepositions (e.g., "Ms. Cheng in teach to some students and me . . ." for "Ms. Cheng is teaching some students and me . . ."), and the addition of articles (e.g., "My little brother in the America born." for "My little brother was born in America.").

Table 1
Top Eight Most Commonly Occurring Types of Morphosyntactic Errors (Total Number of Errors = 125 from Six Writing Samples) and Sample Sentences

Error Type	Sample Sentence with Grammatical Error(s)*	# of Errors (% of the Total # of Errors)
1. Misformation of verbs	I am teach the people ** make a egg. (This sentence also contains errors in the addition of an article, the omission of an adverb and a preposition, and the misformation of an	28 (22)

indefinite article.)
Correct form: I <u>*am teaching*</u> people <u>how</u> <u>to</u> cook <u>an</u> egg.

2.	Misordering of words	<u>Grape, inside the color is purple, outside color is purple.</u> (This sentence also contains an error in the omission of the "and" conjunction.) *Correct form:* <u>*The inside color of a grape is purple, and the outside color is purple.*</u>	14 (11)
3.	Omission of articles	Pineapple, * inside color is yellow, ** outside color is yellow. *Correct form:* The inside color of a pineapple is yellow, and <u>*the*</u> outside color is yellow.	12 (10)
4.	Omission of verbs	My little brother * 9 years old. *Correct form:* My little brother <u>*is*</u> 9 years old.	11 (9)
5.	Omission of conjunctions	2. Put the oil in the wok, * wait * the oil ** hot. (This sentence also contains errors in the omission of prepositions and a verb.) *Correct form:* 2. Put the oil in the wok <u>*and*</u> wait <u>for</u> the oil <u>to get</u> hot.	11 (9)
6.	Misformation of sentences (run-on)	<u>Some day</u> I <u>am</u> not listen * Ms. Cheng * she * give me detention because she said I don't <u>wanted</u> give you detention. (This sentence also contains errors in the misformation of plural noun agreement, misformation of verbs, and omission of a preposition.) *Correct form:* <u>*Some days, I did not listen to Ms. Cheng, but she did not give me detention because she said, "I don't want to give you detention."*</u>	11 (9)
7.	Omission of prepositions	I <u>write</u> * a watermelon. (This sentence also contains an error in the misformation of a verb.) *Correct form:* I <u>am writing</u> <u>*about*</u> a watermelon.	10 (8)
8.	Misformation of plural noun agreement	I in America three year. (This sentence also contains errors in the omission of a copular present perfect continuous verb, and a preposition.) *Correct form:* I <u>have been living</u> in America <u>for</u> three <u>*years.*</u>	10 (8)

Note: The underlined and italicized word(s) is the corrected form that corresponds to the specified error category. The other underlined words are the corrected forms for other types of errors.

Discussion

Most Commonly Occurring Morphosyntactic Errors

First and foremost, the result, revealing the top eight most commonly occurring morphosyntactic errors in Ming's writing samples, is interesting but perhaps not surprising, considering the linguistic differences between Chinese and English discussed above. Specifically, Ming systematically misformed verbs and the plural noun agreement; misordered words in a sentence; omitted articles, copular verbs, conjunctions, and prepositions; and constructed run-on sentences. These common types of morphosyntactic errors found in Ming's English writing are also consistent with those reported in previous research on Chinese EFL learners (e.g., Darus & Chiang, 2009; Sun, 2010; Zheng & Park, 2013). Due to the fact that the morphosyntactic rules governing these linguistic elements in English are either nonexistent or different in operation between Chinese and English, it seems understandable that Ming made the errors he did in these differing grammatical areas.

Sources of Morphosyntactic Errors

The sources of the morphosyntactic errors detected in Ming's writing samples can be related to what Richards (1974) characterized as (a) interlingual errors, and (b) intralingual and developmental errors. The interlingual errors revealed Ming's inappropriate application of L1 knowledge (e.g., omission of articles, prepositions, conjunctions), which may have led to his negative transfer of L1 to L2. The negative transfer of linguistic knowledge from L1 to L2 has been identified as a widespread source of grammatical errors in written production found among Chinese learners of English (e.g., Chen, 1998; Jiang, 1995; Zhang, 2007).

Although Ming's writing samples demonstrated mostly interlingual errors, there was also some evidence of intralingual and developmental errors, which could be attributed to what Selinker (1972) described as a result of the learner's inadequate knowledge of L2 grammatical rules—that is, Ming attempted to apply his limited knowledge of English grammatical rules in composing in English, but his insufficient understanding may have led him to overgeneralize certain rules, resulting in errors notably the misformation of verbs. The overgeneralization phenomenon may be interpreted as the result of the learner's paying extra attention to grammatical rules of his or her L2, particularly if they are different from those of his or her L1 (Zheng & Park, 2013). For instance, in this study, Ming may have learned that verb conjugations were needed in English, but was uncertain where it was necessary and where it was not.

Significance of Morphosyntactic Errors in Relation to Knowledge of L1 and L2

The findings of this study suggest that the nature of the morphosyntactic errors and their sources (interlingual errors as well as intralingual and developmental errors) as observed in Ming's English writing have provided evidence to support Selinker's (1972) theory of IL. Specifically, the pattern of error occurrences across Ming's writing samples revealed the significance of these errors as related to his knowledge of L1 and L2. The pattern seemed neither random nor unpredictable but rather systematic and logical, possibly reflecting Ming's development of an IL, a language system that was related to but also distinct from both his L1 and L2. In other words, the IL that Ming was constructing resembled neither the Chinese nor the English language system, but contained linguistic elements of both systems. Furthermore, Ming's IL demonstrated his cognitive processes and learning strategies in approximating mastery of his L2 by (a) incorporating his knowledge of Chinese grammatical rules in writing in English, and (b) testing his hypotheses about English grammatical rules via trial and error based on his limited understanding of L2. Overall, when viewing through a positive lens of morphosyntactic errors as evidence of a natural, active, and creative process of L2 learning, we may conclude that Ming's IL revealed his learning progress, strengths, and needs in English writing.

Pedagogical Implications

This study suggests that the morphosyntactic errors detected in Ming's English writing samples should not be viewed negatively by teachers as hindrances to his L2 learning, but instead should be considered positively by teachers as evidence of his active construction and interpretation of a new language and his efforts in approximating L2 proficiency. This perspective is particularly crucial in the context of the increasing number of Chinese students from immigrant families, who are learning English as their L2, in U.S. public schools. More than ever, teachers will need to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate these students' successful attainment of L2 proficiency.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight that language teachers working with Ming and students like him can gain a wealth of insights about their performance, strengths, and needs in composing in English by analyzing their writing. For instance, the teacher may notice a systematic pattern of morphosyntactic errors in the English writing of an L2 learner. By understanding the nature and sources of these errors as evidence of the learner's IL, the teacher can gain additional knowledge to inform his or her teaching practice—for example, by developing and implementing responsive pedagogical strategies to facilitate the learner's successful acquisition of English grammatical rules. Furthermore, the teacher can also be better positioned to predict the systematic ways in which the learner produces morphosyntactic errors and assess what he or she already knows and still needs to learn, a basis on which the teacher can provide constructive language support. In fact, effective pedagogical strategies abound, which can include language exposure, teacher modeling, direct instruction on grammatical rules, and peer scaffolding or assistance.

In terms of providing pedagogical support, first and foremost it is imperative that the teacher acknowledges the L2 learner's efforts and language knowledge associated with his or her construction of an IL. To help enhance the learner's English writing, the teacher can expose him or her to correct English grammar, for example, by serving as a language model and drawing the learner's attention to the forms with which he or she is having difficulties. For example, the teacher can model correct forms by explicitly writing sentences down from student dictation and during teacher instruction. The teacher can also help the L2 learner become aware of his or her grammatical errors, such as by pointing them out in his or her writing, highlighting the linguistic differences

between his or her L1 and L2, and suggesting specific strategies for self-correction of errors. More specifically, when working with Chinese learners like Ming, the teacher might like to explicitly teach English linguistic features that do not exist in the Chinese language. In addition, it is incumbent upon the teacher to provide opportunities for all L2 learners to practice applying their knowledge of English grammatical rules in writing and even in other means of communication; the teacher can also elicit the assistance of more linguistically advanced peers to serve as English writing models for the L2 learner, such as showing their writing to this learner, editing his or her writing, and teaching him or her the correct forms by collaborating on writing projects. All of these strategies would, of course, need to be adjusted according to such factors as the age and developmental level of the learner, and his or her language experience in L1 and L2.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

As much research analyzing grammatical errors produced by Chinese learners of English has focused on EFL university students, this study of a Chinese ESL middle-school student's English writing contributes knowledge to the literature of second language writing. Despite its findings that confirm those of previous research, this investigation has limitations. The main one is that the study focused only on one Chinese immigrant student, thereby limiting the generalizability of the research results. The findings may be generalizable only to other Chinese ESL students from similar backgrounds (e.g., schooling history, language experience, learning ability). To increase generalizability of current findings, analyzing a larger corpus of writing samples from Chinese learners of English would be helpful. Furthermore, a longitudinal study of English writing by Chinese learners over time would yield insights on the evolution of their cognitive processes and learning strategies, especially with respect to their development of an interlanguage.

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Notes

[1]To reflect the participant's country of origin, all examples of Chinese sentences are provided in simplified characters as used in mainland China. Note that traditional characters are used in other Chinese societies (e.g., Hong Kong, Taiwan).

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