Language Transfer:
From Topic Prominence to Subject Prominence

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Abstract

This paper explores Chinese native language transfer on English second language acquisition (SLA), focusing on Chinese topic prominence (TP) and English subject prominence (SP). The article intends to find out whether Chinese EFL learners will transfer their Chinese topic-prominent constitutions to their English interlanguage and whether transfer will differ at different proficiency levels. 125 participants are involved in three tasks: interpretation, translation and acceptability judgment. The results show that in interpretation and translation tasks, the numbers of TPs decline and even disappear with the increase of the learners' English proficiency; in acceptability judgment task, the learners' awareness of unacceptability and unnaturalness of Chinese TPs in English increases as their English proficiency progresses. Chinese transfer does play an important role in English SLA. Moreover, the study also finds that the results of interpretation and translation tasks are not exactly in accordance with that of acceptability task. In addition, English native speakers seem to be more tolerant with Chinese TP than most Chinese EFL learners.

Keywords: language transfer, topic-prominence, subject-prominence

Abbreviations

AdjP: adjective phrase

AdvP: adverb phrase

CAH: contrastive analysis hypothesis

CCH: creative construction hypothesis

CET: college English test

CD: communicative dynamism

E: elementary

EC: existential construction and indefinite subject

EFL: English as a foreign language

DN: double nominatives

I: intermediate

IP: inflectional phrase

L1: first language

L2: second language

MDH: markedness differential hypothesis

NL: native language

NP: noun phrase

PA: pre-advanced

PE: passivized ergative

PETS: public English test system

PI: pre-intermediate

PPT: head-dropped prepositional phrase used as topic

PP: pseudo-passives

PS: periphrastic structures

PT: pseudo-tough-movement

S: sentence/clause

SLA: second language acquisition

SP: subject prominence

SPL: subject-prominent language

TEM: test for English majors

TP: topic prominence

TL: target language

TPL: topic-prominent language

UG: universal grammar

VP: verb phrase

ZA: zero anaphor

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Chinese and English languages are typologically different. According to Li and Thompson (1976), Chinese is a topic-prominent language (TPL) in which topic is a key element in sentence formation, while English is a subject-prominent language (SPL) in which the subject is an imperative component in sentence constitution. The following Chinese sentences are common and natural in Chinese, but their English versions (in italics) sound strange to English native speakers even though they are often used by Chinese English learners.

(1.1) 那个人他母亲病了。
Nage ren ta muqin bin le.
That man his mother was ill.
"The guy's mother was ill."

(1.2) 我作业做完了。
Wo zuoye zuo wanle.
I homework has finished.
"I have finished my homework."

(1.3) 水果，我喜欢吃苹果。
Shuiguo, wo xihuan chi pingguo.
Fruit, I like eat apples.
"As for fruit, I like eating apples."

(1.4) 五个苹果，两个坏了。
Wuge pingguo, liangge huai le.
Five apples, two were bad.
"Among/of the five apples, two were bad."

(1.5) 这个小孩他很聪明。
Zhege xiaohai ta hen congming.

This child he is very clever.

"The boy is very clever."

Some argue that these unnatural English sentences are a reflection of inappropriate learning of English grammar rules; others argue that they are, from a typological perspective, results of topic-prominence influence derived from Chinese.

However, there are different perspectives on the roles of topic prominence in second language acquisition (SLA). Some claimed that there was an early universal TP stage irrespective of learners' first language (Fuller & Gundel, 1987). Others argued that English language learners were under the influence of L1 transfer of topic prominence, and more target-like subject prominence was produced along with the development of learners' English proficiency levels (Chen, 1992; Schachter & Rutherford, 1979; Rutherford, 1983). While Zheng (2004) found out that there was an unlearning of topic prominence and a restructuring of subject prominence at the initial stage of Chinese English learners. In view of the various or even contradictory interpretations of TPL influence on Chinese EFL learners' interlanguage, the present study is designed to provide further examination on this issue. The primary aim of the present study is to find whether Chinese EFL learners tend to produce TP structures in their English output. If yes, is it due to language transfer from Chinese topic prominence? Do learners' English proficiency levels affect their production of TP constitutions? By investigating the nature of some typological L2 English syntax structures of Chinese learners of English at different proficiency levels, this study is to propose both theoretical values and pedagogical significance in order to prevent these kinds of typological errors. The study is significant in that it uses empirical research to examine the influence of Chinese TP features on the English language learning in the context of China. The findings of the study should be valuable for discovering Chinese EFL learners' interlanguage development processes and possible reasons from TP to SP transfer and dealing with the error resistance or pedagogical intervention in this area.

1.2. Organization of the Thesis

The present study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 briefly introduces the background information, purpose, and significance of the present study. Chapter 2 is a literature review of the concepts of language transfer and topic prominence as well as some previous studies on topic prominence and language transfer. Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the study in terms of its research questions, research methods, and participants. Chapter 4 presents the results of three experimental tasks, which focus on the topic-prominent constitutions as evidenced in the interlanguage of Chinese EFL learners at various English proficiency levels. Chapter 5 is a detailed discussion of the findings and a brief conclusion of the study. The pedagogical implications and limitations of the study as well as further research plans are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Language Transfer

Language transfer has been a controversial issue in SLA for a long time. Its importance in second language (L2) learning has also been reassessed time and again. Along with the developments of research on language transfer, linguists have realized that the first language (L1) acts as "a major factor in SLA" (Ellis, 1990, p.297). There are evidences of L1 influences at every aspect of L2 learners' interlanguage: discourse, lexicon, semantics, syntax, morphology (including bound morphemes), phonetics, and phonology. In order to get a comprehensive understanding and fully recognize the significance of language transfer, it is necessary to have a close look at its research developments at different stages and relative definitions. Over a hundred years ago, Whitney (1881) used the term transfer to refer to cross-linguistic influences, which had been used by many linguists ever since. However, the terminology is not without problems and leads to different conceptions. Corder (1983) and Kellerman & Smith (1986) advocated abandoning the term or using it with high restriction, yet many linguists continued to use it without any limitation. Up until now, linguists still do not have an exact definition of language transfer, which varies along with the developments of research on it. In the twentieth century, the developments of language transfer research fell into mainly three periods and categories, namely, behaviorist, mentalist and cognitive view (Ellis, 1994, p.297-300). Behaviorists regarded language leaning as habit formation. In the view of mentalists, language acquisition was a creative construction of linguistic rules. Cognitive linguists focused on factors that influence language acquisition. Ever since 1990s，language transfer research has experienced unprecedented development no matter in depth or breadth. A detailed and a close look at the historical background, the main hypotheses of different viewpoints and their relative definitions of language transfer can provide us a profound understanding of it.

2.1.1. Behaviorist view of transfer

Behaviorist view of language transfer was reduced to habit formation, which was actually a process of stimuli-responses. The theory dominated language learning and teaching research in 1940s and 1950s when behaviorism and structuralism prevailed. Behaviorists and structuralists believed that (a) learners' active and repeated responses to stimuli would promote language learning; (b) encouraging target-like responses and correcting non-target-like ones would reinforce language learning; (c) breaking complex structures down into components and acquiring them bit by bit would stimulate language leaning. Meanwhile, they advocated that the difficulties in language learning depended on how much the target language was similar or different from the native language. If two languages were similar or identical, positive transfer from the native language would promote SLA; if they were different, negative transfer from the native language would hinder the acquisition of the target language. Under this assumption, Lado (1957, p.23) put forward the theory of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), which held the view that

- The level of difficulty experienced by the learners will be directly related to the degree of linguistic differences between L1 and L2;
- Difficulty will manifest itself in errors: the greater the difficulty, the frequent the errors.

Accordingly, advocators of CAH put forward the hierarchy of difficulty (Lado, 1957; Stockwell, 1957). They believed that language errors and learning difficulties were mainly or completely due to the interference of the native language. By comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences of two languages as well as setting up the hierarchy of difficulty, it was possible to predict and explain learners' errors and learning difficulties. The predicator of transferability was the typological or structural similarities and differences between L1 and L2.

During that period, one of the most widely accepted definitions of language transfer was put forward by Lado (1957) by comparing and contrasting the surface structures of the native and target languages:

The student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some

> features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult (p.2).

Behaviorist view of transfer was restricted to overt correspondences between L1's and L2's syntactic structures. The degree of transfer greatly depended on the similarities or differences between the native and target languages. Although behaviorists realized that the native language played an important role in SLA, they exaggerated L1 influences and ignored other factors that hindered SLA, such as learners' individual differences. Meanwhile, CAH's error predicting ability was doubted. Therefore, it was not surprising that behaviorist view was faced with great challenges from mentalist view.

2.1.2. Mentalist view of transfer

In the early 1950s, Chomsky put forward the theory of mentalism, which was also called conceptualism or psychologism. The theory believed that human's language ability was born by nature and everyone would eventually master language because there was Universal Grammar (UG) in language learning and it was universal grammar rules that determined the mastery of every language. Besides, Dulay and Burt's study (1974a) concluded that children did not rely on language transfer or comparison with their L1 to construct their L2, but depended on their ability to construct their L2 as an independent system. The conclusion severely attacked CAH. Under the influences of the mentalist view and UG, Dulay and Burt（1973; 1974a; 1974b; 1975; 1977) put forward their Creative Construction Hypothesis (CCH) which promoted the idea of L1=L2 hypothesis. Besides, Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) completely denied native language transfer and believed that language learning ability only depended on UG. These linguists, however, were in a great hurry to jump to conclusion. Ellis (2000) criticized that their conclusion was without empirical support. Consequently, mentalists recognized their limitation and started to explore the relationship between the native language transfer and UG in 1980s. Zobl's (1980) transfer hypothesis argued that formal properties of L2 and

universal developmental principles determined the transferability. Although the mentalists are no longer in a position totally denying native language transfer, they are still under criticism for their theory not having much empirical support.

2.1.3. Cognitive view of transfer

In the late 1970s, the drawbacks of the mentalist view stimulated the development of cognitive view, which believed that language learning involved the same cognitive systems as learning other types of knowledge: perception, memory, problem-solving, information processing, etc. (Kellerman, 1977, p.58-145). In cognitive view, "It is generally acknowledged that typological similarity or difference cannot on its own serve as a predictor for transfer, but interacts with other (linguistic) factors" (Faerch & Kasper, 1987, p.121). During that period, linguists tended to focus on how and when language learners would use their native language. SLA research then emphasized factors that caused language transfer. Ellis (2000) listed six kinds of factors that would cause language transfer:

1. Transfer happens at different linguistic levels, namely, phonology, syntax, discourse, pragmatics, etc.;
2. Social factors have impact on language transfer, for example, the influence of learning environment;
3. Markedness of certain language;
4. Prototypicality, the core meaning and the periphery meaning of a certain word;
5. Language distance and psychotypology, namely, learners' perception of language distance between L1 and L2;
6. Some developmental factors that limits interlanguage development.

Markedness of certain language is one of the key factors leading to language transfer, which have a close relationship with the core and periphery grammar of certain language. According to UG, every language has its core grammar and periphery one. Chomsky (1993, p.23) believed that those rules discovered by children with the aid of UG formed the core grammar; those elements that had to be

learned without the help of UG were periphery. Chomsky's theory of markedness held the view that the core rules were unmarked, namely, the general tendency of all languages was unmarked; while the periphery rules were marked, that is, they were exceptional from the general grammar. However, the distinction of the marked and unmarked was hard to define. Ellis (1994) believed that the core grammar could be marked or unmarked, but the periphery grammar was definitely marked. Rutherford (1982) claimed that the criterion of markedness was primarily dependant on the grammar restriction: the one with higher grammar restriction was marked while the one with less restriction was unmarked; unmarked rules were easier than marked rules. Another definition of markedness was based on language typology, which claimed that those features that were universal to most languages were unmarked while those that were specific to a particular language were marked. Zobl (1984) generalized three cases where rules were marked, namely, typological specialization, typological inconsistency, and typological indeterminacy. As regard to the effect of markedness and transferability of L1 features, Hyltenstam's markedness theory was presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 ***Markedness and language transfer (adopted from Hyltenstam, 1984)***

	Native language (L1)	Target language (L2)	Interlanguage
1	Unmarked	Unmarked	Unmarked
2	Unmarked	marked	Unmarked
3	marked	Unmarked	Unmarked
4	marked	marked	Unmarked

In order to explain how markedness affected language transfer, Eckman (1977, p.321) put forward his Markedness Differential Hypothesis (MDH):

> Those areas of difficulty that a second language learner will have can be predicted on the basis of comparison of the native language and the target language.

- Those areas of the target language (TL) that are different from the native language (NL) and are relatively more marked than in the NL will be difficult;
- The degree of difficulty associated with those aspects of the TL that are different and more marked than in the NL corresponds to the relative degree of markedness associated with those aspects;
- Those areas of the TL that are different from the NL but are not relatively more marked than the NL will not be difficult.

Although CAH and MDH were both based on the comparison between native language and target language, MDH showed its improvement in several ways (Eckman, 1986, p.303). Firstly, MDH not only predicted where the difficulties were, but also pointed out the degree of difficulty. Secondly, MDH pointed out what kinds of differences between native language and target language would not trigger transfer. Thirdly, MDH explained why certain structures were typically acquired before others. However, the problem of MDH lay in the difficulty in defining markedness. Sometimes, it was hard to define whether certain structure was marked or unmarked in relation to others.

Kellerman (1977, p.134) suggested that one way to solve this problem was to "define markedness in accordance with native speakers' perceptions of their languages." He used the term "psychotypology" to refer to learners' perspectives on language distance. His studies indicated that transferability was decided by the learner's *perception* of "(a) the relationship between L1 and L2, and (b) certain characteristics of L1 rules or items" (as cited in Faerch & Kasper, 1987, p.123). However, perceived language distance was not adequate enough to determine transferability. Therefore, Kellerman suggested another constraint of language transfer—psycholinguistic markedness, which was primarily concerned with native speakers' perceptions of markedness or unmarkedness. Only those "infrequent, irregular, semantically or structurally opaque, or in any other way exceptional" were considered to be marked (Kellerman, 1983).

Language distance is another factor that influences L1 transfer. Linguists believe

that distance can be a linguistic term or a psycholinguistic term. Corder (1981) pointed out that language distance led to positive language transfer:

> Other things being equal, the mother tongue acts differently as a facilitating agency. Where the mother tongue is formally similar to target language, learners will pass more rapidly along the development continuum than where it is different. (p.101)

Although he only emphasized on positive transfer, language distance actually led to both positive and negative transfers. Corder (1979, p.28) commented, "The greater the degree of difference/distance, the larger the learning task, or to put it another way, the longer the learning path to be traversed between L1 and L2."

To sum up, in cognitive view, markedness, psychotypology and language distance would trigger language transfer. Therefore, Gass suggested that: "transferability is mainly determined by language *universal* and their interaction with variables such as the surface correspondence of structures in L1 and L2, the perceptual saliency of the transferred feature, and its explicitness and conformity to the underlying logical structure" (as cited in Faerch & Kasper, 1987, p.121). Cognitive linguists realized that "transfer is not simply a consequence of habit formation, nor is simply interference or a falling back on the native language. Nor is it always native language transfer" (Odlin, 1989, p.25-27). Based on these discoveries, Odlin (1989) offered his working definition of transfer:

> Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other knowledge that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired (p.27).

This definition to some extent explained the causes of transfer but did not point out the reasons of transfer from a cognitive perspective. However, compared with Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) which only focused on similarities and differences between L1's and L2's surface structures, the "previous acquired knowledge" not only included the acquired language knowledge but also the rules of target language as well as learners' implicit knowledge of target language.

2.1.4. New perspectives of transfer

A fully adequate definition of language transfer is hard to obtain but the role of transfer has been acknowledged since 1990s. Linguists believe that it interacts with a host of other factors in ways not fully understood. Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008) put forward a more balanced definition of language transfer--the influence of a person's knowledge of one language on that person's knowledge or use of another language. In the context of China, language transfer refers to Chinese EFL learners applying their previously acquired Chinese knowledge to English acquisition. Firstly, the similarities and differences in syntactic structures between Chinese and English do lead to language transfer. When the relevant structures of both languages are the same, positive transfers help create correct English production. On the other hand, the greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative transfers can be expected, which would eventually hinder the acquisition of English. Secondly, the knowledge of language learning is transferable, which includes the general rules of all languages learning-UG, the rules of native language and the rules of target language. Ideally, learners can find the rules of all language learning from their native language acquisition and then apply these rules to their SLA or vice versa. Thirdly, individual differences like intelligence, background, interest etc. can affect SLA. Along with the developments of transfer research, new theoretical explanations like linguistic relativism, multi-competence, attrition of language spring up to illustrate the nature of transfer. Linguistic relativism holds the idea that differences in language are related to differences in cognition of the language users. It is an idea subject in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that develops into Neo-Whorfism in 1990s (Levinson 2003; Evans & Green 2006). Neo-Whorfism tends to figure out the relationship between language and thinking. Multi-competence is a concept formulated by Vivian Cook that refers to the knowledge of more than one language in one person's mind. (Cook, 2008) Language attrition describes the loss of, or changes to, grammatical and other features of a language as a result of declining use by speakers who have changed their linguistic environment and language habits (Schmid, 2011). Consequently, research areas have been focused on

directions of transfer, transferability and conceptual transfer. Due to the complexity of language acquisition, it is impossible to research an agreement up until now. Based on the cognitive view of language transfer, the following section is designed to have a close look at Chinese topic prominence and English subject prominence, which are the most obvious typological features of these two languages. A contrast study can illustrate their similarities and differences, which might shed light on the possibilities of language transfer.

2.2 Topic Prominence vs. Subject Prominence

According to Li and Thompson's (1976) typological theory, the world languages can be classified into two kinds: subject-prominent languages and topic-prominent languages. The subject-prominent languages refer to those whose "structure of sentences favors a description in which the grammatical relation subject-predicate plays a major role" (Li & Thompson, 1976, p.459), while the topic-prominent languages are those whose "basic structure of sentences favors a description in which the grammatical relation topic-comment plays a major role" (ibid). Based on their theory, Chinese language is considered a typical topic-prominent language and English a subject-prominent one. However, the typological disparity only conveys the general tendency of each language; it does not exclude topic structures from English and rule out subjects in Chinese. Therefore, a comparison between Chinese and English in terms of topic and subject would be a good illustration of these two languages.

2.2.1 Topic and Subject in Chinese and English

Up until now, a clear definition of topic is still unavailable since different linguists have explored it from different angles and with different approaches. There are mainly four types of definitions of topic in English language research, which are presented in Table 2.2. From information point of view, topic is the 'given message" which has been known by both the speaker and the listener. Syntactically, topic should be placed at the initial position of a sentence, but it will misled people to

classify all elements at the initial position as topic. Semantically, topic is "something being talked about" which meaning-oriented rather than position-oriented. Pragmatically, topic is "the basis of communicative dynamism (CD)" which has the lowest information value. While in Chinese language research, Chao (1968, p.69) suggested that "the grammatical meaning of subject and predicate in a Chinese sentence is topic and comment, rather than actor and action."

Table 2.2 ***Different definitions of topic***

Topic	Defining criteria	Key definition	Representatives
1	information based	given message	Chafe (1976) Halliday(2000)
2	syntactically based	departure point of a discourse	Prague School
3	semantically based	aboutness	Gundel (1985) Jacobs(1995)
4	pragmatically based	communicative dynamism (CD)	Quirk(1985)

The notion of subject has long been considered as a basic element that maintains grammatical relation in the sentential structure of a language, which takes the basic format of subject and predicate. Halliday (2000) classified subjects into three categories: grammatical subject, logical subject and psychological subject. The first referred to something being predicated. The second presented the actor of the verb. The third referred to the concern of the message. The following example better illustrated these categories.

(2.3) <u>This teapot</u> <u>my aunt</u> was given by <u>the duke</u>.
Psychological subject (concern) grammatical subject logical subject (actor)

The typological difference of Chinese TP and English SP indicates that topics are obligatory and subjects are optional in Chinese; while in English, subjects are

indispensable and topics are optional. Then a close look at the similarities and differences of topic and subject in both Chinese and English can better explain their typological features. Li and Thompson (1981, p.88-92) summarized mainly four types of relationship between topic and subject in Chinese:

1. Sentences with both topics and subjects.

(2.4) 苹果我喜欢吃。

Pingguo (topic) wo (subject) xihuan chi.

Apple I like eat.

"I like eating apples."

2. Sentences in which the topics and the subjects are the same.

(2.5) 我喜欢吃苹果。

Wo (*topic/subject*) xihuan chi pingguo.

I like eat apple.

"I like eating apples."

3. Sentences without subjects.

(2.6) 苹果吃完了。

Pingguo chi wan le.

Apple (topic) eat out ASP.

"Apples have been eaten up."

4. Sentences without topics.

(2.7) 来了一个人。

Lai le yige ren.

Come ASP one man.

"One man came."

From the above examples, it is easy to find that topic-prominent language does not necessarily exclude subjects. Sometimes, a topic-prominent sentence can go without

a topic. Similarly, the subject-prominent English language can also have topics. Sometimes they are overlapped with each other in syntactic structures. The biggest difference between them is that the concept of subject is more syntactically related while topic is semantically related. Hockett (1958) once illustrated this relationship through the following example:

(2.8) John runs away.

John runs away.

Topic/subject comment/predicate.

However, an example from Zheng (2003, p.156) illustrated that topic and subject are sometimes different.

(2.9) Not all your books cater for everyone's taste. For example，this book John likes, but that book he hates. His roommate, Bill, prefers other books.

In his example, the underlined sentence can be analyzed as follows:

(2.10) This book, John likes.

Topic subject predicate

In this sentence, the topic and the subject differ. However, Jin (1991) pointed out that this sentence was only accepted within certain context. If it was isolated from any context, it could hardly be accepted by native speakers. Therefore, it is quite probable to conclude that overlapping of topic and subject is still the main structure of English language.

Topic in Chinese TP and subject in English SP do have something in common but their differences are also very obvious. Li and Thompson (1976, p.461-466) put forward several criteria for distinguishing topic from subject:

1. A topic must be definite, but a subject does not.

(2.11) A piece of pie is on the table. (The subject is indefinite)

2. A topic need not have a selectional relation with any verb, while the subject of a sentence is always selectionally related to some predicate.

(2.12) Naxie shu yezi da.

Those trees leaves big

"Those trees (topic), the leaves are big." (The topic "those trees" has no selectional relation with the verb.

3. Verb determines subject but not topic.

(2.13) Xiang bizi chang.

Elephant nose long.

"The elephant (topic), nose is long." (It is the nose that is long, but not the elephant is long.

4. The functional role of topic is the "center of attention", while subject does not necessarily play a semantic role in sentence.

(2.14) A dog (topic), I gave some food to (it) yesterday.

5. Topic-predicate agreement is rare but subject-predicate agreement is obligatory.

6. Topic normally remains sentence-initial position, but subject is not confined to the initial position.

7. It is subject but not topic that plays a prominent role in processes as reflexivization, passivization, Equi-NP deletion, verb serialization and imperativization.

These criteria indicated that "topic is a discourse notion, while subject is to a great extent a sentence-internal notion" (Li & Thompson, 1976, p.466).

2.2.2 Topic Constructions in Chinese and English

Xu and Langendoen (1985, p.1) defined topic construction as follow:

By 'topic structure/construction', we mean any grammatical configuration

consisting of two parts: the topic, which invariably occurs first, and the comment, a clause, which follows the topic and says something about it.

From their definition, we can see that topic construction consists of two parts: topic and comment. According to Li and Thompson (1976), Chinese language is dominated by different topic constructions. But the subject-prominent English also has topic structures. Xu and Langendoen (1985, p.5) pointed out, “We assume that six major categories are used in Chinese syntax [as topic]: NP [including quantifier phrases as a special case], S, S', PrepP [prepositional phrase], PostP [postpositional phrase] and VP.” The following sentences are some examples to illustrate these categories:

(2.15) 这些话我不相信。

Zhexie hua wo bu xiangxin. (NP in italics)

These words I not believe.

“These words, I don't believe.”

(2.16) 他会说这些话我不相信。

Ta hui shuo zhexie hua wo bu xiangxin. (S in italics)

He will say these words I not believe.

“That he could have said these words, I don't believe.”

(2.17) 这些话他会说我不相信。

Zhexie hua ta hui shuo wo bu xiangxin. (S’ in italics)

These words he will say I not believe

“That these words he could have said, I don't believe.”

(2.18) 在桌子上他放了一本书。

Zai zhuozi shang ta fang le ji ben shu. (PreP in italics)

PREP table on he put ASP some book.

“On the table, he put some books.”

(2.19) 桌子上有书，床上不会有书。

Zhuozi Shang you shu; chuang shang bu hui you shu. (PostP in italics)

Table on have book bed on not can have book

"On the table there are some books; on the bed there cannot be any books."

(2.20) 说这些话我不赞成。

Shuo zhexie hua wo bu zancheng. (VP in italics)

Say these words I not approve of.

"Saying these words, I don't approve of."

According to Jin (1991, p.1-2), there are also six categories which can be used in English as the topics, that is, NP, AdjP, PreP, VP, AdvP and S. The following are examples showing these categories:

(2.21) An utter fool she made me feel. (NP in italics)

(2.22) Very strange it seemed. (AdjP in italics)

(2.23) He was a wonderful athlete, I've heard. (S in italics)

(2.24) Into the stifling smoke we plunged. (PreP in italics)

(2.25) Defiantly they have spoken but submissively they will accept my terms. (AdvP in italics)

Jin (1991) claimed that there were mainly six differences between Chinese and English topic constructions. Firstly, in terms of word order, most English topic constructions could be reverted to SVO order, while Chinese topic structures could not. For example:

(2.26) Apples, John likes. （OSV）

'John likes apples.' (SVO)

(2.27) 水果，我喜欢吃苹果。

Shuiguo, wo xihuan chi pingguo.

"Fruit, I like eating apples."

我喜欢吃苹果水果。(Unacceptable)

Wo xihuan chi pingguo shuiguo.

"I like eating apples fruit."(Unacceptable)

Secondly, there was only one topic in English topic construction, but there could be more than one in Chinese counterpart, which could be moved within the sentence. For instance:

(2.28) Yesterday, I saw Mr. Wu. (English)

(2.29) 昨天李先生我看见了。(Chinese)

Zuotian, Li xiansheng wo kanjian le.

'Yesterday, Mr Li I saw.'

我昨天看见李先生了。

Wo zuotian kanjian Li xiansheng le.

'I yesterday saw Mr. Li.'

Thirdly, English topic structures only existed in declarative statements, but Chinese topic construction could be used in different sentence patterns, especially in interrogative sentences.

(2.30) <u>这本书</u>多少钱？(NP)

Zhebenshu duoshaoqian?

This book how much? (Unacceptable in English)

"How much is the book?"

(2.31) <u>吃饭</u>你去不？(VP)

Chifan ni qu bu?

Eating you go or not? (Unacceptable in English)

"Would you like to eat out?"

(2.32) 房间里有几个人？(PreP)

Fangjian li you jige ren?

Room PREP have how many people? (Unacceptable in English)

"How many people are there in the room."

Fourthly, the English empty category was co-referential to the topic, while Chinese counterpart did not necessarily have the same effect. For example, in (2.33), it was *the box* that she had put something in but not anywhere else. However, in (2.34), what we had eaten should be *dinner* rather than *the restaurant*.

(2.33) The box, she probably put it in *(the box).* (English)

(2.34) 那间饭馆，我们吃过了。

Najian fanguang, women chi guo le.

That restaurant, we eat ASP.

"We once ate in that restaurant."

Fifthly, Chinese topic constructions could be found in embedded clauses, but English version could hardly be like that.

(2.35) 苹果我不记得你说过你喜欢。

Pingguo wo bu jide ni say guo ni xihuan.

Apples I don't remember you say you like. (Unacceptable in English)

"I don't remember that you have mentioned you liked eating apples."

Lastly, without context, English topic structures sounded strange to native speakers, but Chinese ones sounded familiar, for at least 50% of Chinese utterances were topic-prominent. The contrast could be seen in examples (2.9) and (2.10).

2.2.3 Interlanguage influenced by Chinese topic constructions

Yip (1995), Yip and Matthews (1995) summarized seven types of Chinese–English interlanguage structures which were affected by Chinese topic constructions.

1. Double nominatives (DN)

(2.36) Shanghai city is good, dialect difficult to understand.

上海城市好，方言难理解。(NP as topics)

Shanghai chengshi (topic) hao (comment),fangyan (topic) nanlijie (comment).

"Shanghai city is good, but its dialect is difficult to understand."

In (2.36), there are two topic-comment structures coexisted in one sentence, which is quite natural in Chinese but unacceptable in English. However, the influence of Chinese TP is so strong that some learners are apt to ignore using some transitional words to link two independent sentences.

2. Existential construction and indefinite subject (EC)

(2.37) Have / There are some State-owned enterprises wait to be restructured.

有一些国有企业等待重组。(VP as topic)

You yixie guoyouqiye dengdai chongzhu.

"Some State-owned enterprises are waiting to be restructured."

As mentioned in section 2.2.3, VP can be the sentence topic in Chinese but not in English. However, the above example (2.37) shows that some EFL learners still fail to recognize the typological difference and use the VP "*Have / There are some State-owned enterprises*" as the sentence topic. This is another example of Chinese TP transfer.

3. Zero anaphora (ZA)

(2.38) Have you learned English before?

你以前学过英语吗？

—Yes, have learned, very hard, spent a lot of time, but no use.

—是的，(我)学过(英语)，（我）很认真，（我）花了很多时间，但（学习）没用。

—Shide, (wo) xueguo(yingyu), (wo) hen renzhen, (wo) hua le henduo shijian, dan (xuexi) meiyong.

—Yes, (I) have learned (English), (I) learned very hard, (I) spent a lot of time, but (learning) was in vain.

"Yes, I have studied English very hard and have spent a lot of time on it before, but was in vain.

There are two problems with the above example (2.38). Firstly, some broken sentences without subjects are crammed into one sentence. Secondly, no transitional words are used to link these broken sentences. Obviously, these two mistakes are not allowed in English but quite natural in Chinese. Normally, an English sentence must have a subject except for an imperative sentence, but a Chinese topic construction can go without a subject and a topic illustrated in examples (2.6) and (2.7). Besides, it is natural and acceptable to have several independent sentences co-exit in one sentence in Chinese but not in English. Learners at the interlanguage stage are easy to be influenced by Chinese TP transfer and make mistakes.

4. Pseudo-tough-movement (PT)

(2.39) Physics is tough to study.

物理难学。

Wuli (topic) nan xue(comment).

"It is tough to study physics."

Sentence (2.39) is another example of Chinese TP transfer. In Chinese, tough means *nan (difficult/hard).* According to Chinese topic-comment structure, it is natural to say "*something be tough to do*": *something* is the topic and *be tough to do* is the comment. Under the influence of this sentence structure, English learners at the interlanguage stage tend to produce sentences like "Physics is tough to study." In fact, the correct usage of *tough* should be "It is tough to do something." *It* is the dummy subject of the sentence and *tough to do something* is the real subject. However, Chinese language does not have this kind of dummy subject. As a result, EFL learners tend to make mistakes in the case of pseudo-tough-movement.

5. Pseudo-passives (PP)

（2.40）<u>Economy</u> <u>can classify into two types.</u>

Topic -- comment

经济可以分为两类。

Jingji keyi fenwei liangzhong.

"Economy can be classified into two types."

The topic-comment structure of Chinese usually excludes the passive voice, while the passive voice is one of the key voices in English and is as popular as the active voice. EFL learners who have got used to Chinese TP are tempted to transfer TP into English SP.

6. Passivized ergative (PE)

(2.41) <u>They</u> <u>were arrived yesterday.</u>

Topic --- comment

他们是昨天到的。

Tamen shi zuotian dao de.

"They arrived yesterday."

The mistaken sentence in example (2.41) illustrates the strong impact of Chinese topic-comment structure on learners' interlanguage. Learners tend to directly translate Chinese TP into English without realizing that *arrive* is an intransitive verb in English which does not allow to be followed by objects and be used in the passive voice.

7. Periphrastic structures (PS)

(2.42) <u>For China</u> (topic) <u>in the next 50 years (topic)</u>, <u>she</u> (subject) is faced with both opportunities and challenges.

对中国而言，未来五十年，她将面临机遇和挑战。

Dui zhongguo er yan, weilei wushinian, ta jiang mianlin jiyu he tiaozhan.

"In the next 50 years, China will be faced with both opportunities and challenges."

The above example (2.42) shows another distinct difference of Chinese TP and

English SP. The interlanguage produced by some EFL learners has two topics: *China & in the next 50 years* and one subject *she*. The topic *China* and the subject *she* are actually co-referential. As mentioned above in section 2.2.3, Chinese language allows more than one topic in one sentence, while English language only allows one. Therefore, English language tends to omit *she* and uses *China* as the subject of the sentence.

Among what Yip (1995) and Yip & Matthews (1995) have mentioned above, we would like to consider the double nominatives construction as one of the most common C-E interlanguage affected by Chinese topic constructions. In English language, the nominative can be a noun, a pronoun or an adjective used as the subject of a sentence. Literally speaking, a double nominatives construction means two subjects co-existing in one sentence, which is obviously not allowed in English language since the general rule of English grammar is one subject one sentence. On the contrary, the illustration of the relationship of topic and subject (please see section 2.2.2) shows that one topic and one subject can co-exist in a Chinese sentence. Therefore, according to Chinese syntactic structure, the double nominatives constitution refers to the co-existence of a topic and a subject in a sentence. EFL learners at the interlanguage stage are apt to transfer this Chinese constitution to their English acquisition process and then make mistakes. Chinese double nominatives constitution can be formed through different ways. Five TP dimensions are chosen as the most common ways, namely, object-fronting (OF), nominative NP+IP (IP), Object scrambling (OS), Head-dropped PP as the topic (PPT) and Nominative NP as the co-indexed topic (CT). A detailed discussion with examples below can provide a profound understanding of these double nominative constitutions.

1. Object-Fronting (OF)

Object-fronting means to move the object from the post-predicate position to the sentence initial position and its function changes from the sentence object to sentence topic. Example (2.43) better illustrates the fronting movement.

(2.43) 张三， 我已经见过了。

Zhangsan, wo yijing jianguo le.

Zhangsan (topic/object), I' (subject) ve already seen (him). (Li & Thompson, 1981, p.15)

"I've already seen Zhangsan."

In this example, the topic *Zhangsan* is the object of the predicate *see*. By moving the object NP to the sentence initial position, a double nominatives construction, which consists of one topic and one subject, is formed. In Chinese, this sentence pattern is very common and natural, but it is somewhat unnatural without proper context in English, which has been discussed in section 2.2.2.

2. Nominative NP+IP (IP)

In this typical Chinese structure, nominative NP acts as the topic of a sentence, and IP acts as the comment. An inflectional phrase (IP) is basically the same as a sentence in which the verb has finite form and the subject is indispensable. For example, in sentence (2.44), *this tree* is the nominative NP; *leaves are very big* is the IP.

(2.44) 这棵树， 叶子很大。(ibid.)

Zheke shu, yezi hen da.

This tree (topic), (its) leaves (subject) are very big.

"The tree has big leaves."

In this sentence, *this tree* acts as the topic, which does not have direct relation with the predicate *are very big*. It is the *leaves* that *are big* but not *the tree*. But here the topic and subject have a very close relationship, in which the subject (*the leaves*) is part of the topic (*the tree*). The example can be understood as 'the tree's leaves are very big', which sounds unnatural but grammatically acceptable while being compared with the standard and natural expression 'the tree has big leaves'.

3. Object scrambling (OS)

Unlike object-fronting which move the object to the sentence initial position to be

the topic of a sentence, object scrambling refers to the moving of the object to different positions of a sentence. Examples (2.45), (2.46) and (2.47) illustrate the movement of the objects.

(2.45) 他作业已经做完了。

Ta zuoye yijing zuo wan le.

He (topic) the homework (subject) has finished.

"He has finished the homework."

Here, the topic *he* is the actor, *finish* is the action and *the homework* is the object of the predicate *finish*. The object scrambling process moves the object to the sentence subject position. Besides, (2.45) can be changed into (2.46) or (2.47):

(2.46) 他已经做完了作业。

Ta yijing zuowan le zuoye.

He (topic/subject) has finished the homework (object).

"He has finished the homework."

(2.47) 作业他已经做完了。

Zuoye ta yijing zuo wan le.

The homework (topic) he (subject) has finished.

"He has finished the homework."

Through the three examples, we can find out that the object *the homework* can move freely in a sentence and act as topic or subject. In other words, different elements can be moved to the initial position to be the topic in a Chinese topic structure. While the English counterpart has to conform to the SVO word order if it is decontextualized.

4. Head-dropped PreP as the topic (PPT)

Head-dropped PreP refers to the prepositional phrase which has the preposition omitted and the other elements remained. Section 2.2.3 has shown that PreP can be used as a topic in both Chinese TP and English TP. But head-dropped PreP as the

topic is only accepted in Chinese language, but not in English. Example (2.48) is a good example of this difference.

(2.48) 十个小孩，六个是男孩。

Shige xiaohai, liuge shi nanhai.

Ten children (topic), six (subject) are boys.

"Among/of the ten children, six are boys."

The direct translation of this Chinese topic structure is obviously ungrammatical and unaccepted in English. Here the subject *six* and the topic *ten children* have a subordinate relation: six out of ten children. In English, it is necessary to use a PreP to specify the domain and introduce the topic. Normally, PrePs like *among, of,* and as for are often used. However, head-dropped PrePs are quite natural.

5. Nominative NP as the co-indexed topic (CT)

Unlike Nominative NP+IP structure where the subject of IP belongs to the NP, nominative NP in CT structure acts as a co-indexed topic, which refers to the same person or thing as the sentence subject. Example (2.48) helps explain the relation.

(2.49) 这个小孩他很调皮。

Zhege xiaohai ta hen tiaopi.

This child (topic) he (subject) is very naughty.

"The boy is very naughty."

In this example, the topic '*the child*' and the subject '*he*' are co-indexed and refer to the same person. Chinese topic construction uses this structure to emphasize the topic, but the English counterpart is unacceptable without certain context.

In this section, seven types of C-E interlanguage affected by Chinese TP are presented and the double nominatives, one of the most common Chinese TP, is illustrated in detail to present the transfer effects of Chinese TP to English acquisition. Examples indicate that EFL learners at the interlanguage stage are under

the strong influences of Chinese TP constitutions. Then, a close look at previous studies concerning the relationship of topic prominence and language transfer will present a more comprehensive picture of TP transfer.

2.3 Topic prominence and language transfer

After looking at the general typological differences between Chinese and English, this section is going to focus on previous studies related to topic-prominent and subject-prominent constructions under the context of SLA. Basically, linguists agree that language transfer does play an important role in the acquisition of these two typologically different languages. The presentation below will divide the previous studies into three categories, namely, the universal topic-prominent stage, TP transfer to SP and SP transfer to TP.

2.3.1 Previous studies on universal topic-prominent stage

The representatives of early studies on universal topic prominence stage are Fuller and Gundel (1987). There were two groups of participants in their study, namely TP L1 (Chinese, Japanese and Korean) learners of English and SP L1 (Arabic, Farsi and Spanish) learners of English. After comparing their spoken narratives related to some TP features, the study represented two findings. Firstly, no difference was found in L2 oral production between speakers of TP and SP language. Secondly, TP constructions were more frequently used in the participants' interlanguage production irrespective of their L1 background. Therefore, L2 learners of English all underwent a universal topic-prominent stage no matter what native languages they had. The result also showed that TP/SP were not transferable.

Another similar finding was found by Zheng (2004), who claimed that there was an unlearning of nominative constructions beyond IP (one feature of TP) in initial acquisition stage for Chinese EFL learners. 150 Chinese EFL learners at different L2 levels went through an empirical study focusing on 5 categories of Chinese-specific topic-prominent structures. The results revealed that Chinese EFL learners could successfully reject unaccepted interlanguage with Chinese TP features in their early

L2 acquisition process.

2.3.2 Previous studies on TP transfer to SP

Many linguists have carried out studies on L2 acquisition of English by speakers of TP languages. Most results showed that TP speakers often transferred their L1 TP features into L2 acquisition. Schachter and Rutherford (1979) found a "strong TP orientation" on their Chinese and Japanese participants, who tended to produce "pseudo-passive" constructions. Rutherford (1983) found that L1 TP speakers tended to produce more target-like SP constructions with the increase of their English proficiency levels. Chen (1992) conducted an empirical study with two groups of Chinese EFL learners (pre-intermediate and pre-advanced levels) by requiring them to do spontaneous interpretations of 35 Chinese sentences into English. The result suggested that Chinese EFL learners tended to rely on their L1 transfer effect on L2 acquisition. Cai (2002) used error corrections to test 132 third-year university English majors and found that even these pre-advanced EFL learners were influenced by L1 Chinese language transfer. Furthermore, Yip (1995) discovered a superset-subset relationship between topic-comment constructions and subject-predicate constructions, which suggested that Chinese topic structure was more inclusive than English topicalization structure.

2.3.3 Previous studies on SP transfer to TP

Some reverse studies were carried out to investigate typological transfer from subject prominence to topic prominence. Jing (1994) conducted a study with 46 adult native English speakers learning Chinese to examine their performance on Chinese topic structures, including null elements, specificity marking and double nominative constructions. The result suggested that participants underwent a systematic transfer from English SP to Chinese TP before they realized the concept of topic, and it implied that both TP and SP were transferable. By using acceptability judgment tests, Yuan (1995) carried out an investigation on native English speakers' acquisition of Chinese base-generated topics. The result showed that the acceptability of these

topics did not increase along with the participants' Chinese proficiency except at the advanced level. This study to some extent implied that L1 would have a long-term effect on L2 acquisition. Jiao's (2004) study focused on the acquisition of zero anaphora (a type of Chinese TP) by English learners of Chinese. The result confirmed that the ratio of use of zero anaphora progressively increased along with the improvement of learners' Chinese proficiency.

2.3.4 Summary of previous studies

The relevant previous studies on topic prominence and subject prominence are fruitful but somehow quite controversial. On the one hand, researchers using the research methodology of interlanguage production, either written or spoken, found out that native language did have strong impact on SLA. But linguists using acceptability judgment tasks found out that native language had little effect on SLA or there was even an unlearning effect. This controversy might be due to the difference of these methodologies. It is hard to say which one is better than the other. But it suggests that the study in the present investigation had better combine these two methodologies.

Chapter 2 has presented relevant literature review on Chinese topic prominence and English subject prominence. Three proposals can be drawn from the previous studies. While Schachter and Rutherford (1979) found that TP and SP were transferable, Fuller and Gundel (1987) believed that TP and SP were not transferable because there was an initial topic-prominent stage irrespective of learners' L1 background. Zheng (2004) suggested that there was an unlearning of some topic-prominent structures at the early acquisition process. This wide divergence needs to be settled by further studies.

Chapter 3: The Study

The controversy of the previous studies prompts us to conduct a study to investigate the influences of Chinese topic structures on the interlanguage development of Chinese EFL learners. This chapter is designed to present the research questions and a detailed description of the present study, including the research methods, data analysis, and participants.

3.1 Research Questions

As has been mentioned in Chapter 2, Chinese topic constructions are common and natural even without specific context. But English topic structure is only acceptable under certain context. The five TP dimensions affirmed in Section 2.2.4, namely, Object-Fronting (OF), Nominative NP+IP (IP), Object scrambling (OS), Head-dropped PP as topic (PPT), and Nominative NP as co-indexed topic (CT), were used as the criteria to examine the possible influences of language transfer. If all these five TP structures were transferable, then the following five sentence structures might exist in Chinese EFL learners' interlanguage:

(3.1) That book he has read. (OF)

(3.2) This tree, leaves are big. (IP)

(3.3) Five apples, two are bad. (PPT)

(3.4) Lily she is angry. (CT)

(3.5) He this film did not see. (OS)

Therefore, the research questions for the study were:

1. To what extent is the production of English output by Chinese EFL learners influenced by the topic-prominent structures of their L1?
2. Are there any similarities or differences in the interlanguage output of students at different proficiency levels, regarding their TP and SP structures?
3. Will topic-prominent constructions decrease as students' English proficiency

increases and finally unlearn them among advanced learners?

3.2 Research Methods

Basically, SLA researchers adopt two types of research methods: spontaneous reactions and elicitation tasks. A spontaneous reaction, both written and spoken, is considered a good way to reveal learners' interlanguage development. But this methodology requires large samples to guarantee the significance of the data, and this will inevitably pose great pressure on data processing. Elicitation tasks, such as translation and grammatical acceptability judgment tasks are easier to conduct. Although they are criticized to be too manipulated, the possibility to infer learners' interlanguage development makes them popular among language researchers. By considering the advantages and disadvantages of these two research methodologies, it is feasible and reasonable to combine them in the study. By doing this, it will enhance the reliability of the data and the validity of the findings. Therefore, the study first asked the participants to do 25 Chinese-English oral interpretation or written translation. Then the acceptability judgment task was given to measure their judgments on 40 sentences. The research instrument was adapted from Li (2006).

3.2.1 Oral interpretation task

The Chinese-English oral interpretation task was designed to get the participants' spontaneous reactions. The participants were required to interpret orally 25 Chinese topic constructions representing the five TP categories mentioned in 2.2.2 (please see Appendix A), within a short time limit (10 seconds for each). The interpretation was recorded by using an MP3. There were two purposes in conducting this task. Firstly, the interpretation task was a kind of pilot study to find out whether the participants had any trouble with the vocabulary or the understanding of the sentences. Secondly, it to some extant could show us whether the participants' L2 productions would be influenced by their Chinese topic-prominent constitutions. If yes, how did the transfer happen?

3.2.2 Written translation task and acceptability judgment task

The second set of tasks was a larger scale test to guarantee the reliability and validity of the present study. The participants were required to finish two tasks. First, they needed to translate 25 Chinese TP structures (please see Appendix B), which had been used in oral interpretation task, into English in written form. Those who had participated in the interpretation task were excluded. The translation task was designed to be finished within 10 minutes and the participants were not allowed to go back to check their answers. By doing this, it was possible that we could get their spontaneous responses. Then the grammatical acceptability judgment task (please see Appendix C) was immediately distributed to the participants. There were 40 English sentences in the task, among which 20 were typical direct translation of Chinese topic constructions and 20 were native English expressions. The participants were asked to judge their acceptability with a 5-point scale ranging from completely unacceptable to completely acceptable. The native speakers of English participated in the acceptability task (please see Appendix D). Their data were then compared with those of Chinese participants.

3.2.3 Data analysis

After data collections, the data was assessed with SPSS 16.0. For the interpretation and the translation tasks, the frequency of various TP structures was sorted out to compare with the total number of each dimension. For the acceptability task, the means of each TP dimension were listed according to different proficiency levels.

3.3 Participants

3.3.1 Participants for oral interpretation task

10 second-year English majors from Zhuhai Radio and TV University were involved in the oral interpretation task. They were all preparing for Chinese Test for English Majors-Band 4 (TEM 4), which was a language proficiency test for intermediate English majors in China. They had studied English for about 10 years

and had received at least 2 years of constant intensified English training in the university. Therefore, we should be able to believe that their English proficiency had reached the intermediate level.

3.3.2 Participants for written translation task and acceptability judgment task

105 Chinese EFL learners participated in these two tasks, representing 5 English proficiency levels: elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, pre-advanced and advanced level. Besides, 10 native speakers served as a control group. The profiles of the participants in the experimental group were presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 ***Profiles of the participants***

	E	PI	I	PA	A
Ave. age	13	18	19	20	26
Major	English	English	Computer	English	English
Level	PETS-1	PETS-2	CET-4	TEM-4	TEM-8
Learning yrs	3	9	10	11	16
Number(n)	15	15	25	30	20

E=elementary; PI=pre-intermediate; I=intermediate; PA=pre-advanced; A=advanced

PETS=Public English Test System; CET=College English Test, TEM=Test for English Majors

15 first-year business English majors from Zhuhai City Polytechnic Secondary School formed the elementary group. Another 15 first–grade English majors from Zhuhai City Polytechnic College comprised the pre-intermediate group. Most of the participants in these two groups started learning English at the age of 9. Without natural language environment and regular exposure to English after class, their interlanguage did not develop very well. 25 second-year university students from Beijing Normal University at Zhuhai who had passed College English Test-Band 4 (CET-4) comprised the intermediate group. All of them were non-English majors but had studied English for about 10 years with a vocabulary of around 4000 words. 30

third-year English majors from Beijing Normal University at Zhuhai formed the pre-advanced group. All of them had passed Test for English Major-Band 4 (TEM4). Most of them had studies English for more than 10 years and had a vocabulary of about 5000 words. The rest 20 participants were postgraduates majoring in English from Guangdong University of Business Studies. All of them had passed Test for English Major-Band 8 (TEM8). They were regarded as the advanced group since they had passed TEM8 and were still undergoing constant English training in postgraduate schools. The control group was made up of 10 native speakers from UK, USA and Canada. All of them were English teachers working in Universities in Guangzhou and Zhuhai.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter is devoted to the report and interpretation of the results of the study. The results of the oral interpretation, written translation and acceptability judgment tasks are presented in Section 4.1, Section 4.2 and Section 4.3 respectively.

4.1 Results of the Oral Interpretation Task

In the interpretation task, 9 records were transcribed by the researcher and re-checked by another English professor. Then the numbers of TP constitutions of each category were counted out. The percentage of TP constitutions was then calculated by comparing them with the total numbers of experimental sentences. One record was abandoned because the participant failed to finish it within the time limit. This pilot study helps to find out that the participants have no trouble with the vocabulary or the understanding of the sentences. The results are presented in Table 4.1 which shows that the English majors at the intermediate level do make some Chinese TP constitutions in their C-E interlanguage especially when doing spontaneous task. Besides, it also tells us that TP structures like PPT and OS are the two most frequently used TP structures by these participants, which to some extent implies that these two kinds of TP structures are under stronger influence from Chinese than the other three. The frequency order of these five TP categories is PP=OS>IP>OF=CT. However, the interpretation task is restricted to a small sample of Chinese EFL learners at intermediate level In order to get a more objective results, a larger scale test is very necessary.

Table 4.1 ***Each participant's numbers of TP constitutions in interpretation task***

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	total	TP%
IP	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	6.67%
OS	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	5	11.11%
OF	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.22%

PPT	0	2	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	5	11.11%
CT	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2.22%

IP=Nominative NP + IP; OS= object scrambling; OF=object fronting; PPT=Head-dropped prepositional phrase; CT= Nominative NP as co-indexed topic; TP=topic prominence; ; P=participant

4.2 Results of the Written Translation Task

After analyzing all the test papers, it was found that there were many topic prominent structures in the participants' English translations. The numbers of TP structures are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 ***Numbers of TP constitutions in translation task***

TP Structure	E (n=15)	PI (n=15)	I (n=25)	PA (n=30)	A (n=20)
IP	57	31	19	11	0
OS	54	18	8	5	0
OF	47	21	4	14	0
PPT	72	40	9	10	0
CT	45	13	6	4	0
Total	275	123	46	44	0
TP/N	18.3	8.2	1.8	1.5	0
%	73.30%	32.80%	7.40%	5.90%	0%

E=elementary level; PI= pre-intermediate level; I=intermediate level; PA=pre-advanced level; A=advanced level

As indicated by Table 4.2, the percentage of TP constitutions decreases from 73.3% at the elementary level to 0% at the advanced level, which implies that Chinese EFL learners do have a tendency to produce TP English sentences at the initial and intermediate stage. The general tendency is that Chinese EFL learners tend to produce more TP structures at the initial SLA stage and then the numbers decrease or even disappear along with the improvement of their English proficiency. In addition,

the data show that the tendency of decreasing is uneven. There is a sharp decrease from the elementary level to the intermediate level with the per capita TP constitutions dropping from 18.3 at elementary level to 8.2 at pre-intermediate and then ending up with 1.8 at intermediate level. Then the decreasing tendency slows down from intermediate level to pre-advanced level and completely disappears at the advanced level. The results illustrate that the participants at the initial stage are easier to be influenced by their native language and L1 transfer has a much stronger impact on their interlanguage development. The data to so extent have proved our research hypothesis, that is, topic-prominent constructions are closely related to EFL learners' English proficiency, which decrease as proficiency level increases and finally are unlearned by advanced EFL learners. The following are some typical translations made by the participants at the elementary level.

1. Nominative NP+IP

(4.1) 这个女孩，眼睛大大的。

a. This girl eyes big.

b. *This girl eye is big.*

(4.2) 那件衣服，颜色好看。

a. That coat, the color very good.

b. That coat, color is nice.

c. That coat, color is beautiful.

(4.3) 你的作业，错误很多。

a. Your homework, mistake many.

b. Your homework, mistakes are many.

(4.4) 这本书，图片很有趣。

a. This book, pictures very interesting.

b. This book, pictures are very interesting.

(4.5) 这棵树， 叶子很大。

a. This tree, leave very big.

b. This tree's leave is very big.

2. Object scrambling (OS)

(4.6) 他作业已经做完了。

He homework has already finished.

(4.7) 他这个问题没有回答。

He this question no answer.

(4.8) 他礼物收下了。

He present received.

3. Object Fronting (OF)

(4.9) 苹果我不喜欢吃。

Apples I don't like eating.

(4.10) 计算机，我喜欢。

Computer, I like.

4. Head-dropped prepositional phrase as topic (PPT)

(4.11) 水果， 我喜欢吃梨。

Fruit, I like eating pear.

(4.12) 五个苹果，两个坏了。

Five apples, two bad.

5. Nominative NP as co-indexed topic (CT)

(4.13) 小张他没有来。

Xiaozhang he didn't come.

(4.14) 丽丽她很生气。

Lily she very angry.

These examples indicate that the participants at the elementary stage are under stronger influence of Chinese TP constitutions. But once learners have mastered the rules of their target languages, the L1 transfer gradually disappears and more target-like constitutions are produced. In order to specify what kinds of TP constitutions have stronger transfer effects on the participants, the TP ratio of each category, which is measured by comparing the numbers of participants' TP constitutions with the total numbers of experimental sentences, is presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 ***Percentage of TP constitutions for each TP structure***

Level	E (n=15)		PI (n=15)		I (n=25)		PA (n=30)		A (n=20)	
TP	TP No.	TP ratio	TP No.	TP ratio	TP No.	TP ratio	TP No.	TP ratio	TP No.	TP ratio
IP	57	76.0%	31	41.3%	19	25.3%	11	14.7%	0	0.0%
OS	54	72.0%	18	24.0%	8	10.7%	5	6.7%	0	0.0%
OF	47	62.7%	21	28.0%	4	5.3%	14	18.7%	0	0.0%
PPT	72	96.0%	40	53.3%	9	12.0%	10	13.3%	0	0.0%
CT	45	60.0%	13	17.3%	6	8.0%	4	5.3%	0	0.0%

It can be found that for the participants at the elementary level the TP frequency order of these five TP structures is PP (96%)>IP (76%)>OS (72%)>OF (62.7%)>CT (60%), which might indicate that the participants are more likely to produce PPT and IP than OF or CT. The frequency order, to some extent, may reflect that the degree of native language transfer differ according to different TP structure. The frequency order at each English proficiency level is illustrated in Table 4.4

Table 4.4 ***Frequency order of each TP structure at different English proficiency levels***

Elementary level	PPT>IP>OS>OF>CT
Pre-intermediate level	PPT>IP>OF>OS>CT
Intermediate level	IP>PPT>OS>CT>OF
Pre-advanced level	OF>IP>PPT>OS>CT
Advanced level	IP=OS=OF=PPT=CT=0

The above table tells us that for Chinese EFL learners, especially for those at the elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate levels, their interlanguage productions are easily influenced by PPT and IP constructions than by OF, OS and CT. However, when the learners' English proficiency has reached the pre-advanced level, they are more likely to produce OF structures rather than PPT or IP. Finally, all Chinese-like TP structures disappear at the advanced level. The underlying reasons will be discussed at the following chapter.

4.3 Results of the Acceptability Judgment Task

4.3.1 The general trend of TP structures in acceptability judgment task

For the acceptability judgment task, all participants were required to finish a 5-point scale judgment, in which point 1 stood for "completely unacceptable"; point 5 meant "completely acceptable" and point 3 was in between. Point 2 and 4 meant that the sentence was neither quite unacceptable nor quite acceptable. The 40 sentences to be judged were made up of two groups: control sentences and experimental sentences. The control ones were typical English SP constitutions while the experimental ones were those TP structures that were unacceptable in English but natural in Chinese. Then the mean scores of each proficiency level and each TP structure were carefully analyzed. If the mean score of a certain TP structure at a certain level was higher than 3, it tended to mean that the participants at that group believed that the sentence was generally acceptable. If the mean score

was lower than 3, the participants tended to believe that the sentence was usually unacceptable. The mean scores and standard deviation are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 ***Mean scores and standard deviation of five TP structures at each proficiency level***

	E		PI		I		PA		A		NS	
	n=15		n=15		n=25		n=30		n=20		n=10	
TP	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
IP												
EXP	2.85	1.41	2.72	1.37	2.64	1.55	1.94	1.23	1.56	0.94	1.98	1.07
CON	3.15	1.36	4.1	1.2	3.37	1.56	4	1.24	4.38	1.17	4.8	0.88
OS												
EXP	2.52	1.3	1.6	1.08	2.16	1.38	1.55	0.94	1.12	0.63	1.48	0.82
CON	2.8	1.33	3.88	1.17	3.31	1.36	3.73	1.31	4.6	0.89	5	0
OF												
EXP	2.7	1.41	2.08	1.15	2.58	1.45	2.03	1.31	1.79	1.21	2.36	1.22
CON	2.88	1.42	4.33	1.05	3.68	1.41	4.03	1.22	4.51	1.04	4.83	0.51
PPT												
EXP	3.07	1.41	3.1	1.41	3.03	1.51	2.5	1.43	2.19	1.56	2.85	1.49
CON	3.5	1.36	4.03	1.23	3.62	1.3	3.93	1.31	4.26	1.25	4.7	0.61
CT												
EXP	2.93	1.23	2.43	1.24	2.63	1.48	2.3	1.29	1.79	1.24	3.78	1.29
CON	3.08	1.31	4.12	1.15	3.64	1.34	3.89	1.26	4.36	1.02	4.58	0.84
EXP ave.	2.81	1.35	2.37	1.25	2.61	1.47	2.06	1.24	1.69	1.12	2.49	1.18
CON ave.	3.08	1.36	4.09	1.16	3.52	1.39	3.92	1.27	4.42	1.08	4.78	0.57

The average mean scores at each proficiency level indicate that the mean scores for the experimental sentences are always lower than those of the control ones,

which to some extant implies that participants can distinguish the experimental sentences from the control ones. The mean score ranging at different levels is listed as below: 1.6 to 4.33 for the pre-intermediate group; 2.16 to 3.68 for the intermediate group; 1.55 to 4.03 for the pre-advance group and 1.12 to 4.51 for the advanced group. The sharp contrast indicates that participants at these four groups can easily recognize those natural English SP structures and those unnatural Chinese TP structures. The elementary group is an exception because the mean scores of the experimental sentences and control sentences are quite close. To see whether these means scores have significant difference, Paired-Samples T Test is used to analyze the data. The results are presented in Table 4.6.

Tables 4.6 ***Paired samples T test of mean scores difference of EXP and CON at different proficiency levels***

Level	Instrument	Mean ave.	t	Sig.(2-tailed)
E	EXP	2.81		
	CON	3.08	-5.41	0.006*
PI	EXP	2.37		
	CON	4.09	-6.605	0.003*
I	EXP	2.61		
	CON	3.52	-8.391	0.001*
PA	EXP	2.06		
	CON	3.92	-12.788	0*
A	EXP	1.69		
	CON	4.42	-12.028	0*

*Note *.The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.*

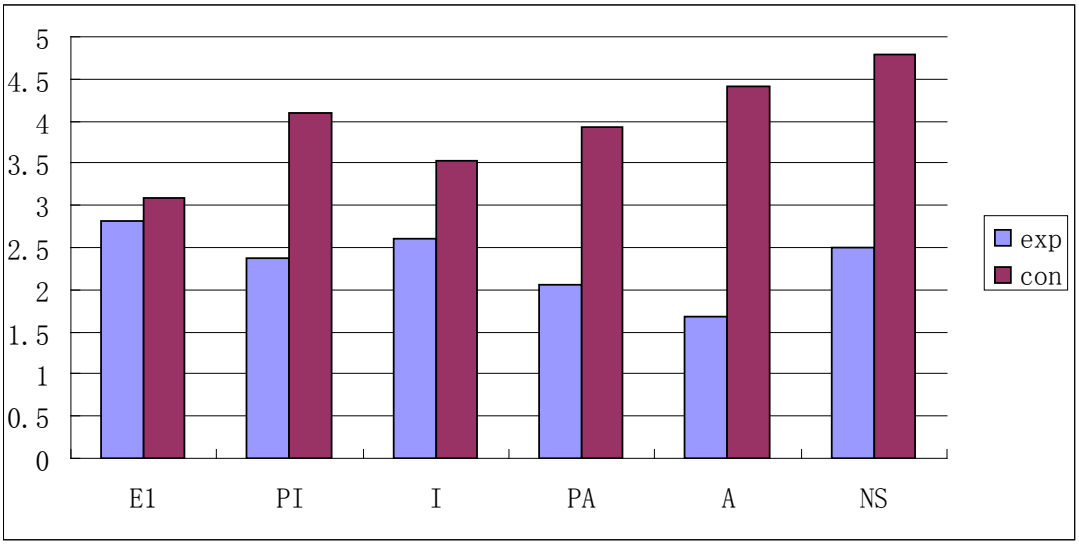
We can see from this table that all *Sig<0.05*, which implies that the mean differences are significant. Therefore, it is tentative to conclude that L1 topic-prominent structures are not influential enough to lead the participants to make a wrong judgment irrespective of their proficiency levels. It may also imply that the structures

of experimental sentences, which follow the Chinese topic-prominent constitutions, are considered to be "psychologically marked" (Kellerman, 1983) by the participants who can easily distinguish them from natural English expressions. The mean scores of experimental and control sentences for the elementary group are significantly different, but those of three TP dimensions, namely, OS, OF and PPT, still need to be further discussed. As illustrated in Table 4.5, the mean scores of the control sentences for OS and OF structures are under 3, which may imply that the participants at this group regard these natural English expressions as unnatural and unacceptable. While the mean score of the experimental sentences for PPT is higher than 3, which reflects that the participants consider those Chinese PPT structures as acceptable in English. Therefore, it can be confirmed that the participants at this group cannot fully recognize English SP constitutions and Chinese TP constructions. In addition, the mean scores of PPT experimental sentences of Pre-intermediate and intermediate groups both exceed the mid-3 point, which reflects that the participants are uncertain about the acceptance of PPT. We can conclude that the participants at intermediate and lower level are confused by PPT. The underlying reasons will be further discussed in next chapter.

The average mean scores of judgments on experimental sentences, that is, sentences with Chinese TP features are illustrated in Figure 4.1. It is obvious that participants at all proficiency levels can recognize sentences with Chinese TP features as unacceptable because all the average mean scores are under 3. Meanwhile all participants tend to accept the control sentences because all mean scores exceed the mid-3 point. However, the histogram tells us that the mean scores of experimental sentences do not decrease along with the development of the participants' English proficiency. The tendency of the mean scores is fluctuating with the elementary group having the highest and the advanced group having the lowest but with the intermediate group exceeding the pre-intermediate group. Moreover, it is interesting to notice that the mean scores of native speakers on experimental sentences are higher than the PI, PA and A groups, which indicates that the native speakers have a higher tolerance towards Chinese TP constitutions. Both

of them will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Figure 4.1 ***Average mean scores of experimental and control sentences in acceptability judgment task***



4.3.2 The distribution of TP structures in acceptability judgment task at different proficiency levels

In order to see the participants' performances on each TP structure, the average mean scores of each structure are presented in figures at different proficiency levels. Moreover, the falling orders of the mean scores of the experimental sentences are compared with the frequency orders of TP constitutions of the written translation task. The falling orders of the mean scores can reflect the participants' acceptance orders of those TP structures. For the participants, the higher the mean scores are, the more acceptable the TP structures are, which to some extent implies the stronger influences from the relevant Chinese TP constitutions. The frequency order of TP constitutions is another indicator of Chinese TP transfer effects. The higher the frequency is, the stronger the influences are. Therefore, if these two orders are in accordance with each other, the one at the initial position of these two orders should be regarded as the most troublesome C-E interlanguage affected by Chinese TP constructions.

As Figure 4.2 indicates, the participants at the elementary group regard most Chinese TP constitutions as unacceptable and unnatural. However, the control sentences for the two TP structures--OS and OF-- are also regarded as unaccepted and unnatural even though they are actually native English expressions. It can be tentatively conclude that Chinese EFL learners at the initial stage are conscious of the differences between Chinese TP and English SP, but they are not clearly aware of their differences. In acceptability judgment task, the falling order of five TP structures can be delivered as PPT>IP>CT>OF>OS, which is slightly different from the frequency order of the translation task: PPT>IP>OS>OF>CT. Nevertheless, PPT is placed at the initial position of both orders.

Figure 4.2 ***Mean scores of five TP structures at elementary level***

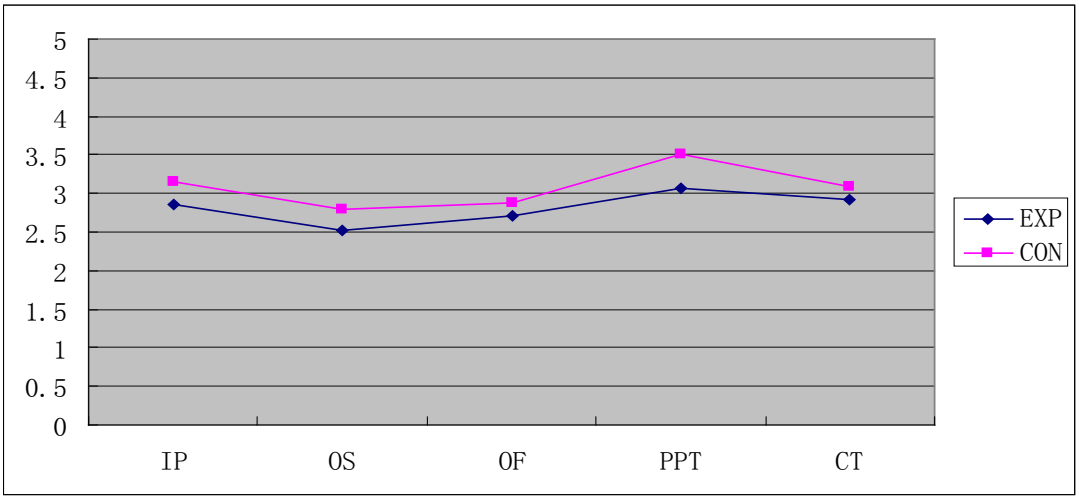
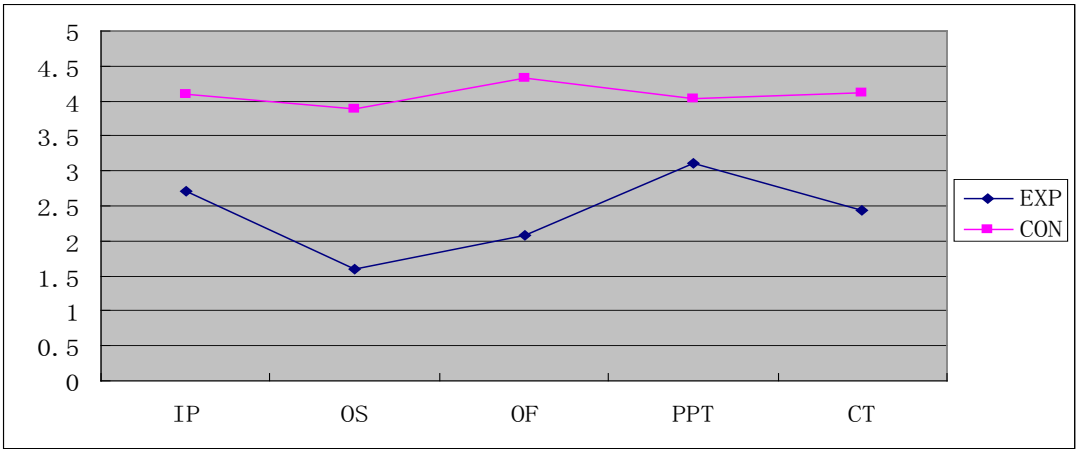


Figure 4.3 ***Mean scores of five TP structures at pre-intermediate level***



At the pre-intermediate group, most mean scores of experimental sentences are lower than 3. The results presented in Figure 4.3 show that the participants at this level are conscious of the inappropriateness of Chinese TP constructions in English. But it is necessary to pay more attention to the mean score of PPT, which is slightly higher than 3. The slight difference implies that the participants are not very good at distinguishing Chinese PPT. The falling order of mean scores of five structures is PPT>IP>CT>OF>OS, and the frequency order of translation task is PPT>IP>OF>OS>CT. These two orders are slightly different but still having PPT and IP at the initial two places. Besides, all participants notice that the control sentences are acceptable and natural in English, which indicates that participants at this level are good at distinguishing Chinese TP from English SP.

Figure 4.4 ***Mean scores of five TP structures at intermediate level***

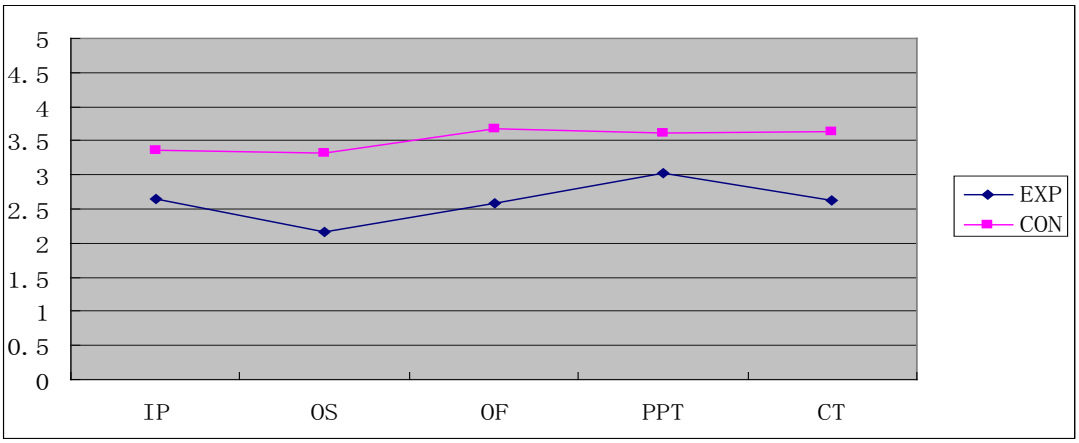
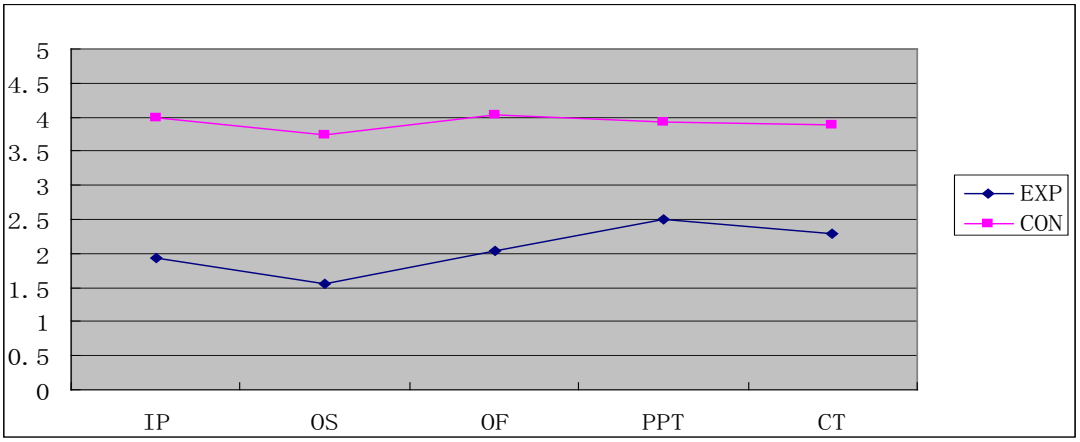


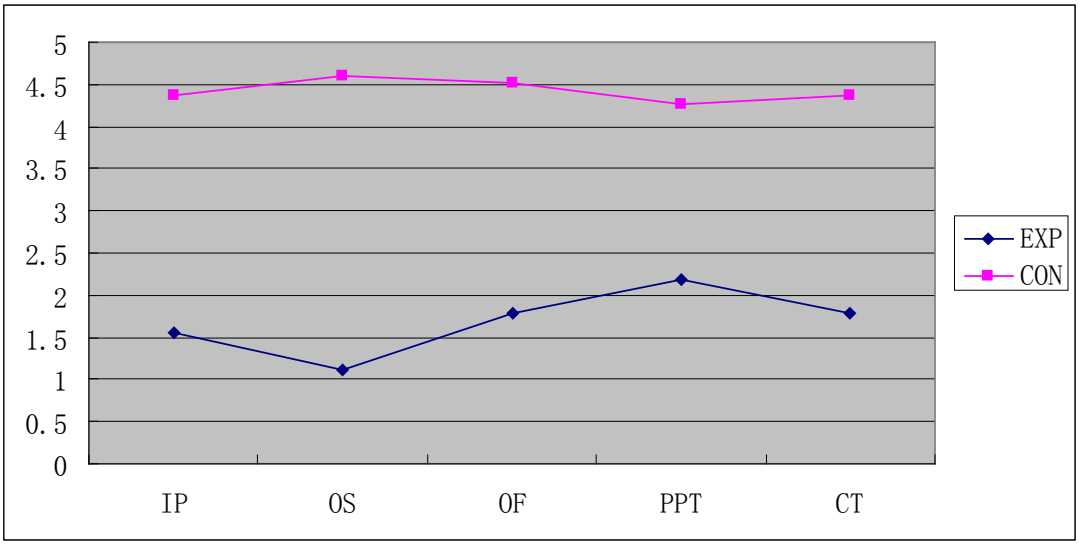
Figure 4.4 indicates that the participants at intermediate level can correctly figure out all the Chinese TP structures as unacceptable and unnatural and the control sentences as acceptable and natural in English. The falling order of mean scores of five TP dimensions are delivered as PPT>IP>CT>OF>OS. Compared with the frequency order of translation task, which is IP>PPT>OS>CT>OF, it can be confirmed that although these two orders are different, IP and PPT are the two most confusing TP structures for the participants at this level.

Figure 4.5 ***Mean scores of five TP structures at pre-advanced level***



At the pre-advanced level, the participants' mean scores of judgments on the experimental sentences range from 1.5 to 2.5 and the scores of the control sentences vary from 3.7 to 4 (please see Figure 4.5). The slight mean differences show that the participants are aware of the distinction between Chinese TP and English SP. The falling order of mean scores of experimental group is PPT>CT>OF>IP>OS, which is different from the frequency order of the translation task, OF>IP>PPT>OS>CT. This difference implies that the transfer effects of Chinese TP constructions lose its influences on a certain structure but strengthen on the others.

Figure 4.6 ***Mean scores of five TP structures at advanced level***



At the advanced level, the mean scores of the experimental sentences range from

1.1 to 2.2 with a falling order of PPT>CT>OF>IP>OS. And the mean scores of the control group are about 4.5. The data in the translation task shows that the participants at this level make no Chinese TP constitutions. But the results of the acceptability judgment task show that they still consider some Chinese TP features more acceptable and natural than others, which to some extent indicates that the transfer effects vary on different TP structures. A close look at the mean scores of native speakers might shed light on the reasons.

Figure 4.7 show that native speakers consider all control sentences completely acceptable. However, as regard to the experimental sentences, their mean scores changes suddenly at CT structure. Unlike the Chinese participants, the English native speakers tend to consider CT structures acceptable. To better understand the differences, Figure 4.8 presents five groups' mean scores of these five TP structures.

Figure 4.7 ***Native speakers' mean scores of five TP structures***

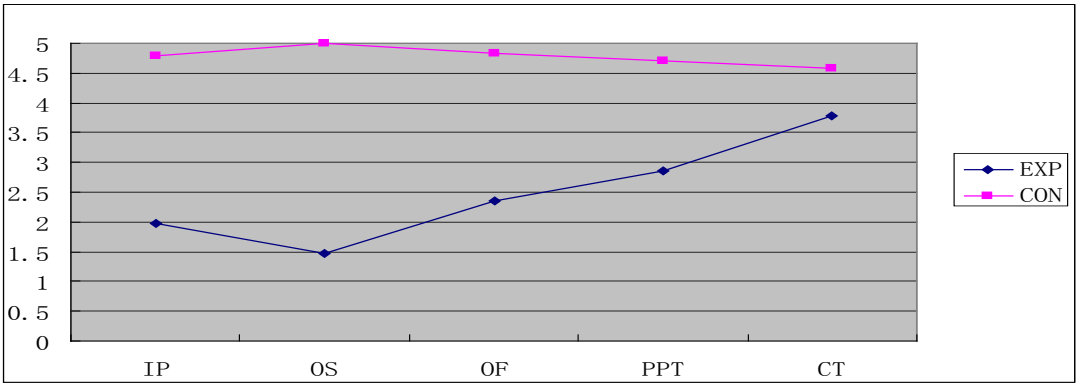
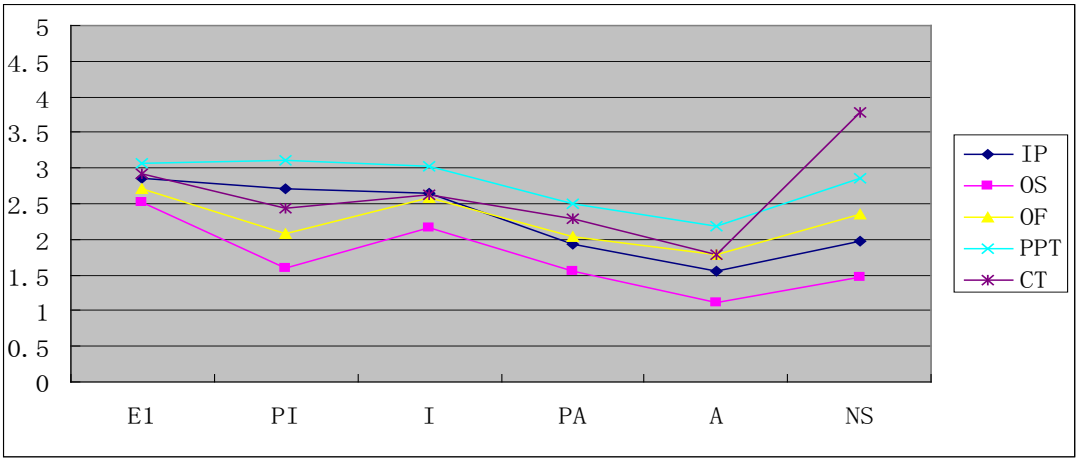


Figure 4.8 ***Mean scores of five TP structures at all proficiency levels***



we can see from Figure 4.8 that the mean scores of the experimental sentences at levels E, I and A do not have sharp contrast but those of PI and native speakers group are dramatically different. For PI group, one possible explanation of the performances is that the participants at this level have realized the typological differences between Chinese TP and English SP. But the strong L1 influences hinder them from making a correct judgment. Moreover, CT structures need to be further discussed since most Chinese participants regard them as unacceptable and unnatural but English native speakers tend to consider them acceptable and natural. The reasons for these controversies will be discussed in next chapter.

In order to check whether the participants' translation task and acceptability judgment task are correlated, a comparison of the frequency orders and the falling orders of these two tasks is presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 ***a comparison of frequency order and falling order of the translation task and the acceptability judgment task***

Level	Translation task	Acceptability Judgment task
Elementary level	PPT>IP>OS>OF>CT	PPT>IP>CT>OF>OS
Pre-intermediate level	PPT>IP>OF>OS>CT	PPT>IP>CT>OF>OS
Intermediate level	IP>PPT>OS>CT>OF	PPT>IP>CT>OF>OS
Pre-advanced level	OF>IP>PPT>OS>CT	PPT>CT>OF>IP>OS
advanced level	IP=OS=OF=PPT=CT=0	PPT>CT>OF>IP>OS

We can see that for those participants at intermediate and lower levels, PPT and IP are the two most frequently used Chinese TP constitutions in their translation task, and these two structures are more acceptable than other TP structures in the judgment task. While for the participants at the pre-advanced and advanced level, TP constitutions in the translation task and the acceptability judgment task seem to be not correlated, which will be further discussed in next chapter.

In this study, by using the oral interpretation task, written translation task and acceptability judgment task, we performed a series of data analyses across different academic levels and different TP constitutions. Several findings can be deduced from the results. Firstly, the participants' TP constitutions decreased along with the improvement of their English proficiency at the translation task. Secondly, most participants regarded those TP constitutions of the acceptability judgment task as unacceptable and unnatural in English and the general tendency of the acceptability declined along with the improvement of their proficiency levels. However, we also found that the participants' performances in translation task were not always in accordance with their performances in the acceptability judgment task. Besides, it is interesting to notice that native speakers were more tolerant with TP constitutions than most Chinese participants.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, this chapter is designed to have a further discussion and analyses of the major findings. Firstly, we will try to illustrate the contrast between the participants' performances at the translation task and the acceptability judgment task. Secondly, we will propose some possible explanations for the different performances between Chinese participants and English native speakers. Thirdly, we will put forward possible explanations for why PPT is the most confusing TP constitutions for the participants at intermediate and lower levels. Finally, we will come up with some pedagogical implications for helping Chinese EFL learners transform from TP constitutions to target-like SP ones.

5.1 Summary of the major findings

The major findings of the interpretation and translation tasks can be summarized as below:

- The participants' production of TP constitutions decreases along with their English proficiency development, which eventually disappear at the advanced level. More target-like subject-prominent constitutions are produced when their English proficiency reaches the intermediate level.
- More TP structures are identified at the elementary level, but then the numbers decline dramatically from the intermediate level on.
- The participants at all proficiency levels tend to produce more PPT and IP constitutions than other TP constructions.

The major findings of the acceptability judgment task can be summarized as follows:

- Participants at all proficiency levels can recognize TP constitutions as unacceptable and unnatural in English and SP as natural English expressions.
- Participants at the elementary group have linguistic consciousness of the inappropriateness of TP structures in English but are not very clear about their differences with English SP constitutions.

- The English native speakers seem to be more tolerant with TP constitutions than Chinese participants at intermediate level and above.
- The participants' performances of the acceptability judgment task are not in accordance with their performances of the translation task.

5.2 Cognitive Explanations for L1 Transfer

As the findings indicate, even though the Chinese participants at the initial stage of SLA made many TP constitutions in the translation task, they could recognize the inappropriateness at the acceptability judgment task. The contradiction can be justified with the cognitive view of L1 language transfer. According to Schachter (1988), learners would resort to their L1 knowledge during their L2 acquisition. Chinese EFL learners tend to transform Chinese specific topic-prominent structures into their English acquisition. According to MDH, at the early stage of SLA, English subject prominence is typologically different from Chinese TP and is relatively more marked than Chinese, which is consequently more difficult for EFL learners, who have to resort to their native language. That's why most participants at the elementary level directly translated the Chinese forms and functions into English and produced TP constitutions in their translations. However, with the improvement of learners' proficiency, English SP also becomes regular, frequent and unmarked. L1 influences gradually disappear. That tests what Eckman (1977, p.321) once said---Those areas of the TL that are different from the NL but are not relatively more marked than the NL will not be difficult.

On the other hand, the participants' "psycholinguistic markedness" (Kellerman, 1993) helps them correctly recognize those TP constitutions. If a feature is perceived as "infrequent, irregular or exceptional", which is what Kellerman called "psycholinguistically marked", then its transferability is inversely proportional to its degree of markedness. Chinese and English are typologically different. Most Chinese TPs are psycholinguistically high-marked and therefore non-transferable. As a result, it is easy for Chinese EFL learners at the intermediate or higher levels to recognize those incorrect sentences in acceptability judgment task. However, EFL learners at

the initial stage failed to figure out the "infrequent, irregular or exceptional" features of TP, which are "psycho-linguistically unmarked" and transferable. That helps to explain why participants at the elementary level tend to produce more TP constitutions.

5.3 The Possible Explanations for the Judgment Differences between Chinese Participants and English Native Speakers

The findings show that English native speakers are more tolerant with TP constitutions, especially CT, than Chinese participants at higher levels. Presumably, the mean score of native speakers should be the lowest because their English proficiency level is high enough to recognize those unacceptable and unnatural Chinese TPs. Two possible explanations are then put forward to account for the contradiction. Firstly, the problems of overgeneralization and avoidance have occurred on Chinese participants. With the improvement of their L2 proficiency, Chinese EFL learners gradually recognize the typological differences of Chinese and English. The traditional English teaching, which only emphasizes the frequent and regular forms or functions of English but ignores the irregular and infrequent ones, has strongly influenced EFL learners' second language acquisition. Few participants can then realize that English language also has Chinese-like topic structures. Secondly, most English TP constitutions are context-dependant. English native participants claimed that they could always think of some relevant context where the TP constitutions could be used properly, either in oral or written forms. However, most Chinese TP constitutions were context-free, so Chinese participants tended to depend on their first reaction to make judgment rather than consider a specific context. Therefore, Chinese participants ignore some context where the English TP can be used. For example, English participants believed that CT structures were unacceptable in written English but are acceptable and common in oral communication. On the contrary, Chinese participants did not realize that CT structures were context-dependent but considered them unnatural.

5.4 Possible Explanations for the Confusion of PPT for Chinese EFL Learners

Results of the present study illustrated that Chinese EFL learners at intermediate and lower levels were confused about the usage of PPT among those five TP structures and the participants at pre-advanced and advanced level were less certain about the usage of PPT either. A contrast study of PPT in Chinese and English sheds light on the confusion. In the present study, there were two sub-dimensions of head-dropped PPT structures, namely, superordinative-hyponymy and whole-part relation. In English, these two relations are illustrated respectively with Preps like *speaking of/as for* and *of/among*. But in Chinese, Preps are unnecessary. The following examples can better present the differences.

(5.1) 水果，我喜欢吃苹果。(Superordinative-hyponymy)
Shuiguo, Wo xihuan chi pingguo.
Fruit, I like eating apples.
"As for/ Speaking of fruit, I like eating apples."

(5.2) 五个苹果， 两个坏了。(Whole-part)
Wuge pingguo, liangge huaile.
Five apples, two are bad.
"Two of the five apples are bad."

The above two examples show that in Chinese TP constitutions, head-dropped PPT can be used as topics, while in English, prepositional phrases are used to introduce topics and head-dropped PP are not allowed. The participants at lower level do not have a good command of these Preps, so they have to resort to their L1 knowledge. It is not strange that they produce sentences like "Fruit, I like eating apples." or "Five apples, two are bad". Nevertheless, along with the development of their L2, the participants gradually acquire more complicated Preps like *speaking of*, and *as for*. Finally the head dropped PPT structures gradually disappear. The learning process of PPT can imply that L2 learners actually go through a gradual acquisition process and the possible L1 transfer does have strong impact on learners' L2 performance,

especially at the early learning stage.

5.5 Pedagogical Implications for English Teaching and Learning

The findings of the present study have some pedagogical implications. Firstly, the typological differences between Chinese and English can generate a new way of English teaching different from the traditional Chinese language teaching methodologies which emphasize grammar analysis but seldom focus on the differences between the native and target languages. If the differences could be compared and analyzed, learners would be able to figure out the causes of errors and teachers could provide more effective feedbacks to help students correct their mistakes and improve their language proficiency. By using this new way of teaching, learners can face the influences of L1 transfer positively rather than avoid confronting them, which would help both learners and teachers correctly recognize and make good use of L1 transfer. Those similarities between two languages could have positive transfer and accelerate the acquisition process; those differences could be identified to avoid being used. Moreover, comparing the similarities and differences of two languages can help teachers recognize the emphases and difficulties of language leanings and then put forward more effective teaching methods accordingly.

Secondly, it is necessary for language teachers to recognize the cognitive structure of language learners and their psycholinguistic perspectives on the target language. L2 acquisition is a gradual process, which is strongly influenced by learners' cognitive structure. Therefore, understanding the cognitive orders of language learners will help teachers better arrange their teaching schedules. Besides, teachers should be able to identify both psychological and language distance, which is not decided by language differences but by learners' perspective. If teachers can better understand learners' cognitive development, it helps to improve the appropriateness and effectiveness of language teaching.

5.6 Conclusion

The present study presents a detailed understanding of Chinese EFL learners' interlanguage development from Chinese topic prominence to English subject prominence. Five Chinese TP structures were chosen as the focuses of the experiment. 125 participants were involved and three methodologies, namely, interpretation, translation and acceptability judgment tasks were used to collect data. The results show that Chinese EFL learners, especially those at the intermediate and lower levels, are under strong influence of their L1 TP constitutions. However, the transfer effects gradually decrease along with the improvement of learners' proficiency and finally disappear at the advanced level.

5.7 Limitations and Further Research

Several limitations can be noticed in the present study due to the limitation of time and the small size of the sample. Firstly, the current analysis of TP to SP transfer is based on Li and Thompson's typological classification, which is only one way of analysis of the complicated and diversified linguistic system. Further scientific research on SLA should be handled considering multiple factors. Secondly, to have a more objective perspective on learners' developmental sequences of TP structure features in SLA, a longitudinal study rather than the present cross-sectional one will be much better. Thirdly, in order to have a more reliable representation of L1 transfer, learners' natural and spontaneous output of daily oral utterances and free writings are better than the present elicitation tasks, which might have the disadvantages of manipulation. Fourthly, certain context can be added to the instrument since some TP constitutions are actually context-dependent. Furthermore, further research needs to investigate acquisition of a SP language (English) as an L2 by comparing L2 learners from both TP and SP L1 backgrounds, which will enable us to obtain a fuller picture of typological influence on second language acquisition. Finally, future researches can be focused on more advanced-level learners and the issue of fossilization in order to look into the process of fossilization in SLA.

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Appendix A

(Adapted from LI (2006))

Interpretation Task

Please interpret the following Chinese sentences into English, 10 seconds for each sentence. You interpretation will be recorded for research purpose.

1. 这个女孩，眼睛大大的。
2. 他作业已经做完了。
3. 苹果我不喜欢吃。
4. 水资源，我们不能浪费。
5. 水果，我喜欢吃梨。
6. 他这个问题没有回答。
7. 计算机，我喜欢。
8. 小张他没有来。
9. 那件衣服，颜色好看。
10. 莉莉数学不及格。
11. 橙汁，我弟弟爱喝。
12. 你的作业，错误很多。
13. 他这部电影没有看过。
14. 这本书，图片很有趣
15. 音乐，我爱听。
16. 他礼物收下了。
17. 他这个人很懒惰。
18. 这几个学生，他最聪明。
19. 这只猴子，它很可爱。
20. 五个苹果两个坏了。
21. 这棵树，叶子很大。
22. 体育活动，我喜欢篮球。
23. 丽丽她很生气。
24. 这个孩子，他很聪明。

25. 十个小孩，六个是男孩。

Appendix B

(Adapted from LI (2006))

Translation Task

Please translate the following Chinese sentences into English.请将以下句子翻译成英文（请写在中文句子右侧）。

1. 这个女孩，眼睛大大的。
2. 他作业已经做完了。
3. 苹果我不喜欢吃。
4. 水资源，我们不能浪费。
5. 水果，我喜欢吃梨。
6. 他这个问题没有回答。
7. 计算机，我喜欢。
8. 小张他没有来。
9. 那件衣服，颜色好看。
10. 莉莉数学不及格。
11. 橙汁，我弟弟爱喝。
12. 你的作业，错误很多。
13. 他这部电影没有看过。
14. 这本书，图片很有趣
15. 音乐，我爱听。
16. 他礼物收下了。
17. 他这个人很懒惰。
18. 这几个学生，他最聪明。
19. 这只猴子，它很可爱。
20. 五个苹果两个坏了。
21. 这棵树，叶子很大。
22. 体育活动，我喜欢篮球。

23. 丽丽她很生气。
24. 这个孩子，他很聪明。
25. 十个小孩，六个是男孩。

Appendix C

(Adapted from LI (2006))

Acceptability Judgment

Questionnaire of the acceptability judgment for Chinese subjects (with items randomized) **请你判断**

下面有 40 个英语句子，请你凭自己的感觉进行判断它们是否地道. 每句话后面有五个阿拉伯数字供你选择，其中 5 表示你认为这句话肯定地道，说英语的人都这么讲;1 表示肯定不地道，讲英语的人都不会这么说。如果你觉得某句话也许不地道，但把握没有 1 那么大，就可以选 2;如果你觉得某句话还算地道，但把握没有 5 那么大，就可以选 4;如果你觉得把握在于 2 和 4 之间，就可以选 3。选定一个数字后，请在上面画一个圈。

Completely unacceptable ***completely acceptable***

1 ***3*** ***5***

1. She has read the book. 1 2 3 4 5
2. This house, the bedrooms are small. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Fruit, I don't eat apples. 1 2 3 4 5
4. He has finished the project. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Coca Cola my brother enjoys. 1 2 3 4 5
6. Two bottles are empty. 1 2 3 4 5
7. That car it is very old. 1 2 3 4 5
8. Music, I love R&B. 1 2 3 4 5
9. That child is very clever. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I have lost the books. 1 2 3 4 5
11. Ten books, four are interesting. 1 2 3 4 5
12. He did not answer this question. 1 2 3 4 5

13. Tom is so hard-working. 1 2 3 4 5
14. She the book has read. 1 2 3 4 5
15. Money he doesn't have. 1 2 3 4 5
16. My brother enjoys Coca Cola. 1 2 3 4 5
17. Lucy never drinks tea. 1 2 3 4 5
18. That lady has left a message to you. 1 2 3 4 5
19. He the project has finished. 1 2 3 4 5
20. His child, eyes are big. 1 2 3 4 5
21. I love R&B. 1 2 3 4 5
22. I the books have lost. 1 2 3 4 5
23. He doesn't have money. 1 2 3 4 5
24. Four books are interesting. 1 2 3 4 5
25. Their dog, ears are small. 1 2 3 4 5
26. He this question did not answer. 1 2 3 4 5
27. This house has small bedrooms. 1 2 3 4 5
28. Books she likes. 1 2 3 4 5
29. Tom he is so hard-working. 1 2 3 4 5
30. We should not waste time. 1 2 3 4 5
31. His child has big eyes. 1 2 3 4 5
32. Five bottles, two are empty. 1 2 3 4 5
33. That lady she has left a message to you. 1 2 3 4 5
34. Lucy, tea never drinks. 1 2 3 4 5
35. That car is very old. 1 2 3 4 5
36. I don't eat apples. 1 2 3 4 5
37. She likes books. 1 2 3 4 5
38. That child he is very clever. 1 2 3 4 5
39. Their dog has small ears. 1 2 3 4 5
40. Time we should not waste. 1 2 3 4 5

Thanks for Your Help!

Appendix D

(Adapted from LI (2006))

Questionnaire for the native speakers of English (with items randomized)

Please help us to judge the acceptability of the following sentences:

If you think each of the following sentences is completely acceptable, please color 5; if you think the sentence totally unacceptable, please color 1; if you think the sentence is either acceptable or unacceptable, please color 3; if you think the acceptability or unacceptability is somewhere in between, color 4 or 2.

Your help is very important for non-native learners of English who are sometimes puzzled about this kind of sentences. Thank you very much for your help.

Completely unacceptable ***completely acceptable***

1 ***3*** ***5***

1. She has read the book. 1 2 3 4 5
2. This house, the bedrooms are small. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Fruit, I don't eat apples. 1 2 3 4 5
4. He has finished the project. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Coca Cola my brother enjoys. 1 2 3 4 5
6. Two bottles are empty. 1 2 3 4 5
7. That car it is very old. 1 2 3 4 5
8. Music, I love R&B. 1 2 3 4 5
9. That child is very clever. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I have lost the books. 1 2 3 4 5
11. Ten books, four are interesting. 1 2 3 4 5
12. He did not answer this question. 1 2 3 4 5
13. Tom is so hard-working. 1 2 3 4 5
14. She the book has read. 1 2 3 4 5
15. Money he doesn't have. 1 2 3 4 5
16. My brother enjoys Coca Cola. 1 2 3 4 5
17. Lucy never drinks tea. 1 2 3 4 5

18. That lady has left a message to you. 1 2 3 4 5
19. He the project has finished. 1 2 3 4 5
20. His child, eyes are big. 1 2 3 4 5
21. I love R&B. 1 2 3 4 5
22. I the books have lost. 1 2 3 4 5
23. He doesn't have money. 1 2 3 4 5
24. Four books are interesting. 1 2 3 4 5
25. Their dog, ears are small. 1 2 3 4 5
26. He this question did not answer. 1 2 3 4 5
27. This house has small bedrooms. 1 2 3 4 5
28. Books she likes. 1 2 3 4 5
29. Tom he is so hard-working. 1 2 3 4 5
30. We should not waste time. 1 2 3 4 5
31. His child has big eyes. 1 2 3 4 5
32. Five bottles, two are empty. 1 2 3 4 5
33. That lady she has left a message to you. 1 2 3 4 5
34. Lucy, tea never drinks. 1 2 3 4 5
35. That car is very old. 1 2 3 4 5
36. I don't eat apples. 1 2 3 4 5
37. She likes books. 1 2 3 4 5
38. That child he is very clever. 1 2 3 4 5
39. Their dog has small ears. 1 2 3 4 5
40. Time we should not waste. 1 2 3 4 5

Thanks for Your Help!