A Case Study of L1 Interference in Speech Acts among Chinese L2 Students

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ABSTRACT

Improving linguistic and communicative competence will minimise challenges faced in Intercultural communication especially with globalisation and technology advancement. The study aimed at identifying potential areas of L1 interference in speech production relating to five speech acts: compliments, requests, refusals, apologies, and complaints. The L1 interference is examined based on four approaches which are Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Interlanguage Analysis, and Contrastive Rhetoric. Data was collected through a discourse completion task comprising five speech acts: compliments, requests, refusals, apologies, and complaints, and an interview to find out students' reasons for committing L1 interferences. The findings revealed lexical, discourse and syntactic interferences in the students' speech where students faced difficulties in understanding the different semantic systems between Chinese and English, were influenced by cultural knowledge and transferred linguistic rules from their L1 to the L2. The main reasons for these interferences were lack of opportunities for practice and limited vocabulary repertoire. Therefore, it is important to develop ways to improve linguistic and communicative competence to minimise misunderstanding and awkward sentences in speech communication.

Keywords: L1 interference; Chinese students; L2 students; speech acts; communicative competence

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication (ICC) has long been an area that is widely researched due to globalisation. This is because world travel has become more accessible due to budget airlines and opportunities for education outside one's country. This can especially be seen by the influx of students from various parts of China who come to Malaysia in pursuit of higher education. Hence, ICC plays a very important role especially when these students encounter people from various backgrounds and culture. For these Chinese students, the English language is mainly used as the medium of academic communication and instruction in Malaysia whereby their class discussions, presentations and assignments, to mention a few, are conducted in the English language. However, in the process of L2 speech production, it has been observed that Chinese students often make language errors due to L1 interference (Dipolog-Ubanan 2016). The native language structures of L2 learners influence their production and development of spoken English (Hashim 1999). This means that although the English language sentences produced by L2 learners may contain correct grammar structures, appropriate vocabulary items and content, they could still be incorrectly arranged and awkward. For example, "You please can help me?" where the second person pronoun is placed first in a request because that structure is common in the L1. Hence, the L2 learner's grammatical competence does not necessarily mean that they are successful in selecting appropriate utterances that are relevant to real communicative situations (Al-Ghamdi, Almansoob & Alrefaee 2019). There is still a certain degree of cross-linguistic language interference from their L1 whereby the same linguistic rules and structures from the Chinese language have been applied to the English language (Timina 2013). This is because the L2 speech produced makes more sense in the L2 learner's native language when directly translated from their L1 to their L2. It is therefore

important to identify how the various L1 elements influence the production of L2 learners' speech and the extent of its influence.

L1 interference in L2 speech is common among English language learners in China, causing communication strain for them. One contributing factor is because the English language that is taught in classrooms focuses on memorising grammatical rules and vocabulary, textbook exercises and reading skills (Ye 2013). More emphasis is placed on learning English language forms and functions, but there is a lack of practice in real life contexts where the memorised language rules may not surface in spontaneous communicative speech. Therefore, the students may seem to have mastered the English language in terms of obtaining high scores in their English language exams but are unable to speak English effectively (Dipolog-Ubanan 2016). Additionally, a number of Chinese students lack opportunities to explore English-speaking contexts in China leading to minimal exposure and practise. Hence, after completing their high school and furthering their studies in Malaysia, they carry over their cognitive processes and transfer the linguistic rules from their Chinese language into the English language during communication (Zou 2013). This results in incorrect grammatical structures, awkward vocabulary and even the loss of intended meaning in the speech produced because it is mainly translated from their native language. For example, when the Chinese send-off guests, they would say "再见，慢走" (zai jian, man zhou) but when produced in the English language, they may say "Goodbye, slowly walk". Therefore, even students with adequate linguistic knowledge may still commit errors when communicating with foreigners in real-life situations (Ji 2008).

There are two types of errors normally committed by the second language learners, which are interlingual and intralingual errors, (Manan & Raslee 2017). Interlingual errors are caused by L1 interference, for example, using inappropriate vocabulary which has similar meaning in the L1 but have different connotations in the L2 ("My sickness was very heavy"). While intralingual errors are caused by the difficulty of acquiring the language being learned, for instance, being confused with subject-verb agreement ("She have a cat") (Hourani 2008).

Researchers who have studied language learners' ability to perform speech acts identify L2 proficiency as one of the factors which influence their ability, which may give information concerning pragmatic developmental patterns (Kim 2000; Li, Suleiman & Sazalie 2015). Therefore, if the speaker is able to get their intended message across with minimal L1 interference and without causing misunderstanding, this would mean successful communication.

In Malaysia, no studies have so far highlighted issues which combine both L1 interference with the speech acts of Chinese students. All studies on L1 interference in Malaysia focused either only on writing proficiencies (Siti Hamin Stapa & Mohd Mustafa Izahar 2010, Chen & Li 2016; Darus & Subramanian 2009, Dipolog-Ubanan 2016, Zou 2013) or solely on speech acts (Farnia & Wu 2012; Zhao & Mohd Nor 2016). Hence, this study is significant because it combined both of these elements. The objectives of the study aimed at identifying potential areas of L1 interference in speech production relating to five speech acts: compliments, requests, refusals, apologies, and complaints. Speech acts were chosen as a point of analysis for L1 interference because they also caused problems in communication. There has been great consensus among second language learner acquisition (SLA) scholars that lack of L2 pragmatic competence in speech acts can lead to communication breakdown for students besides writing (Al-Ghamdi, Almansoob & Alrefaee 2019).

The speech acts were analysed in terms of syntactic, lexical and discourse features which are based on four approaches relating to L1 interference which are Contrastive Analysis (CA), Error Analysis (EA), Interlanguage Analysis (IA), and Contrastive Rhetoric (CR). Additionally, contributing factors to these interferences among the mainland Chinese students in Malaysia were investigated. The findings of the study are significant in order to understand

the problem areas relating L1 interference in speech. These can cause miscommunication and misunderstanding between native and L2 speakers. If not addressed, communication problems may then lead to relationship strains. By identifying the potential problems that arise from L1 interference, it is hoped that specific problematic areas could be targeted and resolved. The findings of this study could also be used by ESL educators to seek effective methods and possible solutions to deal with the problem areas of L1 interference in speech.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Initially, studies on L1 interference in second language acquisition (SLA) was developed from Contrastive Analysis (CA). This was a traditional approach which was widely practiced in the 1950s and 1960s where it focuses on the comparison of the linguistic systems of the two languages, especially the sound and grammar systems of L1 and L2 and attempts to predict errors and areas of difficulty in L2 acquisition due to the native language (Richards & Schmidt 2002). From there CA seeks to find solutions to interference problems by improving on second language instruction. However, it was found that the error predictions from Contrastive Analysis were not often consistent with the L2 learners' performance as not all differences between the L1 and L2 caused difficulties in L2 acquisition. At the same time, other difficulties in L2 acquisition were not only caused by the L1 and L2 differences (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005). There were also other factors such as the complexity of L2 structures. Therefore, in the 1960s, Error Analysis (EA) was developed as an analytical approach in identifying L2 errors rather than predicting them. It was found that these errors were not random but systematic in nature, according to the various stages of L2 acquisition (Corder 1981). Richards and Schmidt (2002) classified the errors as overgeneralizations (errors caused by extension of target language rules to inappropriate contexts), simplifications (errors resulting from learners producing simpler linguistic rules than those found in the target language), developmental (errors from natural stages of development, communication-based (errors resulting from the use of communication strategies, induced (errors resulting from transfer of training), avoidance (caused by failure to use target language structures since they are thought to be too difficult), and overproduction (errors in structures being used too frequently).

Nevertheless, Error Analysis was limited only to errors and therefore was supplemented with Interlanguage Analysis (IA) which refers to the type of language produced by L2 learners in the process of learning the target language. Selinker (1972:214) described interlanguage as 'a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a TL (Target Language) norm'. This means that the analysis of the interlanguage system involves different processes such as i) borrowing patterns from the native language, ii) extending patterns from the target language, e.g. analogy, and iii) expressing meanings using the words and grammar which are already known (Richards and Schmidt, 2002).

While contrastive analysis, error analysis and interlanguage analysis view L2 learners' native language as a negative interference, Krashen's monitor model (1977) suggested that the native language does not necessarily have a negative influence on second language acquisition but rather a positive interference. The model looks at the similarities of the native and second language features and the extent of the native language support to learning second language. From this, Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) was developed to compare 'discourse structures across cultures and genres' as found in Kaplan's pioneering study (1966). The CR concept studies the similarities and differences between discourse in the L1 and L2 in order to understand how one language influences the other.

The study of CR is related to many other theories such as theories of linguistic relativity, rhetoric, text linguistics, discourse types and genres, literacy, and translation (Connor 2002) but this study employs the theory of applied linguistics, which focuses on L1 patterns which are transferred into L2 speech. This study combines Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis and Interlanguage Analysis to identify patterns of L1 interference at the lexical and sentential levels of the Chinese students' L2 speech acts and the Contrastive Rhetoric approach is used to analyse rhetorical, stylistic and cultural patterns of the speech discourse. These theories were used as the foundation of this study and investigated according to five speech acts which were compliments, requests, refusals, apologies and complaints.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects involved in this study were 6 mainland Chinese students (labelled as S1 to S6) aged 21 to 25 years who were selected through snowball sampling. This sampling method was used because suitable participants with L1 interference problems in speech would be more easily identified through their contacts and similar circles. These participants came from six different private universities in Malaysia and were currently pursuing different disciplines including Masters in Business Administration, Bachelors in Logistic Management, Accounting Finance, Education and English language Communication, and Music. They had passed with minimal scores in various English language tests before commencing their post-graduate studies, and have resided in Malaysia for at least 3 years.

Data was collected in 2 phases. Phase 1 involved a verbal discourse completion task whereas Phase 2 involved a follow-up interview conducted with reference to Phase 1's responses shown to the students for recall. The focus of Phase 1 was solely on collecting speech data based on the students' responses to the questions asked. These questions were designed and adapted from Feng (2009) and they were based on five speech acts: compliments, requests, refusals, apologies and complaints. The students' responses were used to determine the extent of L1 interference with regards to their communicative competence. Table 1 lists the questions that were designed.

TABLE 1. Phase 1 Questions Based on Speech Acts

Speech Acts	Questions
COMPLIMENTS	*Question 1:* "A foreign visitor talked with you one day and said that your English was quite fluent. How would you have replied him/her?" *Question 2:* "Mrs. Brown, in her forties, came to the lecture hall wearing a new beautiful dress, and you complimented her. How would you have said this?"
REQUESTS	*Question 3:* "Patrick was sitting in the car with you and some friends. He had just asked if anyone minded him smoking. You were allergic to cigarette smoke. What would you have said to him?" *Question 4:* "If someone gave you directions in English so quickly that you did not understand, what would you have said?"
REFUSALS	*Question 5:* "You have been asked to go out for a dinner but you did not want to go with the person who had invited you, what would you have said?" *Question 6:* "Your friend's mother, Mrs. Loo, asked if you would like something to eat. How would you have politely refused?"
APOLOGIES	*Question 7:* "How would you have expressed your apologies for failing to keep an appointment with a friend?" *Question 8:* "You have received a warning for missing lectures three times. How would you have explained your situation?"
COMPLAINTS	*Question 9:* "Supposed you were studying for your exam in the library and two other students, who were sitting nearby, started talking loudly and you got disturbed. What would you have said to them?" *Question 10:* "You were in a bank, queuing to deposit some money. Suddenly a guy jumped the queue and stood in front of you. What would you have said to him?"

Phase 2 on the other hand, focused on the students' reasons for constructing such responses in the discourse completion task in Phase 1. Both these phases of data collection were conducted on one-to-one basis.

The complete data was then organised based on the speech acts and analysed based on L1 interference approaches which were Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Interlanguage Analysis, and Contrastive Rhetoric in order to identify potential problems due to L1 interference and how cross-linguistic language transfers influence the students' spoken English. These transcribed responses were left unedited in this paper in order to capture the students' actual spoken discourse. The analysed data was also further verified by an expert in English and Mandarin.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis from the students' responses to the discourse completion tasks reveal three major types of L1 interference in their L2 which are at the lexical, syntactic and discourse level.

L1 LEXICAL INTERFERENCE (DIRECT TRANSLATION)

Lexical interference in this study refers to the direct translation of words or sentences from the Chinese language to English. In this study, it was found that this kind of interference occurred the most compared to syntactic and discourse interferences in the speech context. In contrast to writing tasks, most interferences in L2 writing were more syntactic in nature (Bennui 2008, Chen and Li 2016, Dipolog-Ubanan 2016). This was perhaps due to the fact that while speaking, L2 speakers were required to produce L2 speech promptly and spontaneously and hence needed to produce sentences in a short frame of time. Therefore, the available time to process correct forms of L2 words and sentences was more limited compared to the writing process, whereby the written product which could be edited and re-written. Therefore, language interference from L1 occurred more often in L2 speech production. Hermans et al. (1998) confirmed that L2 speakers tend to struggle in supressing activation from the L1 when referring to meaning in the L2.

For example, in order to ask someone to repeat, S2 responded with "Can trouble you say again?" which is actually a direct translation from Chinese which would be, "Kěyǐ (can) máfan(trouble) nǐ(you) zài(again) jiǎng(say) yībiàn(one more) ma (可以麻烦你再讲一遍吗?)". "Trouble you" is a common language style used in Chinese speech when making requests.

Then, there were also other direct translation of words which may cause misunderstanding on the part of the hearer. Here, S6 apologised by saying "Sorry, teacher, I was sick before. It is very *heavy*, so I missed class." Besides, errors in tenses, S6 translated the Chinese word "zhòng(重)" to "heavy" which was the most direct and simplest translation. The more accurate one would be "serious" when referring to illnesses. S4's request in asking the other person to repeat, "I cannot *catch* you, can you speak slowly?" also demonstrated a direct translation from "Wǒ (I) bùnéng (cannot) *zhuā (catch)* dào nǐ(you), nǐ(you) kěyǐ(can) jiǎng(speak) màn (slowly) diǎn(a little) ma (我不能抓到你，你可以讲慢点吗?", could have been represented better if "catch" (*zhuā*) was replaced with "get" or followed with "*catch* what you are saying". S1 and S2 also made the same errors in their requests in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Examples of Lexical Interference

S1: please would you *reduce* your voice? S2: can you *slow* down your voice?	Instead of using "lower down your voice" or "soften", S1 and S2 directly translated "jiǎn dī nǐ de shēng liàng (减低你的声量)" to *slow* and *reduce* which in English describes the speed of speech rather than its volume.
S1: Sorry, I *slept* again.	S1 probably wanted to indicate that he/she *overslept* rather than just *slept* but there is no one word for "oversleep" in Chinese, only shuì guòtóu(睡过头). Therefore, S1 might not have known the word "overslept" if his/her vocabulary repertoire was limited.

Table 2 demonstrates students' unawareness to differing semantic denotations from both English and Chinese words, though the literal translation may mean the same (Dipolog-Ubanan 2016). Lexical interference is related to aspects of Contrastive Analysis (CA) where direct translations happen due to students' inadequate understanding of the semantic systems which differ in Chinese and English languages. Therefore, attempts were made to directly translate Chinese words into English without taking into consideration the differences in word meanings and usage.

L1 DISCOURSE INTERFERENCE

Besides the lexical interference causing direct translation of Chinese words into English, the students were also affected by their cultural knowledge which in turn affect their language styles in the English language speech.

In Chinese speech, it is common to be repetitive with the same words in order to emphasise a point and this style of interference is also seen with S2 while expressing refusal, "*No, no*, thanks, aunt, in fact, I not hungry." and a compliment, "*No, No*. Just *so so*, I learn English long time." Besides rejecting the compliment, S2 has displayed a common kind of humility usually present in the Chinese culture. It was often considered proud to directly accept compliments and therefore, a typical Chinese would reject or provide an explanation for it. This cultural interference can also be observed in S4's reply, "Thank you, not very good, just a little."

Similarly, it is considered rude in the Chinese culture if one were to engage in direct confrontation with another person in any matter. Hence, most Chinese would soften their speech with an indirect explanation first before addressing the matter. Therefore, although a student may have language competency, they may still deviate from being socially and pragmatically appropriate due to assimilation of cultural patterns and behavioural norms (Al-Ghamdi, Almansoob & Alrefaee 2019). Here, S1 intended to reject a meal but softened it by complimenting the food before rejecting the offer, "Wow, *it seems delicious,* but I just had dinner." In another case, S1 indirectly rejected an invitation with an excuse and without saying "no" to avoid confrontation, "I not sure, maybe I have something that." It can also be observed that the Chinese are careful when it comes to offence. S1's indirect reply reflects the fear of offending the other person. This is similar to S2's request to ask someone not to smoke, "Cannot stop it? *Maybe* it is not good." Instead of giving a direct order, it was turned into a question with a suggestion in order to avoid confrontation and offence.

In requesting for a person to repeat, even S2 says "Can *trouble you* say again?" instead of directly asking one to repeat for fear of offending the other person. "Trouble you" or "máfan nǐ (麻烦你)" is a common way used by speakers of the Chinese language when making requests to someone.

Based on Contrastive Rhetoric, it is observed the Chinese discourse style was adapted into the students' L2 speech. Although grammatically incorrect, this could be considered as a favourable positive interference because it exhibited politeness from the students' cultural background.

L1 SYNTACTIC INTERFERENCE

WORD FORM AND WORD CHOICE

Syntactic interference was another common form of interference which caused grammatical and structural errors in the English language. The most common could be seen in word choice and word form. Shi (2015) terms this as a negative interference of meaning where the speaker assumes that the translation for similar items in both languages exist as pairs. However, this is not the case because no two languages are symmetrical in nature. For example, the word "bù (不)" in Chinese is translated as "no" in English. Whereas "bù (不)" is generally used for all sentences to indicate the negative in Chinese, in English, it has two forms, "no" and "not". Therefore, students have difficulty using both English forms appropriately as in the case of S4, "Thank you, *no* very good, just a little." This same difficulty is also seen with the personal pronoun, "wǒ (我)" which refers to both "I" and "me" in English as seen from S2, "Hey, *me* come first, please be careful". Hence, students often made mistakes when it came to words which have a few forms in the English language but only one form in Chinese. This is a form of error based on the aspect of Error Analysis, in which the English translation of the Chinese words get simplified across all forms of sentence usage.

Besides, data from this study also pointed out that students were confused in the usage of various word classes in English. This meant that the noun, gerund, verb and adverb forms are used interchangeably and this very much resulted in incorrect sentence structures. Table 3 shows examples of how both S4 and S6 wrongly used the various forms of the word "date".

TABLE 3. Examples of Interference in Word Class

S4: Sorry, I already have a *dating*.	Confusion with noun form and gerund form
S6: Sorry, I have something to do, can we *date* next time?	Incorrectly using the noun form as a verb. The correct sentence should be "can we *go on a date* next time?"
S5: Sorry, would you mind *speak* again? S5: Excuse me, would you mind *queue* please?	In these two contexts, the verb was supposed to function as gerund where the correct form would be "speaking" and "queuing".

Additionally, due to the spontaneity that comes with speech, students tend to create inappropriate collocations because they thought they could also be used in the same way in the L2 (Shi 2015). Table 4 demonstrates some of these collocations.

TABLE 4. Examples of Interference in Word Choice

S2: Hey, me come first, *please be careful*	S2 meant to give a warning, "You better be careful", Nǐ zuì hǎo xiǎoxīn diǎn (你最好小心点) but due to the collocation, the sentence did not give off a warning effect.
S1: Hey, don't jump the *fence*.	Inappropriate translation to the English phrase "jump the queue". Perhaps S1 wanted to mean "line" but said "fence" instead.
S3: You can *do* first, no problem.	In a queue, one usually says "you can *go* first". But the Chinese usually use "do"-"zuò(做) instead of go "zǒu (走)"which in turn sounds awkward in Chinese.
S2: Sorry, teacher, It was *too much* traffic jam.	S2 meant to say "there was a *very bad* traffic jam" with "too many cars" and hence created this collocation as a result.
S1: Please no smoking in the indoor, is danger for our *breath* or health.	S1 was probably referring to "lungs" used for breathing but due to perhaps, limited vocabulary knowledge and speech spontaneity, it was referred to as "breath" instead.
S4: Excuse me, I *have* sensitive to cigarette.	There was an overgeneralisation of using the verb to-be "have" to indicate a condition instead of "am".
S3: Sorry, sir, I got fever *during* several days. It won't happen again.	Misused prepositions "for several days"

The errors in translating and selecting appropriate English words for proper use was probably due to inadequate exposure to Contrastive Analysis in the second language acquisition process. Without the knowledge and practice, students would be unable to compare and contrast the differences between the vocabulary aspects between the Chinese and English words. Therefore, students need to be given detailed insights into the comparative and contrastive aspects between the Chinese and English words to minimise these interference errors.

TENSES

There are no tenses in the Chinese language. This is because, in the construction of Chinese phrases, time adverbs are included in the sentences and they are used to represent the time of when the action takes place (Dipolog-Ubanan 2016). This means that the verbs in the Chinese language stay the same regardless of whether the action takes place in the past, present or future. Hence, this is another major syntactic interference that causes errors in English language usage. Table 5 demonstrates some of the errors in tenses made by the students in this study.

TABLE 5. Examples of Interference in Tenses

S1: Thanks, because I have *learn* English for 4 years. S5: Thanks, because I already *stay* here for 5 years. S5: I'm already full, I just *eat* the dinner. S5: Sorry. I am late, my mother just *call* me.	In these examples, the students failed to change to the verbs to the present participle forms but retained the base verb forms in the sentences instead.
S4: I*'m* sick for several days, sorry. S6: Sorry, teacher, I was sick before, It *is* very heavy, so I missed class. S2: Sorry, it *is* too late.	S4 retained the present tense of the be verb "am" and "is" instead of using "I *was*". S6 managed to use the tense correctly in the first part of the sentence but the L1 tense structure interfered in the second part of the sentence.

The students' inability to change the English verbs to its appropriate forms of tenses was due to failure in Contrastive Analysis during the second language acquisition process. Students were unable to grasp the rules related to verb tenses. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Interlanguage patterns (patterns transferred from the L1) could be seen when the students attempted to use English time markers in their sentences which were similar to Chinese such as *already* ("yǐjīng- 已经) and *just* (kānghào- 康浩). Here, the students were able to transfer them appropriately, just as how it should appear in an English sentence rather than choosing to omit them due to challenges in remembering the sentence patterns correctly.

OMISSION AND INSERTION

It was observed that quite a number of omissions and additions occurred in the L2 speech of a Chinese speaker as well. These omissions mainly affect articles, prepositions, verbs-to-be and even pronouns. Sometimes, unnecessary lexical insertions were also added into their sentences. For example, in the sentence, "Please no smoking *in the* indoor, ^ is danger for our breath or health", S1 inserted the preposition "in" which was not necessary in this case because a preposition is only used when indicating a temporal, spatial or logical relationship and not to be used when the meaning is already clear without inserting them. "Indoor" had clearly indicated a location and hence, no extra preposition was needed. A definite article "the" was also inserted before "indoor" when a zero article was needed. Hence, students were unaware of rule restrictions when it comes to various conditions requiring the use of different articles or zero articles.

The accurate usage of articles is tricky because although the Chinese language has words to refer to singular items such as "yī zhǐ (一只)" and "yīgè (一个)" which is equivalent

to the indefinite article "a" in English, these "Chinese articles" however are only used for singular, countable nouns unlike the English language which has certain rule for usage. The use of the indefinite English articles "a", "an" and the definite article "the" depends on the number referred to in the noun, whether the noun's first sound is a consonant or a vowel and also if the noun was referred to for the first time in a sentence or at a subsequent time. Additionally, certain uncountable nouns do not require articles. This confusion is displayed in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Examples of Article Omission and Insertion

S1: This is ^ accident, sorry. S5: Sorry, because I was sick. I can give you ^ MC later.	These examples show that the article "an" was omitted, before "accident" and "MC".
S6: Hi, can you guys ^ quiet please? This is ^ library.	The verb "be" and article "a" was omitted. The right sentence should be "Hi, can you guys *be* quiet please? This is *a* library."
S5: Excuse me, this is ^ library, we need ^ quiet environment, you can discuss in the discussion room.	Again, the article "a" was omitted both before "library" and "quiet environment". This was probably because the student may have assumed that they were already in the library so an article was unnecessary.
S5: Would you mind smoking *at* outside of ^ car? Because I am allergic to smoke.	The definite article "the" was omitted before "car". Here, an unnecessary insertion of a preposition "at" was also added because in the Chinese language, "at" (cai) is usually inserted before a location to indicate where the verb is taking place.

Table 7 illustrates examples of omissions with prepositions. This was probably due to the absence of prepositions in the Chinese language.

TABLE 7. Examples of Preposition Omission

S2: No, No. Just so so, I learn English ^ ^ long time.	Omission of preposition "for" and article "a".
S2: Sorry. I go ^ other date. Next time lo.	Omission of preposition "with"..
S6: Can you go out ^ smoke? S3: If possible, I would like you not ^ *smoking.*	Omission of preposition "to".

Apart from the above, other omissions such as pronouns are displayed in Table 8. Based on Error Analysis, this was probably due to overgeneralisation and simplification where the students probably thought that since the pronoun "I" had already been mentioned earlier in the sentence, it was appropriate to omit it in the subsequent phrases in case they were considered redundant. This case is similar with other pronouns.

TABLE 8. Examples of Other Types of Omission in Sentences

S6: Sorry, my dear. I'm late. I promise next time ^ will be on time.	Omission of pronoun "I".
S1: This dress is yours, ^ ^so beautiful	Omission of pronoun "it" and be verb "is"
S4: I ^ full already, thank you. S2: No, no, thanks, aunt, in fact, I ^ not hungry. S1: I ^ not sure, maybe I have something that. S4: I ^ full already, thank you.	Omission of linking verb be (am).
S6: Can you go out ^ smoke? S3: If possible, I would like you not ^ *smoking.*	Omission of infinitive "to".

Again, focus on Contrastive Analysis would be helpful in addressing this form of interference. At the same time, in aspects of Error Analysis, students demonstrated overgeneralisation errors and therefore, dealing with this issue would involve encouraging extensive input of the English language through reading materials and listening media in order to help students familiarise with correct usage in all contexts rather than to overgeneralise.

SYNTACTIC AND STRUCTURAL ERRORS

Syntactic and structural errors were also found in the students' speech. These mainly involve comma splice or run-on sentences. This basically means that students used commas to splice independent clauses instead of using conjunctions or string together a series of independent clauses using conjunctions which results in run-on sentences. Table 9 demonstrates some of these errors.

TABLE 9. Examples of Comma Splice

S6: Because I always communicate with my friend, then practice my English, so can faster improve my English.
S6: Hi, Ms., you are so pretty today, and I like your dress, very beautiful.
S6: Sorry, before I had eaten something and so full, but it is so nice the food, can I eat later?
S3: Please speak a little bit slow, I did not hear clearly.

Error analysis reveal that the errors were cause by different organisational structures between the Chinese and the English language. Most of the time, negative interference happens when students bring over structures from their L1 into their L2 speech. These kind of errors are even more pronounced in speech production because speakers tend to focus more on the meaning they want to get across rather than the presentation of the sentence. Here, S3 meant to say "Sorry, an emergency just happened." but the interference resulted in "Sorry, just happen emergency." which was similar to the Chinese sentence order "Gāng fāshēng jǐnjí qíngkuàng (刚发生紧急情况)".

REASONS FOR PERSISTENT L1 INTERFERENCE IN SPEECH

The students revealed that even though they have resided in Malaysia for at least 3 years are studying their courses in the English language, they still lacked opportunities to communicate with other foreign students and lecturers during and outside of class time. Hence, they are limited in terms of practice as they do not often converse in the English language. Therefore, it was of no surprise when all the students in this study confessed that they were still unable to use the English language properly even though they had learnt English for more than 8 years and passed English language tests before commencing their post-graduate studies. Nevertheless, all students except S6 indicated that they could at least speak English three times a week when they had classes. Only one student noted that he found writing in English more difficult whereas the other five students found that speaking English was more difficult for them due to spontaneity. They pointed out that although they studied in Malaysia, the surrounding environment did not require them to use English often, so they spoke Chinese almost all of the time.

Besides the spontaneity in speech communication, students also claimed that their limited vocabulary repertoire caused difficulties in communication as they found it a challenge to get their meanings across and may even sometimes cause misunderstanding. S5 said this was because "I will think in Chinese first before I speak English." Therefore, the students sometimes combine their English vocabulary with their L1 grammar, or directly translate phrases which results in awkward and unnatural sounding sentences. This is referred to as "Chinglish", which is a mixture of Chinese and English structures which usually sound ungrammatical and unintelligible to others (Timina 2013). In fact, S2, substantiates this when she revealed that "I have speak English with non-Chinese, most of the time, and we don't really understand each other. Just some easy words they can understand". However, the reverse is also true when the Chinese students find difficulty in comprehending English speech from native speakers. S3 said, "The words they use I also do not understand." and S6 said, "when

chat with native-speaker, their accent is too strong and they often use words which I do not know."

The interviews confirmed that the students rarely had the opportunity to acquire English directly from concrete and social situations. So when they learnt some English expressions, they tended to apply those expressions mechanically.

CONCLUSION

In ICC, the use of the target language requires building a whole new linguistic system, including a new grammar which is different from that of the source language. In this study, findings based on certain aspects of Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Interlanguage Analysis, and Contrastive Rhetoric have identified potential problems due to L1 interference and how cross-linguistic language interference influenced the students' spoken English.

These L1 interferences may have resulted in misunderstanding and frustration for both the speaker and hearer because the direct translations and grammatical errors may convey messages that differ from what the students initially intended to say. Most students in the study had little awareness that their grammatically incorrect or directly translated speech may display an illocutionary force which differs from the speaker's intention. They were unclear about the relationship between the linguistic forms and their communicative functions. For example, S6's apology, "Sorry, teacher, I was sick before, it is very heavy, so I missed class." may have caused misunderstanding due to lexical interference from the direct translation of the word "heavy". What was "heavy" and how does it relate to sickness which happened "before"? A study by Lin and Lin (2019) found that Taiwanese learners of different proficiency levels were found to over-rely on basic meaning of words and lack collocation use. Hence it is proposed learners should be exposed to corpus resources of real world English throughout their EFL education in order to understand the relationship between the linguistic forms and their communicative functions.

Linguistic competency is therefore a very important aspect needed for successful communication. Fisher (1984:35) explained that "linguistic competence may be thought of as the learner's knowledge of the structures and vocabulary of the language and it is his ability to produce and comprehend well-formed sentences in the language." Here, linguistic competence is concerned with the knowledge of the structures of language, such as grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Hence, Fisher (1984) described that in an L2 environment, the students' behaviour is governed by rules, whereby they try to focus on applying rules to produce accurate grammatical forms. Therefore, without linguistic competence, L2 students would not be able to make even a single correct sentence to convey their intentions, and consequently, the hearer would not be able to understand them. Hence, linguistic competence is the basic condition for successful communication. If one cannot express oneself properly and understand the actual intentions of the other party, this means that communication has not been carried out successfully. In order to communicate smoothly, language learners need to improve their linguistic competence and communicative competence.

The findings of this study are significant to provide a deeper awareness of specific L1 interferences that may cause miscommunication and awkwardness in cross-cultural communication. This study can help not only the mainland Chinese students to be more aware of L1 interferences and in turn produce better speech, but also promote more effective communication between mainland Chinese students and other students when interacting in the English language. It also provides a preview to researchers and educators on common instances of L1 interference incidences in speech acts among mainland Chinese students in Malaysia and helps them to understand that there is a need to further explore this area of research especially

in developing effective methods which can improve the linguistic and communicative competence of these students. This may include encouraging thinking habits in English in order that the L2 patterns and organisation process may be internalised and hence avoiding interference altogether.

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