



Error Analysis of Chinese Learners of the Korean Language: Focus on Source Analysis of Content-Based Errors

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Abstract

Research on error analysis in Korean language learning focuses on the judging and recording of manifested errors within learners' written works. To assess error frequency, error analysis targets local errors (errors that are 'understandable' or 'anticipatory' from students of various levels while learning to write). However, in foreign or second language learning, where achieving communicative competence is the primary goal, uncovering/identifying those factors that 'minimize' proper communication is of utmost importance. Among Chinese learners, for instance, we discover global errors. These errors are committed by learners due to the differences in the basic understanding and use of those words that are based on the fundamentally different etymology of Chinese characters. For this paper, 500 compositions by Chinese students were analyzed and compared. Assessed errors were classified as spelling errors and content-based errors; the latter category was then divided further into native language-influenced errors and developmental errors. In short, the ratios of the different classes of errors classes at various levels were as follows: 1) Spelling errors to content-based errors for beginners 78%:23%, for intermediate 20%:80%, for advanced 36%:64%; and 2) Native tongue-interference errors to developmental errors to unique errors for beginners 11%:87%:2%, for intermediate 21%:69%:10%, for advanced 29%:71%:1%.

1 Introduction

Most studies on errors in the field of Korean language learning focus on describing errors that are manifested in learners' language. Also, most studies limit their scope to 'local errors,' which may fall into the categories of 'understandable' or 'assumable.' But, if the primary purpose of foreign or second language learning is to communicate in the target language, the ultimate goal must be to minimize the factors which will disrupt communication, and for this reason, the first task should be identifying and defining these factors.

In the case of Chinese learners at all levels from beginners to advanced, lexical errors usually arise because of learners directly translating from their native language into Korean or because they are unaware of the semantic differences for the same words in Chinese and Korean. If the interlocutor does not understand any Chinese, as is often the case, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the target sentence. The failure to use the proper 'word' leads to a global error, which disrupts the overall communication.

The extent to which wrong word usage can negatively influence communication depends on the native language of the learners. For those whose native language is not related to the Chinese script, strategies for successful learning or conversation could be paraphrasing the target words, creating new words, and code-switching, which refers to the act of combining their native lan-

guage with the target language. But learners with a background in Chinese characters tend to commit a higher percentage of errors due to the different usage of Chinese characters in their native language and the target language, Korean. These errors, influenced by their native language, can be divided into the following two categories: errors due to direct translation from Chinese sentences, and errors committed because of the semantic difference between Chinese characters in Chinese and in Korean.

Studies about Chinese learners of Korean language and their lexical errors have been conducted by Wang (2007), Han (2006), Yi (2006), Hong (2006), Choi (2005), Yi (2004), and Kim (2003). Wang's study (2007) about adjective errors among Chinese learners, which did not clearly provide details of the frequency of the usage and of the errors within the different levels, has classified the adjective errors according to the origin of each error: transfer in language (62.4%), transfer between languages (28.35%), and strategies in communication (9.25%).¹ The study conducted on Chinese learners of Korean in Korea by Hong (2001) explains the types of errors according to the parts of speech in Korean and also suggests which aspects will need to be corrected and taught. The errors can be attributed to an inadequate understanding of the structure of Korean, differences in meaning and form between native language and Korean that are similar to each other, and native language transfer.² Yi (2006) reports on the frequent error patterns of Chinese learners. When the meaning of the Korean word is similar to the Chinese word, they are most likely to think that the form of the Chinese character would be the same. So they directly translate the Chinese word or come up with a compound word of their own using the Chinese characters as they understand them. Kim's study (2003) claims that lexical errors of Chinese learners rapidly increase at level 4 (intermediate) and the learners tend to make more lexical than other errors, especially in the substitution of Chinese words for Korean words. This seems to be an error that is influenced by their native language while replacing the Chinese characters in Chinese with those in Korean.

This study will examine the types and causes of the errors, and then analyze the errors in word usage in students' compositions. The errors discussed in this paper will be categorized into different types after the analysis. After this categorization, the errors at different levels and their changes will also be discussed.

2 Analysis of lexical errors and their causes

2.1 Global errors and lexical errors

When the error disrupts the whole communication, Burt (1975) defines it as a 'global error' and claims that it influences the overall sentence structure. According to him, global errors are usually syntactical by nature and can be divided into four types.³ Ferris (2002) also identified syntactical errors to be the most frequently committed errors in general English writing of foreign students who are studying it as a second language. He identifies the following three sub-categories of syntactical errors: sentence structure error (22.5%), run-ons in which two or more sentences are connected without a proper conjunction (2.9%), and fragments resulting from incomplete sentences (1.8%).⁴ However, these errors arising from the improper usage of syntactic structure do not disrupt overall communication in Korean. The reason for this seems to be the relatively free format of word order in the Korean language.

If we look at Example (1) from Lee (2003) and Example (2) from Suk and Ahn (2003), the misplacement of word would not lead to global errors which would disrupt the whole communication process.⁵

- (1) a. *그러나 숲 큰과 산에 열매가 많고 단풍이 아름다워요. (Norway, Beginners 2)
*But the forest big and many fruits are in the mountains leaves are beautiful. (Norway, Beginners 2)
- b. *그래서 많이 한국어 책을 읽고 싶습니다. (Italy, Beginners 2)
*So many Korean books want to read. (Italy, Beginners 2)
- c. *부모님은 제가 아이로 여전히 생각합니다. (Russia, Intermediate)

- *Parents I am a child still think. (Russia, Intermediate)
- d. *맨날 하늘의 맑은 LA 가 생각난다. (US, Intermediate 2)
- *Everyday [I think about] the clear sky of LA think. (U.S., Intermediate 2)
- (2) a. *나는 갈 때 숲에 캥거루와 고슴도치를 왔다. (US, Intermediate 2)
- *Everyday [I think about] the clear sky of LA think. (U.S., Intermediate 2)
- b. *일찍 아침마다 헬스를 해요. (US, Intermediate 4)
- *Early morning [I do] health. (U.S., Intermediate 4)

Generally speaking, native speakers think that improper use of words is that which causes miscommunication with non-native speakers (Burt, 1975; Tomiyana, Khali, & Ellis as cited in Ellis, 1994). Because of the influence of Chinese characters, Japanese and Chinese learners of the Korean language frequently commit 'lexical errors' which lead to global errors. If we look at the Example (3a), the factor causing global error is not the preposition "에" but the word "공국(?)." The listener cannot guess the meaning of "공국(?)." Therefore, the communication fails. In the case of (3b), "좋은 표현" means "to work hard in a company and to be recognized for it" in Chinese. Someone whose native language is not Chinese would not be able to understand its meaning, making it a global error.

- (3) a. *공국(?)에서 키울 수 있는 꽃도 있는데다가 꽃을 파는 사람들이 다른 나라*에서(√의) 이국적인 꽃도 수입해서 팔고 있다. (Intermediate 2)
- *In Konggook [there are] to cultivate flowers those who sell flowers import exotic flowers and sell them (Intermediate 2)
- b. *회사에서 좋은*표현(?) 있으면 승진할 수 있다. (Advanced 1)
- *At company good expressions [one] can get promoted. (Advanced 1)

As seen from the above, most errors committed by Chinese learners are due to wrong word usage and this leads to miscommunication. This kind of failure, related to choice of the right word, is due to the interference of Chinese characters. Gass and Selinker (2001) also claim that, in the learning of English as a second language, lexical errors are usually the ones which cause miscommunication rather than grammatical errors. Grammatical errors do not seem to be a problem, and a native speaker can understand a non-native speaker, but lexical errors do cause miscommunication.⁶ But the reason that global errors cannot easily be the subject of study is due to the limitation of analyzing only the 'document' at the time of error examination without considering the learners' situation when making the errors.

Ellis (1994) also mentions the importance of error evaluation and discusses it in the following three dimensions. The first is the degree of seriousness of the error, the second concerns the differences in evaluations made by native and non-native speakers, and the third concerns the criteria used when evaluating the errors. Of the three, the primary dimension seems to be the first one, the degree of seriousness of each error. Given the seriousness of the errors, one can see that research into global errors, as mentioned previously, is extremely important. The purpose of such research would be to identify the causes of global errors and to prevent them. Future studies about errors should involve not just objective and quantitative research to describe the errors but also to gain deeper insights into the causes of errors.

2.2 *The causes of errors and transfer*

There have been many arguments about why errors occur. Generally speaking, they could be attributed to the influence of the native language, the influence of the target language, and the learning and communicative strategies adopted in the process of learning and language acquisition.

An important factor in the study of errors is that errors should be seen as a natural process in language acquisition rather than as a failure in word usage. Even for native speakers, it is difficult, beyond the mere retention of a target word, to use a word correctly in a totally new context while still grappling with its meaning. All linguistic processes, including errors, which occur while learn-

ing a second language are called interlanguage. Interlanguage is not stable but is rather continuously changing and in transition.

The factors contributing to interlanguage are the native language, the target language, and unique linguistic elements not attributable to either the native or the target language. There are not as yet many studies conducted on the last factor. These three factors come into play when learners use their prior knowledge in order to solve the problems in miscommunication. This can be viewed as a communicative strategy and manifests itself when learners do not exactly know what to say. There are different types of communicative strategies, but if we only look at the problem of missing lexical knowledge, the strategies would usually consist of using an easier word, changing to a different word from one's native language, and creating a totally new word.

In light of the preceding observations, this paper, drawing from interlanguage research, classifies lexical errors according to the following three causes: First, errors due to native language transfer; Second, errors attributable to their development in learning the target language; Third, unique errors arising from the use of communicative strategies.

The errors resulting from native language transfer will occur more often when the target language and one's native language are similar to each other. In the lexical area, there have been many studies related to native language transfer. One of these was conducted by Kellerman (as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2001) who said that, because of the influence of one's first language, many types of interlanguage develop. Also, Ringbom (as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2001) discovered that Swedish and Finnish speakers who study English as a second language commit lexical errors and that this fact is mostly due to the transfer in translation. Furthermore, if one's first language and second language are interrelated, the acquisition would be accelerated. Therefore, Sjöholm (as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2001) said, Swedish learners of English are better than Finnish learners because the Swedish language is closer to English than Finnish. As explained here, in the area of lexical error and acquisition, native language transfer is an important factor (Gass & Selinker, 2001). For Korean and Chinese, both these languages are based on Chinese characters. So lexical errors due to the influence of the native language would be proportionately higher than any other errors for Chinese learners of the Korean language.

The second form of errors are developmental errors and these are different from how Dulay and Burt (as cited in Ellis, 1994) defined them in their study. In their paper, a developmental error is similar to that committed during the process of first language acquisition. But developmental errors in this study occur in the process of learning the target language. It is closer to the definition of Richards (as cited in Ellis, 1994) that such errors occur due to the limited knowledge of learners while they hypothesize about the target language.

The third form of errors, unique errors, cannot be explained by either the native or the target language. This type of errors tends to fall into the category of global errors as discussed previously, and it is especially evident in word usage. Coining or creating new words as a result of communicative strategies during a conversation would fall into this category.

For Chinese learners, there is a higher percentage of lexical errors due to the influence of their native language compared to grammatical errors. The reason is as follows: more than sixty percent of Korean words are based on Chinese characters. Therefore, when Chinese learners study Korean words, they can easily relate Chinese characters in Korean to those in their native language. But, again, Chinese characters in Korean and Chinese are different from each other. 'Native language influence' can involve interference from many different aspects of the native language. Because of this, such errors can be reflective of the respective socio-cultural backgrounds and cultural differences between the native and target societies, as well as spelling errors arising from pronunciation differences. There are so many possible sub-types that they cannot all be identified and counted.

If we consider errors due to the influence of the native language to be part of native language transfer errors⁷ and sub-divide them further, it can be classified into the following three types: first, errors arising from the use of Chinese characters directly in their original Chinese meaning; second, errors arising from the use of Chinese idiomatic expressions⁸; third, errors due to the interference of Chinese pronunciation by transferring the Chinese pronunciation to the spelling rather than using the Korean pronunciation.⁹ The most frequent error type is the first one, errors arising from

the use of Chinese characters in their actual meaning in Chinese for studying Chinese characters in Korean.

- (4) a. 그래서 향산에서 *출산(出產, √生産)하는 견과류의 열매도 아주 많고 건강 데 좋은 것이다. (Advanced 1)
So from Hyangsan produced nuts are lots and healthy. (Advanced 1)
- b. 태산에 있는 도교도 볼 수 있다. 그 곳에 *원망(願望, √所望)이 될 수 있는 *원망판(√소망판)에서 원하는 것을 쓰고 원망이 자주 될 수 있다. (Advanced 1)
One can see Dokyo in Taesan. From the Wonmangpan where wonmang is possible and write what he wants and become wonmang as often as possible. (Advanced 1)
- c. 겨울연가와 *상관한(相關한, √關聯된)기념품도 살 수 있습니다. (Advanced 1)
[The Korean drama] Winter Sonata related souvenirs can be bought. (Advanced 1)

The Chinese characters mentioned above 出產(生産), 願望(希望), 相關 한(關聯된) are not the ones frequently used in Korean.

- (5) a. 셋째, 사형제도 있기 때문에 가족 버부도 예방할 수 있습니다. ... 그 범죄자 벌 받지만 안 죽이면 피해자의 가족들이 공평적으로 버부하면 *어떻습니까? (怎么样, √어떻게 되겠습니까?) (Advanced 1)
Third, because there is death penalty, family beobu 버부 can be prevented. ...*how is (what would happen) that criminal will be punished but if he is not killed the victims [family] justly beobu 버부? (Advanced 1)
- b. 공부를 통해서 자기의 *능력이 강하게(√능력을 기르게) 된다. (能力很强) (Advanced 1)
Through studies one's *abilities are strengthened (abilities are cultivated). (Advanced 1)
- c. 한자권이라서 물론 단어의 뜻이나 발음, 생각하는 방식 및 예의나 *대인의 태도(√對人的態度√사람을 대하는 태도) 등에 대해서 공통점이 굉장히 많다고 생각한다. (Advanced 1)
Because we use the Chinese characters, of course meaning and pronunciation and the way we think and manners and *attitude toward others (how we relate to others), there are many similarities. (Advanced 1)
- d. 건강이 나빠서 인간관계도 *처리할(√유지할) 수 없다. (Intermediate 2)
Because health is bad, human relationship is difficult to *take care of (maintain). (Intermediate 2)

(5a) contains spelling errors of “버부(버부),” “비해자(비해자)” which are influenced by vocal sounds along with the wrong usage of the coined word 공평적, and furthermore the direct translation of the Chinese word “怎么样” makes it difficult to understand the meaning of the whole sentence. (2b) is a collocational error resulting from a direct translation of the Chinese expression of “능력이 강하다(能力强).” The example in (2c) also directly translated “사람을 대하는 태도 혹은 인간관계” from the Chinese expression. Similarly, in (2d), the Korean expression of “인간관계를 맺다(유지하다)” was changed into the Chinese expression of “人際關係處理.” As we had discussed here, these errors, influenced by expressions in Chinese, increase greatly at the intermediate level and will continue to grow in numbers up till the advanced level.

- (6) a. 텔레비전에 비해서 뉴스가 좀 느리며 화상이 없어 가지고 *우해 (誤解, √오해)가 있는 것 같다. (Intermediate 2)
Compared to television news is a little slow and no picture leads to a *woohae (misunderstanding). (Intermediate 2)
- b. 우리 고향의 날씨*부잡하는데(複雜, √복잡) 제가 습관이 되어서 불편하지않습니다. (Intermediate 2)
The weather of my birthplace is *boochap (complicated) but because I'm used to it, it's not so bad. (Intermediate 2)
- c. 복잡한 *수수(手續, √수속)했다. (Intermediate 2)
It was a complicated *soosoo (process). (Intermediate 2)

- d. 특히 X 맨이나 러브편지 이런 것이 *자무(字幕, √자막)도 있어서 제일 좋다. (Advanced 1)
Particularly X-men or Love Letter they have *jamoo (subtitles) so they were good. (Advanced 1)
- e. 화장실과 주방, *수개실도 있다. (Intermediate 1)
[There were] bathroom, kitchen and *soogaesil. (Intermediate 1)

The examples shown in (6) “오해>우해(誤解 wùjiě),” “복잡>부잡(複雜 fùzá),” “수속>수수(手續 shǒuxù),” “자막>자막(字幕 zìmù)” are spelling errors due to the influence of native language pronunciation. If readers or teachers do not know the Chinese characters used here, proper comprehension of these sentences will be difficult. Example (6e) is a special case because a new word has been created after borrowing the meaning of “bedroom” in Chinese characters in Chinese “休息室 (xiūxiǎoshì)” and transferring the Chinese pronunciation to Korean.

Examples of developmental errors, the second type of lexical errors, are shown in the following. Their occurrence depends on the difficulty of the target word during the process of vocabulary learning.

- (7) a. 전화는 아주 *편하다(√편리하다). (Intermediate 2)
Telephone is very *pyeonhada (convenient). (Intermediate 2)
- b. 라디오는 인터넷에 비해서 소식이 짧고 *적다(√간단하다). (Intermediate 2)
Radio compared to the Internet news is short and *jeokda (simple). (Intermediate 2)
- c. 악기와 운동과 창작이 다 *좋습니다(√잘합니다). (Intermediate 1)
Musical instruments, exercise and creating are all *jotsumpnida (good at it). (Intermediate 1)
- d. 온도가 높고 일교차가 심해서 피부병이 많이 *나옵니다(√납니다). (Intermediate 2)
High temperature and the daily range [of temperature] *naopnida (cause) skin problems. (Intermediate 2)

As seen in the above examples, “편하다-편리하다,” “(소식이) 적다- 간단하다,” “(악기와 운동이) 좋다-잘하다,” “(피부병이) 나오다-나다” are errors arising from the choice of the wrong words because they seem to have similar meanings to the proper ones. These kinds of errors occur frequently independently of one’s native language.

The third type of lexical errors are unique errors and are caused by the use of the words created by the learners as a strategy according to their own language rules or during the process of communication. Some examples are as follows:

- (8) a. 좀더 적극적인 방법은 스트레스를 주는 *선인(√원인)에 대해 다른 사람들과 신나게 수다를 떠는 것이다. (Intermediate 2)
A little more aggressive way is to vent out with another person about the *seonin (cause) of the stress. (Intermediate 2)
- b. 11 월까지는 가을입니다. 더워지만 시원합니다. 1 년중에 제일 *쾌편(√쾌적하고 편합니다)합니다. (Intermediate 2)
It’s autumn until November. It was hot but somewhat cool. Of the year, it’s the most *kweopyun (delightful) time. (Intermediate 2)
- c. 눈을 올 때 눈사람을 만들며 눈싸움을 할 수 있습니다. 그리고 *스탁(스키를 탈)을 할 수 있습니다. (Intermediate 1)
When it snows, you can make snowman and have a snowball fight. And *stock (ride the skis). (Intermediate 1)
- d. 그때는 여름이었었는데 산위에는 아주 시원하며 아름다웠다. *산물(√약수)이 많이 있어서 마실 수도 있었다. (Intermediate 1)
It was summer then the place near the mountain was cool and beautiful. *sanmool (mineral water) was tasty and available. (Intermediate 1)
- e. 또한 *새 대학생이(대학 신입생) 입학시간이라서 희망이 가득하는 것을 느낍니다.

Also [it was] registration time for *sae daehakseng (1st year college students), so I felt a sense of hopefulness.

The above examples suggest that the coined words like “선인(善因), 쾌편(快便)” should be categorized as the third type, unique errors, and not as errors due to the influence of the native language; they are not Chinese characters that exist in their native language but are newly created by the learners. Besides these, in the case of “스탁,” the clause “스키를 타다” is reduced to the 2-syllable word “스탁.” Whether this is due to the tendency for Chinese characters to be easily combined to form new words, or is influenced by the new trend of coining 2-syllable words in Korean these days, is hard to say. Other examples are “대학 신입생>새 대학생,” “약수>산물” and “세탁기>빨래기” (Intermediate 2), “헬스클럽>헬스탕” (Intermediate 2), “초등학생>초학생” (Beginners 1).¹⁰ This kind of errors is typical of learners’ interlanguage. Owing to the demands of the test they have to take, the learners are under pressure to perform to come up with the best answers they could think of. Therefore, they tend to create new words based on Chinese characters, as in the examples above. In the case of “산물,” the Korean word “약수(藥水)” does not correspond to any Chinese word. It is also not a word we usually encounter in daily life. So the learners come up with “산물” which is created from the clause “산에 있는 물.” In the case of “헬스탕,” since in their native Chinese language, one refers to a large space as “청(厅, tīng),” learners have created a new word based on this Chinese character.

3 Results of the error analysis

The compositions analyzed in this study are midterm and final papers of students at the Institute of International Education (IIE) at Kyung Hee University during the spring semester of 2008. After looking through the papers of 480 Chinese learners of the Korean language, we have identified the lexical errors. First of all, we identified simple spelling errors and content-based errors.¹¹ For simple spelling errors, only the frequency is determined, while content-based errors were organized and analyzed according to their causes. There were a total of 34 composition topics, composed of 106,361 clauses. The breakdown of the papers and the clauses according to levels is shown in Table 1.

	Number of Papers	Number of Clauses	Percentage (%)
Beginners 1	39	1,861	2%
Beginners 2	117	9,392	9%
Intermediate 1	428	49,110	46%
Intermediate 2	311	34,512	32%
Advanced 1	65	11,486	11%
Total	960	106,361	100%

Table 1: Breakdown of the papers

The analysis of the errors in this study is based on the above data. The compositions of the learners were analyzed and coded three times. During the analysis, we marked the lexical errors while reading students’ papers. These errors comprise spelling errors, wrong usage of words, parts which native Korean speakers cannot understand, and the sentences whose meanings are not clear.¹² For the second analysis, our researchers examined each error carefully and looked at the frequency of the simple spelling error or simple mistake. During the third analysis, after discussing the influence of their native language with five native Chinese speakers and their judgment of these errors, we re-categorized these errors. While going through the third analysis, we identified the origins of the different errors as native language-influenced, developmental, and unique or strategic errors. The following were the writing topics according to the different levels:¹³

- Beginners 1: The Reason I Like Food, Writing an Invitation to a Birthday Party, Looking at the Picture and Describe It, Introducing My Family
- Beginners 2: Introducing the Season of My Country, Introducing My Family, Introducing a Friend, Introducing a Place to Visit, Future Plan
- Intermediate 1: The Friend I Remember the Most, The Condition of a Profession, The Types and Characteristics of Mass Media, Comparison between the Season of Korea and My Country, The Famous Market in My Country, Self Introduction, Looking at a Picture and Describe It, Writing a Travel Essay, Describe the Condition of a Room after Robbery. Introducing My Family
- Intermediate 2: My Mistake, My Opinion about Studying Abroad in Korea, My Way of Relieving Stress, Introducing How to Choose One's Name in My Country, Introducing Favorite Food, My Feelings on Studying Abroad in Korea, The House I would like to Live in, The Goal of My Life
- Advanced 1: Writing to Ask for a Consultation, Introducing a Place for a Tour, The Most Memorable Day of My Life, Share One's Experience on Language Learning

If we look at the ratio of lexical errors within the different levels, as seen in Table 2, the overall percentage is 2-3%, which is not that high in quantitative terms. Yet as we mentioned previously, these lexical errors disturb the overall conversation; for this reason, they are important to look at. Also, these are content-based and not spelling errors, which makes the study about content-based errors even more important.

	Number of Clauses	Number of Clauses that Contain Lexical Errors	Frequency of Errors (Percentage)
Beginners 1	1,861	38	2%
Beginners 2	9,392	120	1%
Intermediate 1	49,110	572	1%
Intermediate 2	34,512	1,146	3%
Advanced 1	11,486	279	2%

Table 2: Frequency of errors by levels

The next table (Table 3) distinguishes content-based errors and spelling errors, along with their frequency.

	Clauses that Contain Lexical Errors	Frequency of Spelling Errors	Frequency of Content-based Errors
Beginners 1	38	37 (97%)	1 (3%)
Beginners 2	120	93 (78%)	27 (22%)
Intermediate 1	572	450 (79%)	122 (21%)
Intermediate 2	1,146	929 (81%)	217 (19%)
Advanced 1	279	179 (64%)	100 (36%)

Table 3: The frequency of spelling and content-based errors by levels

As seen in Table 3, in Beginners 1, there was only one case of content-based errors; the rest were all spelling errors. In Beginners 2, more content-based errors occur, and at the same time, spelling errors seem to be reduced in number. At this level, learners have become more familiarized with the spelling and structure of Korean and at this point they are more likely to remember the words they have learnt in Beginners 1. So the accuracy in writing tends to be very high at this level. It is somewhat reduced in Intermediate 1 and 2, but shows an improvement again in Advanced 1.

As far as content-based errors are concerned, they started to rise in Beginners 2, and remained at around 20% in Intermediate 1 and 2. Such errors increased further at the Advanced Level, and

the reason seems to be the influence of the lexical structure or expressional transfer from the native language as mentioned before. While the learners can be familiarized with grammatical structures in Intermediate or in the first half of Advanced Level, the lexical area continuously requires new input and constant study. Thus, without some individual effort and self-study in addition to formal classroom learning, it would be quite difficult to overcome lexical errors.¹⁴

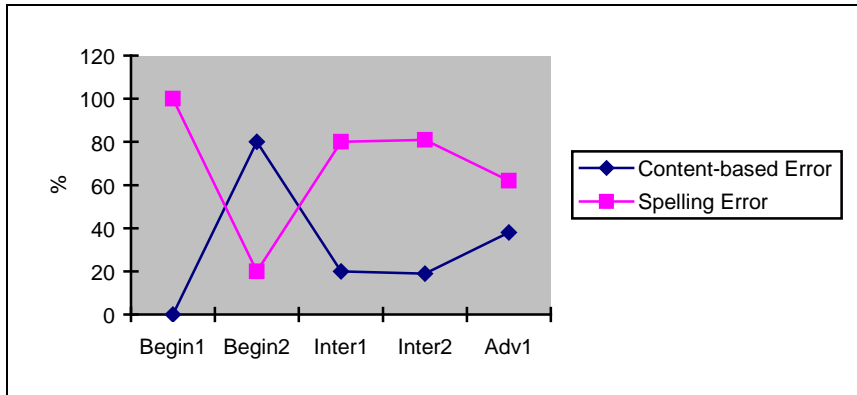


Fig. 1: Changes in content-based and spelling errors by levels

The following data show the frequency of the three types of content-based errors we have looked into: 1) errors due to native language transfer; 2) developmental errors; and 3) unique errors or strategic errors. Beginners 1 data have been excluded as they show only one content-based error. But in order to see the developmental patterns through the Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced Levels, Intermediate 1 and 2 numbers have been added up. Table 4 shows the error frequency at different levels, whereas Figures 3, 4 and 5 plot the error frequency in graph form.

	Errors due to Native Language Transfer (Percentage)	Developmental Errors (Percentage)	Unique and Strategic Errors (Percentage)
Beginners	11%	87%	2%
Intermediate	21%	69%	10%
Advanced	26%	71%	3%

Table 4: Frequency of errors by cause

Looking at the errors caused by native language transfer, they amounted to 11% at Beginners' Level, increased to 21% at Intermediate Level, and rose further to 26% at Advanced Level. This is similar to the frequency of errors influenced by language transfer reported by Wang (2007), which stands at around 28%. The subjects of Wang's study (2007) were students majoring in Korean in China. Their level seemed to be between Intermediate and Advanced, when compared to the proficiency of the students in Korea. If this is so, we could infer that, for Chinese learners of the Korean language at Intermediate or Upper Levels, the proportion of errors caused by native language transfer stands at an average of 25%.

The most frequent of the errors committed by Chinese learners due to the influence of their native language, Chinese, is the improper use of “자기(自己),” used 7 times, followed by “기분이 좋다>기분이 나쁘다,” 6 times, “이름>명(名),” 6 times, “(바람이) 세다/약하다>크다/작다.” 2 and 4 times respectively, “(병이) 나다>나오다,” 3 times, “(운동경기를) 하다>치다,” 2 times. Besides these, using the Chinese characters from Chinese, “관용어>습관용어, 공연>연출, 소망>원망, 전자제품>전자장품” are all related examples. Also, because of the meaning or usage difference of Chinese characters used in Chinese and in Korean, the following errors occurred as well:

“관련하다>상관하다, 일상>일반, 모양>보습, 책임지다>담보하다, 익숙해지다>습관이 되다.” “*기분이 나쁘다” is a direct translation from Chinese, which has persisted from the Beginners to the Intermediate Level. But if we teach the connecting structure of “기분이 좋다/나쁘다” along with the general usage of the “adverb+기쁘다” structure, and teach the structure of “기분이 즐겁다” while considering the motion of “기쁘다,” the errors from this area would be reduced.¹⁵

The next examples in (9) illustrate the wrong usage of “자기(自己).”

- (9) a. *자기가(√ 나는) 한국어를 가장 좋아합니다. (Intermediate 2)
**Jagiga* (I) like Korean language the best. (Intermediate 2)
- b. *자기(√ 자신)에게 어울리는 스트레스 해소법을 찾아서 스트레스를 풀 수 있다. (Intermediate 2)
Finding ways to relieve stress for *jagi (oneself) is a good way to deal with stress. (Intermediate 2)
- c. *자기의 주택(√ 내 집)에서 살면서 *자기(√ 직접) 만들면 방법이 어렵지 않다. (Intermediate 1)
Living in *jagi's residents (my house), make it *jagi (by himself) is not too difficult. (Intermediate 1)
- d. *자기(√ 혼자) 다른 국가 생활 때 너무 불편하다. (Intermediate 2)
Living in a foreign country for *jagi (by oneself) is very difficult. (Intermediate 2)
- e. 이 음식은 값이 싸고 *자기는(√ 직접) 만들면 방법이 어렵지 않다. (Intermediate 1)
This food is cheap and it is not difficult for *jagi (by oneself) to make it. (Intermediate 1)

From the above examples (9a & 9c), when the speaker refers to himself, he uses the first person pronoun “나” as “자기”; in Chinese, when the speaker refers to himself, the pronoun “자기” can be used. In contrast, it has to be “내가” in Korean. Thus, using “자기” is an error in Korean. In (9b) the noun “자신” has been written as “자기,” in (9d) “혼자” as “자기,” in (9e) noun “직접” as “자기.” When translating Chinese “自己” into Korean, it can be subdivided into “자기,” “스스로,” “직접,” “자신” and “혼자” which makes the degree of difficulty for learners even greater.

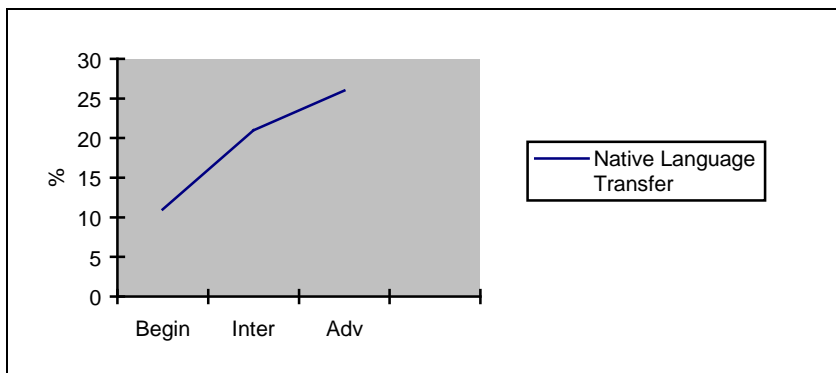


Fig. 2: Errors due to native language transfer

Next, if we examine developmental errors, we see that this category amounts to 87% for Beginners, 70% for Intermediate, and 71% for Advanced. Developmental errors remain consistently the most frequent errors due to the difficulty of the target words to be learned or acquired and the difficulty of learning idiomatic expressions and collocations with similar meanings but different usage. Especially for lexical errors at Intermediate and Advanced Levels, the words having similar meanings particularly drew our attention, such as the following: “작다-적다,” “편하다-편리하다,”

“(몸을)만들다-키우다,” “(병이, 큰일이)나오다-나다,” “적당하다-좋다,” “(건강이)나빠지다-떨어지다,” “(상자를)퍼다-열다.”

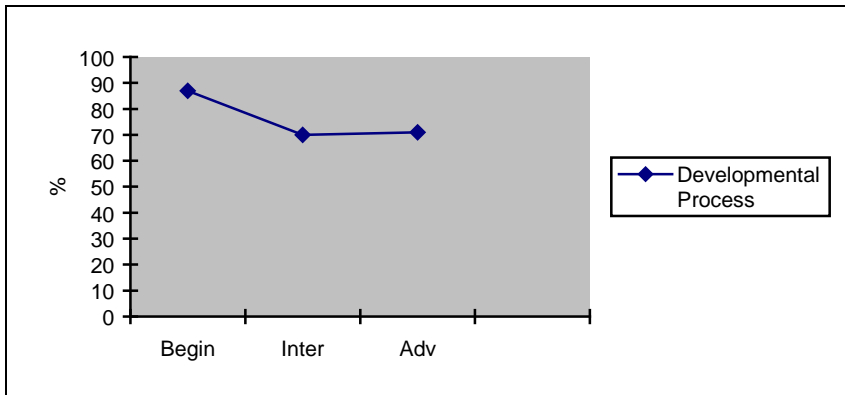


Fig. 3: Errors Committed in the Developmental Process

Figure 4 shows the frequency of unique errors due to the use of communicative strategies. As we mentioned previously, such errors occur when the learner creates a new word from his own knowledge during the learning process or creates one when he cannot think of the target word at any point of time during a conversation.

- (10) a. 생활능력도 많이 *앞일 것이다(√ 좋아질 것이다). (Intermediate 2)
His ability to live will **apilgutida* (improve). (Intermediate 2)
- b. 편지를 통해 *정보한다(√ 정보를 얻는다). (Intermediate 1)
Through letters, [we] **jungbohanda* (gain information). (Intermediate 1)
- c. 범죄자가 사형을 받을지 *곰곰하고(√ 깊이 생각하고) 있다. (Advanced 1)
Whether the criminal will receive death penalty, [they] are **gomgomhago* (thinking deeply). (Advanced 1)

In the case of (10a), the learner strategically created a new word in order to express the meaning of “좋아진다,” “나아진다.” (10b) shows how the learner has constructed the structure “정보+하다” from “정보를 얻는다.” For (10c) “곰곰하다,” the learner converted the adverb “곰곰이” into a verb and applied the structure of “생각하다.” The frequency of unique errors due to conversational strategies lies at 2% for Beginners, 10% for Intermediate, and 3% for Advanced. These data show that Intermediate learners commit a very high number of these errors, and we can infer from this that a large number of communicative strategies were used at this level.

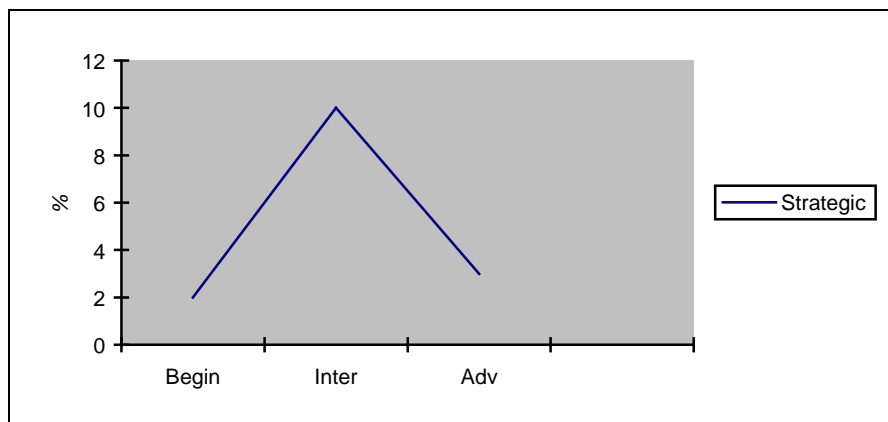


Fig. 4: Frequency of unique and conversational-strategic errors by levels

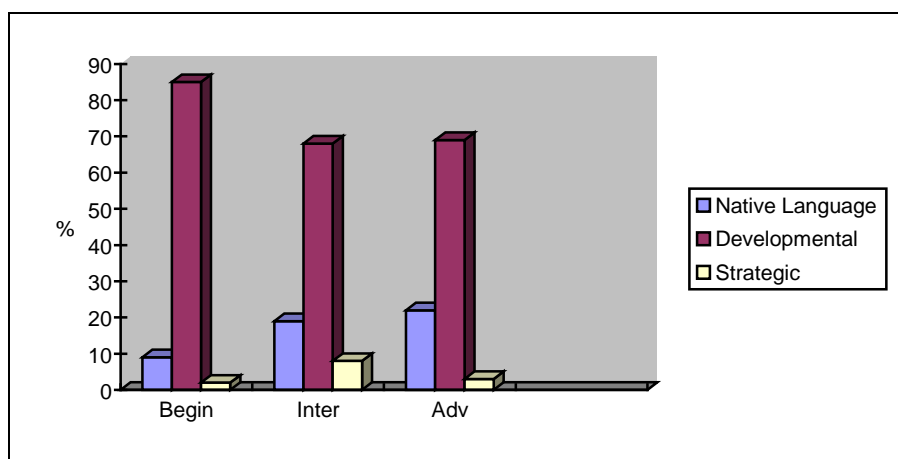


Fig. 5: Comparison of the types of errors by cause

Figure 5 shows the comparison of the different errors by cause at different levels. Developmental errors seem to account for the largest proportion of errors. But at the Intermediate Level, errors due to native language transfer as well as those due to the use of conversational strategies increase. At the Advanced Level, though the number of strategic errors is reduced, lexical errors due to native language transfer increases further compared to the Intermediate Level. If we only consider the frequency of lexical errors in Table 3, the results are similar to that achieved in Kim's study (2003) of lexical error patterns for Chinese learners of Korean language. For Chinese learners, lexical errors are especially high at levels 1 and 4, while the overall lexical errors in this study are the highest in Intermediate 2 (level 4).

4 Conclusion

This study put forward criteria for identifying error types and their causes. Based on the compositions of Chinese learners, it further identified lexical errors, and analyzed and classified them according to their causes. For this study, 500 Chinese learners' compositions were studied for lexical errors, which were classified as spelling and content-based errors. With regard to the content-based errors, we compared the frequency of errors due to native language transfer and developmental errors. There were a total of 34 composition topics, and the compositions were composed of 106,361 clauses. The percentage of lexical errors was 2% for Beginners 1, 1% for Beginners 2,

1% for Intermediate 1, 3% for Intermediate 2, and 2% for Advanced 1. In Beginners 1, the highest accuracy rate was observed, while Intermediate 2 had the highest percentage of errors. The ratio of spelling errors to content-based errors is 78%:23% for Beginners, 20%:80% for Intermediate, and 36%:64% for Advanced. This shows that the accuracy in spelling drops at the Advanced Level.

We also identified the origins of different errors and reflected upon how the lexical errors change across the different levels. The frequency of errors due to native language transfer was 11% for Beginners, 21% for Intermediate, 26% for Advanced. Thus, lexical errors due to native language transfer seem to increase with the proficiency level.

The results of the error analysis have implications for the curriculum and the teaching of vocabulary to Korean language learners. The analysis of the errors due to the similar meanings – meaning-similarity relationship – between native and target languages, which account for a large proportion of lexical errors at the Intermediate and Advanced Levels, yields results which could be a basic resource for foreigners in the study of similar words in Korean and their native languages. To further research this area and to gain a better insight, it would be necessary to also study extensive samples of Korean language learners' speaking. A detailed analysis of learners' lexical errors, as has been presented in this paper, would also be necessary to find effective methods to teach synonyms or words of similar meanings to learners of Korean as a foreign language.

Notes

¹ Wang (2007, pp. 86–87) discusses errors committed in the task of making short sentences in a written test. Among these errors, he identifies the following as errors related to the use of communication strategies: “가득하다>아득하다, 가뻘다>가깝다, 무덤다>더럽다.” Yet there is doubt if these errors can be categorized as related to communication strategies. The examples here which have no meaningful connection to each other, can be seen as simple spelling errors.

² As shown in Hong's (2006) study, “개의 *그림 (√모습)을 점점 머릿속에 나타나지 않는다.” is an example of meaning similarity in words. But “그림.모습” seems to be used because the speaker could not think of the target word “모습”. So he uses “그림” for the purpose of maintaining the communication.

³ a. Wrong word order b. Missing, wrong, or misplaced sentences connectors c. Missing cues to signal obligatory to pervasive syntactic rules d. Overgeneralizing pervasive syntactic rules to exceptions (Burt, 1975).

⁴ But there are opinions contrary to this. In Duskova's study (as cited in Ellis, 1994), among the fifty Czech students learning English, word order errors (31) and syntactic errors (54) are small in number, considering the total of 1,007.

⁵ Related to word order error, Lee (2002) argues that 70% of these kinds of errors are due to the misplacement of adverbs. It seems to be difficult to make a conclusion from adverb misplacement to overall miscommunication, which is known to be global error.

⁶ For example, among the sentences we have looked into for this study, the following sentence of an Intermediate student “눈을 올 때 눈사람을 만들며 눈싸움을 할 수 있습니다. 그리고 *스탁(스키를 타)을 할 수 있습니다.” has failed to represent the overall meaning because of the word “스탁,” and it is a typical case. For errors like this, understanding the meaning of the sentence is impossible until the learner identifies the word “스탁” as created from “스키를 타다,” and he has created a word of his own.

⁷ Ellis (1994) defines negative transfer as an error, and positive transfer as facilitation. But, in terms of making conversation using the target language and native language at the same time, the strategic transfer of the knowledge of one's native language into the target language cannot be considered as negative. At the very least, it seems to be better than not being able to say anything.

⁸ ‘Expression’ here refers to a phrase or a clause that is more than a unit of words, and at the same time to the limitation of co-occurrence relation or collocation.

⁹ Errors, which occur while reading Chinese characters in Korean in Chinese pronunciation, are grammatical matters, not content-based errors.

¹⁰ The error of writing “초학생,” which should in fact be “초등학생” in Korean, seems to have arisen from the fact that in Chinese one says “小学生.”

¹¹ Even among spelling errors, there should be some that are due to native language influence, developmental process, and learners' creation for the purpose of conversation. Yet the objective of this study is to identify the origins of content-based errors. Therefore, the study of spelling errors is postponed to a later time.

¹² Three graduate students majoring in Korean Language Education participated in the analysis of the data.

¹³ In selecting the data for our study, which were drawn from students' written tests, we avoided using students' responses to structured tasks. Answers that are guided by tasks and thus predictable are not included as data. The source of our data is compositions where students respond freely to a given topic without any restrictions in the composition contents.

¹⁴ For students' self-study, it would be helpful to make a list of content-based errors that commonly occur, and use the list accordingly. Besides, most of the content-based errors cannot be simply explained by native speakers' intuition. Therefore, the effort of teachers to organize the particular areas in using the target words seems to be necessary.

¹⁵ Along with the explanation, “기쁘다” shows a strong sense of activity and motion so that when talking about the meaning of the state it has to be “즐겁다.” Also, “기쁘다” means the “emotion itself,” which does not correspond with “기분,” whereas “즐겁다” has broader extension in its denotation so that it can be the upper division of “기분.”

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