

MASTER'S THESIS

A cross-sectional study of syntactic errors in English composition by ESL students in Hong Kong: aspects of negative transfer

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**A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF SYNTACTIC ERRORS IN ENGLISH
COMPOSITION BY ESL STUDENTS IN HONG KONG:
ASPECTS OF NEGATIVE TRANSFER**

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Abstract

There is a large body of research concerning written errors in Hong Kong English and negative transfer phenomenon in second language acquisition over the past twenty years. In this paper, the subjects were 60 secondary students drawn from three different Band two schools. 60 compositions in total, 20 compositions from Form 1, Form 3 and Form 5 were collected and examined. The study is developed within the framework of Interlanguage Hypothesis. Both the transfer errors and the non-errors are studied.

It is hypothesized that junior secondary school students rely heavily on their first language in learning English and make more negative transfer errors than senior secondary school students. Six syntactic aspects are studied: adverbials of degrees, adverbials of time, coordination and subordination, questions, negation, and passive structures.

The result does not match perfectly with the hypotheses. Surprisingly, the effect of negative transfer has the greatest effect on Form 3, not Form 1 students, and has the least effect on Form 5 students. Lower form students made more L1 influenced errors in the placement of adverbials of degrees. Higher form students produced more transfer errors on coordination and subordination. The effect of L1 continues with respect to the production of the causative subordination of *yanwaih* "because"...*soyih* "so", and so does the Cantonese structure of questions.

摘要

在過去二十年，很多論文都對香港英文寫作錯誤作出研究，當中很多都針對中文句法影響英文寫作這個現象。本文收集了中一、中三及中五各二十份作文，共六十份英文作文為是次研究藍本。這些學生來自三間不同的第二等級中學。寫作錯失及非錯失都會包括在是次分析中。

本文假設低年級的學生，在英文寫作方面，比高年級的學生依賴第一語言，而前者的作文出現較多受中文影響的句法錯誤。本文會對以下六方面作分析：程度副詞、時間副詞、連句及附屬句子、問句、否定句及被動句。

分析後得出的結果跟假設有點不一樣，本文發現不是中一學生的英文寫作最受中文句法影響，而是中三學生的英文句子最受中文句法的影響，中文句法對中五學生的英文寫作影響最低。在程度句法方面，低年級的學生受到中文句法影響，錯誤較多；在連句及附屬句子運用方面，高年級的學生較受中文句法影響，錯誤較低年級的多。中文句法對原因附屬句子一如「因為…所以」結構一有持續影響，對問句的影響亦然。