

Chinese Character Errors from Learners of Chinese as a Second Language

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the cognitive development of Chinese orthography between learners of Chinese as a second language (CSL) and native Chinese (NC) learners in Taiwan by assessing their traditional Chinese (繁體中文) wrongly-written characters (CWWC). The patterns of CWWC were observed under the paradigm of the orthographic effects (Just & Carpenter, 1987; Liu, 1984; Zhu & Taft 1994) including the stroke effect, component effect, and structure effect (the position of the component). In this study, there were forty-eight participants, including twenty-four CSL learners in Taiwan and twenty-four third-grade students from an elementary school in central Taiwan. They undertook a paper-and-pencil test of seventy-six Chinese characters selected from the CSL and NC learners' textbooks. By employing error analysis, the participants' errors were collected, and the error frequency was calculated. The results firstly demonstrated that both CSL and NC learners experienced difficulties in the stroke and component of Chinese orthography. This implies their vital roles in Chinese character learning. Secondly, CSL learners' stroke and component errors were statistically significant higher than NC learners'. This suggests that CSL learners did not relate a newly learned character to a meaning so that it can not be retained in the long-term memory. Besides, CSL learners may ignore the process of practice. CSL learners' structure error was not statistically higher than NC learners'; however, it was statistically less than either the stroke or component error. This implies that the awareness of Chinese character formation rules is acquired more efficiently than that of grapheme. Thirdly, error patterns in terms of stroke, component, and structure between the two groups were not statistically different. However, when radicals, instead of components, were examined, error patterns differed statistically significantly between the two groups. One possible explanation is that radical awareness from CSL learners is not fully developed.

Keywords : CSL learners ; NC learners ; Chinese wrongly-written character ; radical awareness

Table of Contents

Table of Contents Abstract.....	iv	Chinese Abstract	vi	Acknowledgement	vii
Table of Contents	viii	List of Figures.....	xi	List of Tables	xii
Chapter I Introduction	1	1.1 Background and Motivation	1	1.2 Purpose and Research Questions	4
1.3 Significance of The Study.....	4	1.4 Organization	5	Chapter II Literature Review	6
2.1 The Primary Research	6	2.1.1 Features of Chinese Characters	6	(A) The Stroke	7
(B) The Radical and the Component	9	(C) The Structure	12	2.1.2 Cognitive Theory: Memory, Mental Lexicon, and Metalinguistic Awareness	14
(A) Memory	14	(B) Mental Lexicon	16	(C) Metalinguistic Awareness	18
(D) The Model of Word Recognition.....	19	2.2 Previous Study	21	2.2.1 The Study on the Effect of Teaching Methods on Chinese Characters: Wang (2000).....	21
2.2.2 The Study of Cognitive Development on Chinese Characters:Yeh, Lin and Li (2004)	24	2.2.3 The Study of Chinese Wrongly-Written Characters for CSL Learners:Ye (1986) ...	27	2.3 Conclusion.....	30
Chapter III Methodology	32	3.1 Hypothesis	32	3.2 Research Design	32
3.3 Participants	33	3.4 Material: Selected Characters	34	3.5 Data Collection	36
3.5.1 Error Analysis	36	3.5.2 Criteria of Identification on Wrongly- written Characters	37	3.5.3 The Raters	37
3.6 Data Analysis	38	3.7 Procedure	39	3.8 The Pilot Study	40
3.9 Conclusion	42	Chapter IV Report of the Results	42	4.1 Error Frequency and Orthographic Features .	43
4.2 Error Patterns for CSL and NC Groups.....	46	4.3 Orthographic Errors.....	48	(A) Stroke Error	49
(B) Component Error	50	4.4 Conclusion	52	Chapter V Discussion and Conclusion	53
5.1 Discussion	53	5.1.1 Frequency of Chinese Wrongly-written Characters.....	53	5.1.2 Pattern of Chinese Wrongly-written Characters: Stroke-component-structure vs. Stroke-radical-structure	56
5.1.3 Item Analysis	56	(A) Stroke Error	58	(B) Component Error	60
(C) Structure Error	61	5.2 Summary of the Study	61	5.3 Limitation	62
5.4 Implication	64	5.5 Suggestions for Further Study	65	References	67
Appendix A The Selected					

Characters in Yeh ' s Study.....	74
Appendix B The Result of the Cluster Analysis of the First Grade Students	75
Appendix C Test of Chinese Characters (English) 77	77
Appendix D Test of Chinese Character (Chinese). 81	81
Appendix E Questionnaire.....	83
Appendix F The Result of the Questionnaire	84

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