ERROR ANALYSIS OF IGBO LEARNERS OF CHINESE IN CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS

Ebele Nwamaka Anajemba
Department of Linguistics
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: en.anajemba@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract
Learning a second language (L2) has always been challenging for a number of reasons of which interference from the first language (L1) is counted as one of the major contributing factors. This study investigates the interference that L2 learners of Chinese encounter which results to erroneous constructions. The framework of Error Analysis is used to analyse the constructions as generated by these L2 learners while relying on their L1 linguistic knowledge. Qualitative approach was used for this study as the work is purely descriptive. The data were realized from classroom participatory observation of students undergoing Chinese proficiency course - Hànyǔ Shǔipíng Kǎoshì (HSK) at levels1 and 2. It was revealed that some syntactic structures necessitated the use of interlanguage which resulted in the omission, insertion, misordering and overgeneralization strategies. These were noticed in use of null subjects, word order and use of negative markers. Learners' understanding will be greatly improved if they are aware of these challenging situations while teachers will be better prepared to guide the learners through these interfering areas for improved pedagogy.
Keywords: Second language acquisition, interlangauge, syntactic structures, errors

1.0   Introduction
In the world we live today, many individuals are bilinguals and multilinguals. People interact with one another in the course of daily activities, and by so doing individuals have been consciously and unconsciously acquiring other languages. The learning process is carried out either in formal settings as are obtained in classrooms or in some naturalistic environments. However, during the learning process, people have unconsciously developed an interlanguage that is quite different from their L1 but has features which is very similar to the target language. This interlanguage sometimes aid in the learning of the target language but some errors have equally been associated with it. So it has been noted by scholars of error analysis that mother tongue interference is not the only source of interference to the learning of the target language.

Communication by language learners especially at the beginner levels of the learning process is largely affected by their L1 competence. People have been noted to depend on their linguistic knowledge already acquired to perform a target language by creating an interlanguage which is closer in structure to the target language. Language learners apply this strategy in order to facilitate communication. Second language (L2) learners of Chinese generate sentences which correspond to the syntactic word order of Chinese (SVO), however, native speakers of the Chinese language (Mandarin Chinese (MC)) would not approve of such utterances, because either they are grammatically wrong or semantically incorrect. Though MC has been classified as an SVO language, the same structures rarely occur in natural discourse (Tao 1996: 180). L2 learners of Chinese at

the beginner and intermediate levels of the HSK are affected by linguistic influence which stems from their native language interference. To combat these interferences the learners quickly develop strategies which results to the interlanguage that still prove erroneous.

Chinese is one of the most popularly spoken languages in the world. Hua (2002) admits that about a quarter of the world's population speaks Chinese as their native language. Recently, Chinese is rapidly spreading as people from diverse communities around the world interact with the Chinese for various purposes. Nigeria is not left behind in the quest for the Chinese language. For more than a decade now, through the efforts of the Confucius Institute, south eastern Nigeria has benefitted by hosting the biggest teaching and learning centre at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Among the population learning Chinese at the Institute, 2019 statistics of intakes, shows that a total of 1800 students registered. Igbo learners account for about 70% of the total number of students admitted. These learners have successfully completed their secondary school education and so have mastered the use of English and Igbo to a large extent.

1.1   Statement of the Problem

At the beginner levels of HSK proficiency course, L2 learners of Chinese at the Confucius Institute domicile at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, have been noted to communicate in sentences that comply with the SVO pattern of the Chinese language. However, native speakers of Chinese frown at such utterances and regard them as errors because they do not comply with the Chinese structural patterns.

1.2   Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to show areas of Chinese syntactic structures that pose as challenges thereby resulting to the development of interlanguage which still result to errors by beginner level learners of Chinese. In order to achieve this purpose we;
  i)   To investigate the Interlingual influence encountered by L2 learners of Chinese to discover errors that occur in sentences especially at the HSK beginner levels 1 and 2.
  ii) To examine the erroneous structures and
  iii) To explain reasons why they are considered ungrammatical.

1.3   Scope of the Study

This research deals with the interlanguage errors discovered at the syntactic level only as generated by L2 learners of Chinese at the HSK beginner levels 1 and 2. This involves the examination of the structural differences as caused by omission, insertion, misordering and overgeneralization by the L2 learners studying at the Confucius Institute of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

1.4   Significance of the Study

This study would be beneficial to L2 learners of Chinese both at the undergraduate and the HSK levels. It is intended to aid them have a better understanding and application of the Chinese syntactic structure. The teachers at the institute both native speakers and non-native speakers, through this work, would note areas where students are prone to errors as a result of their L1 influence. Translators whose services are engaged by the

Chinese expatriates would benefit from this study as cultural differences have been discovered to affect word order. Local Chinese curriculum planners would equally find this work useful for adequate planning of course work.

2.1   Theoretical Framework

Error analysis (EA) became prominent in the 1970s with the objective of discovering what learners already know about a target language. This was pertinent because EA aims to discover and describe different kinds of errors with the goal of understanding how learners process the L2. Unlike the contrastive analysis which predicts learners' errors, EA is based on the assumption that the L2 has its own system in its own right in the sense that it is rule governed and predictable. EA is a procedure used by both researchers and teachers which involves collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their seriousness, James (1998). The purpose of EA is, to find

> "what the learner knows and does not know" and to "
> ultimately enable the teacher to supply him not just
> with the information that his hypothesis is wrong, but
> also, importantly, with the right sort of information or
> data for him to form a more adequate concept of a rule
> in the target language"
> (Corder, 1974: 170).

EA is a fundamental tool used in language teaching. It aids in reorganizing teacher's point of view, thus helping the teacher to readdress his/her methodology for fixing and fulfilling the students' gaps. Corder (1967) notes that learners' errors are significant because they provide the researcher concrete evidence of how language is learned, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language. EA has been identified to provide materials for remedial teaching as it helps to reveal problem areas which the learners encounter and as such guide the teachers aright, Sharma (1980).

Corder (1974) propagates that learners errors serves as a pointer to what they have taken in, not what they have been taught by the teachers. According to him, output is different from input and they are significant for three reasons.

1. Errors tell the teacher what to teach.
2. Errors tell the researcher how learning proceeds.
3. Errors tell the students to correct their notion about second language.

Burt and Kiparsky (1972) and George (1972), are among other scholars that contributed to the development of Error Analysis. According to Burt and Kiparsky, there are six types of errors. These types are mostly focused on the grammatical aspects of L1 and L2. While George states that, learner's errors are caused by redundancy of code, unsuitable presentation in the class and various interferences. He is against the demand of fluency over accuracy and advocates giving the learner time for reflection. Corder (1974:125) notes that "the study of error is a part of the investigation of the process of language learning… It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indications as to the learning process." According to Corder if a learner makes an utterance which deviates from the norm and

is able to correct him/herself, that can only be termed a mistake, but if the learner is not able to give the right version of the said utterance, then it is an error. He equates error to Chomsky's failure in competence showing that the learner has not mastered the use of the language, whereas mistake was associated with performance. In order to escape being trapped by the target language, learners create an interlanguage which does not conform to the structure of the target language.

Edge (1989), remarks that all types of deviances are mistakes. He groups these deviances into three types namely; slips, errors and attempts. According to him, when learners are careless they can slip from the norm but when these are pointed out, they can autocorrect them. Whereas errors are the wrong forms that the learner cannot correct on his/her own. The third type is where the learner creates an utterance that is faulty and incomprehensible because he/she is not aware of the right format. This is done in an attempt to produce a new structure, for him, attempts are great steps taken by the learner.

Corder (1974) enumerates the procedures of EA to include the following:

i)   A corpus language is selected
ii) The errors in the corpus are identified
iii) The errors are classified
iv) The errors are explained
v)   The errors are evaluated

2.2   Categorization of learners' errors

Richards (1971) amongst other scholars classifies errors that have been identified to include the following:

i)   Transfer of rules (in this situation learners do not adher to rules and so failure to observe restrictions and structures),
ii) Redundancy reduction by omitting elements (incomplete application of rules arises when students do not apply the rules of some structures correctly) and
iii) Overgeneralization (this results when the learner creates structures similar to the already existing ones in the language irrespective of the context).

Richards et al (1992) states that the study of errors is used to;

(i)   identify strategies which learners use in language teaching,
(ii) identify causes of errors and
(iii) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in development of teaching materials.

2.3   Interlanguage

The interlanguage theory was first adopted by Selinker (1972) from interlingual. The term refers to the separateness of an L2 learner's system that has a structurally intermediate status between the L1 and the L2. It posits that imperfect foreign language as used by the learner gives rise to an intermediate language system which is a sort of the target language when contrasted between the source and the target language. Ellis (1997) explains that interlanguage is a systemic development of learner language reflecting a metal system of L2 knowledge. This involves a situation where the learner creates a set of abstract linguistic rules, however this leads to errors at different levels which are phonological, morphological, grammatical, lexical or semantical. Chacau

(2016:38) states that during the interlanguage stage, errors occur over a long period of time during the learning process. At this stage the learner usually writes or speaks in a manner that is not accepted by the native speaker but as the learning progresses, the errors gradually reduce until the learner learns so much of the language that he or she could speak in a near native speaker competence.

2.4   Empirical Studies

Chacun (2016) discusses syntactic interference of some French language students at the University of Ghana. Two main types of errors identified were the addition and omission of elements as can be seen in the examples below:

1) a. * Deux femmes différentes qui **sont** parler au téléphone
    b.   Deux femmes différentes qui parlent au téléphone
         'Two different women who are speaking on the telephone'

The student in the above example has been found to introduce *sont* before *parler* probably because in English the verb to be is included in the conjugation of verbs in the present continuous tense. However, in French, the auxiliary is not used for this tense as it shares the same form with the simple present tense. *Parlent* in French can be translated speak or are speaking, hence there is no need for the introduction of the auxiliary.

Chacun (2016) asserts that English students learning French usually insert some lexical items in utterances which results due to transliteration from English to French. They were observed to insert the auxiliary in negation whereas that was not needed as can be seen in the instance below:

2) a. *Elle n'est pas rit
    b.   Elle ne ø rit pas
         'She is not laughing'

Odinye (2011) studies the grammatical errors of Chinese students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, using past examination scripts. He discovers that students' errors boarder on the use of pronouns, possessives, measure words and others. His study reveals students' inappropriate use of the pronouns which results in the pronouns being interchanged thereby rendering their sentences ungrammatical. On the use of the possessive 'de', the students could not apply the rule of proper positioning in the sentences. The use of measure words also posed problems for the students as they were not sure of the correct measure words to attribute to different nouns.

Odlin (1997:13), on a study about Spanish learners of English, reports that Spanish-speaking learners of English delete the verb 'to be'. For instance Spanish learners of English produce such utterances as "*that very simple" instead of "that is very simple". This can be attributed to the grammatical differences between Spanish and English language.

Ghadessy (1980) in his study investigates the sources of errors by 100 Iranian university students in their learning of certain grammatical structures used in writing English composition. His results showed that subjects' mistakes were not primarily

due to inference from the native language but on developmental strategy which resulted to errors which are similar to errors made in first language acquisition.

From the reviewed literature, it was observed that L2 learners usually develop an interlanguage to aid them during the learning process of the target language. Though the interlanguage at the initial stages are erroneous, as the learner progresses, he/she masters the structures of the target language until he/she achieves a near native speaker competence. The interlanguage is also discovered to have more features of the target language than the L1. This study sets to identify the types of errors that occur as a result of the interlanguage by L2 learners of Chinese at the Confucius Institute domiciled at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

3.0   Methodology

The data for this study were collected from classroom participatory observation of L2 learners of Chinese at the HSK levels 1 and 2 in May 2019 at the Confucuis Institute of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. These students had already finished their Senior Secondary school and so have already developed their use of English and Igbo language which are predominantly used in the speech community. Students' responses during the classroom sessions were recorded and contrasted with the Chinese sentence structure. The data were validated by Chinese native teachers at the Institute. Qualitative approach for data analysis was used because the study is basically descriptive. The word orders noted were analysed with that of Chinese. The tenets of EA helped to identify the areas where the students deviated from the norm hence resulting to errors and explanations given why these sentences were considered ungrammatical in Chinese. The data were all marked for tone. The Chinese language has four tones namely high tone (´), level tone (¯), down tone (`) and rising tone(ˇ). The fifth tone is neutral; it is the unstressed syllable and always left unmarked (Yip and Don 2006:4).

The data collected for this study were analysed using the classifications as identified by Corder (1973). The errors as generated by the learners are grouped into four different categories which include:
    i)   omission of some required element
    ii)   addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element (insertion)
    iii)   misordering of the elements
    iv)   selection of an incorrect element (overgeneralization)

4.0   Data presentation and Analysis
4.1   Insertion
The data presented here firstly will address the topic-prominent versus subject-prominent sentences.

Use of Null subjects
Chinese is a topic-prominent language. In Chinese, the discourse topic contributes to the distribution of null/overt arguments. Null arguments are allowed if they can be identified through discourse. The interpretation of null/overt subjects is bound by the topic antecedent in the discourse. This implies that the subject of the sentence is clearly understood, especially when the subjects are pronouns. So, Chinese syntax is

connected to invisible logical relations, not by visible words. The meaning of the sentence is contextually deduced. Below are instances of such cases:

3)   a) *老师，你 好   b)   老师，ø
  Lǎoshī, nǐ hǎo   lǎoshī,   hǎo
  Teacher, 2(s) good   teacher   good
              "Hello, teacher"

4)   a) *你 吃 了 吗?   b)   ø 吃 了
  Nǐ chī le ma?   Chī le
  2(s) Eat Asp Int   Eat Asp Int
           "Have you eaten?"

5)   a) *你 来 了 吗?   b)   ø 来 了 吗?
  Nǐ lái le ma?   lái le ma?
  2(s) Come Asp Int   Come Asp Int
          "Have you arrived?"

6)   a) *你 喝 茶吗?   b)   ø 喝 茶 吗?
  nǐ Hē chá ma?   hē chá ma?
  2(s) Drink tea Int   drink tea Int
        "Do you want to drink tea?"

7)   a) *你吃 饱 了 吗?   b)   ø 吃 饱 了吗?
  nǐ chī bǎo le ma   chī bǎo le ma
  2(s) eat full Asp Int   eat full Asp Int
         "Are you filled?"

8)   a) *你 写 完 了 吗?   b) ø 写 完 了 吗?
  Nǐ xiě wán le ma?   xiě wán le ma?
  2(s) write finish Asp Int.   write finish Asp Int.
      "Have you finished writing?"

Examples (3a – 8a) above are instances where L2 learners of Chinese transferred the case of their L1 into L2 as against what is supposed, as can be seen in examples (3b – 8b). For the Igbo and English language which happen to be most of the learners' first language, it is compulsory for such sentences to have subjects, as seen below. It runs contrary to the null subject rule in Chinese. So the learners created their interlanguage where pronouns were inserted whereas the interlocutors were present as at the time of speech, therefore native speakers find such utterances awkward. It shows that the speaker does not have the mastery of the language.

4.2   Misordering
Chinese has a static format for indicating time where the time is encoded started from the whole to the constituent parts in a construction. However, the Students' linguistic knowledge of their L1 also affected the time coding as such structures are not static in their L1 as can be seen in the sentences below:

Time reference

9)   a) *明 天 三 点 下 午 见。
       míng tiān sān   diǎn   xià   wǔ jiàn
       bright day three o'clock afternoon meet

  b)   明 天 下 午 三 点 见。
    míng tiān xià   wǔ sān diǎn jiàn
    Bright day afternoon three o'clock meet
    "See you tomorrow afternoon at 3 o'clock"

Example 10a shows an instance where the learner did not follow the order of the timing as is shown in 10b. By so doing, an ungrammatical sentence was generated. The timing starts from tomorrow, then afternoon before 3 O'clock. Because these learners are bilingual in Igbo and English there is flexibility in the expression of time in both languages. This however affects their ability to encode Chinese time reference properly as there is no such flexibility in the Chinese language.

4.3 Omission
The use of measure words in Chinese poses great challenges to the students. The learners usually transfer this knowledge erroneously in this regard. In Chinese when a quantity is involved, measure word is inserted between the number of object and the name of the object. The following sentences are instances where such measure words have been omitted.

10)   a) *两 学 生
     Liǎng xué sheng
     Two   student

b)   两 个 学生
  liǎng gè xué sheng
  Two Mw student
  "Two students"

11)   a) *他 是 老师
     Tā   shì lǎoshī
     3(s)(m) be teacher

b)他 是 一 名 老师
  Tā   shì yī mǐng lǎoshī
  3(s)(m) be one Mw teacher
  "He is a teacher"

In examples (11a – 12a), the students used the nouns without the measure words. In Chinese it is ungrammatical for objects to be used without the associated measure words as can be seen in (11b – 12b).
Chinese uses a lot of conjunctions in order to express meanings. Conjunctions in Chinese appear in pairs, but it has been the case that the students did not use the conjunctions as supposed.

因 为。。。   所以。。。
Yīn wèi   suǒ yǐ
"Because …   so, therefore …"

12) a) *因 为 我不 参加　　比赛，　　　我不 来
Yīn wèi wǒ bù cānjiā bǐsài, wǒ bù lái
Because 1s Neg participate competition, 1s Neg come

b) 因 为 我 不 参加　　比赛，　　　所 以 我 不 来
Yīn wèi wǒ bù cānjiā bǐsài, suǒ yǐ wǒ bù lái
Because 1s Neg participate competition, therefore 1s Neg come
"Because I am not participating in the competition so, I will not come"

虽 然。。。但 是。。。
Suī rán dàn shì
"Although… yet…"

13) a) *虽然 他　　迟到，他　　还是 考 考试
Suīrán tā chídào, tā háishi kǎo kǎoshì
Although 3(s)(m) late, 3(s)(m) still examine examination

b) 虽然　　他　　迟到，但是 还是 考 考试
Suīrán tā chídào, dànshì háishi kǎo kǎoshì
Although 3(s)(m) late, yet still examine examination
"Although he was late, he still wrote the examination"

In examples (13a – 14a), the conjunctions were used inappropriately. Learners used the first part of the conjunctions 因为 Yīn wèi - 'because' and 虽然 Suī rán – 'although' without the completing part of them thereby rendering the generated sentences ungrammatical. The correct usage is shown as used in the examples (13b – 14b). In Chinese, these conjunctions must be used in pairs.

4.4　Overgeneralization

In Chinese, some adverbs can function in place of verbs in the predicate position whereas in Igbo such occurrences are rare. In place of verbs, qualifiers are positioned before the adverbs such as hén 很 - 'very, quite', fēicháng 非常 – 'extremely'. But it is often noted that Igbo learners usually insert the verb 'to be' before such adjectives. In place of gradable adjectives, students have also been noted to use double adjectives which become ungrammatical in Chinese. Instances of such are found below:

14) a) *她　是漂亮
Ta shì piàoliang
3(s)(f) be beautiful

b) 她　　很漂 亮
Ta hěn piàoliang
3(s)(f) very beautiful
"She is very beautiful"

15) a *她　的 头发是 很 长
Tā de tóufa shì hěn cháng
3(s)(f) Poss hair be very long

b) 她 的　头发 很 长
Tā de tóufa hěn cháng
3(s)(f) Poss hair very long
"Her hair is very long"

16)   a) *中国菜是 好 吃   b) 中国菜   很   好 吃
          Zhōng guó cài shì hǎo chī   Zhōng guó   cài hěn hǎo chī
          Middle country dish is good food   Middle country dish very good food
                                               "Chinese dish is delicious"

17)   a) *她 非常   很   漂亮   b) 她 非常 漂亮
          Tā fēicháng   hěn piàoliang   Tā fēicháng piàoliang
          3(s)(f) extremely very beautiful   3(s)(f) extremely beautiful
                                               "She is extremely beautiful"

Examples (15a – 18a) show situations where students insert the verb "to be" in order
to express the functions of the adjectives. This runs contrary to the grammatical
sentences in examples (15b – 18b). It is a case of transfer from what is obtained in the
students' L1. In Igbo, verbs precede the adjectives. For the gradable adjective in
example 18a, in order to express this, students resorted to use two different adjectives
which results to ungrammaticality as is seen in 18b.

Use of Negative markers
Negation in Chinese is another area where these L2 learners of Chinese have been
noted to generate erroneous constructions. The negation particles; bù 不 and méi (yǒu)
没 (有) are discussed here. The students were asked to translate the following; habitual,
on-going and intention sentences into Chinese.

18)   a) *她 在家 没 看 书, 只 看 电 视。
            Tā   zài jái   méi kàn shū, zhī kàn diàn shì
            3(s)(f) at home Neg see book, only see electric-view

         b)   她   在家 不 看 书, 只 看 电 视
            Tā   zài jái   bù kàn shū, zhī kàn diàn shì
            3(s)(f) at home Neg see book, only see electric-view
            'At home, she does not read but only watches television

19)   a)   *她   没 在 图书馆   看 书, 她   在 哪里工作。
            Tā   méi zài túshūguǎn kàn shū, tā   zài nǎlǐ gōng zuò
            3(s)(f) Neg at   library   see book, 3(s)(f) at Det   work

      b) 她   不 在 图书馆   看 书, 她   在 哪里工作
            Tā   bù zài túshūguǎn kàn shū, tā   zài nǎlǐ gōng zuò
            3(s)(f) Neg at library see book, 3(s)(f) at Det work
            She is not reading in the library but is working there

20)   a) *我 没 有 来。   b)   我 不 能 来。
            Wǒ méi yǒu lái.   Wǒ bù néng lái.
            1(s) Neg have come   1(s) Neg can come
                                         "I would not come."

21) a) *她 昨天 不 来。   b) 她 昨天 没 来。
        Tā   zuó tiān bù lái.   Tā   zuó tiān méi lái.
        3(s)(f) yesterday Neg come   3(s)(f) yesterday Neg come
                                                      "He did not come yesterday."

22) a) *我 不 有 钱 用。   b) 我 没 有 钱 用。
        Wǒ bù yǒu qiān yòng.   Wǒ méi yǒu qiān yòng.
        1(s) Neg have money use   1(s) Neg have money use
                                                      "I did not have money to use."

23) a) *我 不 有 空   b) 我 没 有 空
        Wǒ bù yǒu kòng   Wǒ méi yǒu kòng
        I(s) Neg have freetime   I(s) Neg have freetime
                                                      "I am not available."

Examples (19a – 22a) show instances of wrong negation. The students' L1 knowledge was erroneously transferred to Chinese and these generated ungrammatical sentences as can be seen when contrasted with their counterparts in examples (19b – 22b). The negative marker suffix -ghị in Igbo and 'not' in English can be used with the verbs in the present as well as past. But contrary to this fact, in Chinese 不 'bù' is association with the present while 没'méi' is associated with past events.

In examples (23a – 24a), we can see 不 'bù' used with 有 'yǒu' which has rendered the sentences ungrammatical. This is the only verb that cannot be used with 不 'bù', it is only associated with 没 méi as can be seen in the examples (23b - 24b).

5.0   Summary

The study analyzed the erroneous constructions of L2 learners of Chinese as necessitated by interlanguage. It focused on the syntactic errors that occurred as a result of omission, insertion, misordering and overgeneralization. These syntactic errors were associated with the use of null subjects, word order (time reference, use of adjectives, measure words and conjunctions) and the use of negative markers. The goal was to determine how the L2 learners of Chinese deal with the language differences that necessitate erroneous transfers at the beginner levels of HSK 1 and 2. These learners were found to depend on the creation of an interlanguage to navigate through their learning challenges especially at the beginner levels. This however, did not yield a complete solution to their problems as some of sentences generated resulted to ungrammaticality. With the use of EA, errors were identified and so the pedagogical implication is for teachers and students to be aware of these areas, seek measures to avoid this sort of error in order to facilitate the learning process.

5.1   Conclusion

Error Analysis is a great tool for the foreign language teachers as it provides needed information on learners' performance. Information provided on students' errors guide the teachers on the best approach to correct students' errors, thereby improving their teaching methodology. Error Analysis helps to identify strategies which learners use

in language learning, track causes of errors, obtain information on common difficulties in language learning and insight on how to prepare teaching materials. Teachers and students are encouraged to note these erroneous areas necessitated by interlanguage. Considerable attention therefore is demanded from the learners in order to ensure a smooth learning especially at the beginner levels of HSK 1 and 2. Further studies are encouraged in other areas of the language such as phonology, morphology and semantics for better understanding.

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