

## Chinese Learners' Overgeneration of English Existential Constructions\*

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*There be* sentences have been observed to occur excessively in the performance of Chinese learners of English. This overgeneration problem is assumed to arise from the interactions of the syntactic structure, the semantic import as well as the discourse function of the learners' native and target language. Through the analysis of a corpus of Chinese learners of English and a substitution test, the assumptions about the causes of this interlanguage phenomenon are confirmed. The results of the present study show that the structural resemblance between Mandarin *you*-sentences and English *there be* structures facilitate, to a great extent, the occurrence of the interlanguage *there be* sentences. Pragmatically, the topic-prominence of Mandarin may predispose Chinese learners to employ *there be* to introduce a new referent into the L2 discourse. Semantically, the definiteness constraint on Mandarin subjects has been shown to exert considerable influence on Chinese learners' tendency to overuse English *there be* sentences. This cross-linguistic study lends empirical support to the claim that Chinese learners' overproduction of *there be* sentences is attributable to the interaction of the inherent properties and functions of the learners' L1 and L2.

Key words: English existential constructions, Chinese-English Interlanguage, Mandarin *you*-sentences, topic-prominent language, discourse function of Mandarin, the definiteness effect

### 1. Introduction

*There be* sentences, the major subset of English existential constructions, are found to occur excessively in both Chinese learners' oral and written performance (Schachter and Rutherford 1979, Yip 1995). The overgeneration of English *there be* sentences by Chinese learners is assumed to be attributable to the interactions between various formal and functional features of the learners' L1 and L2 as well as the interactions between the universals of the languages involved. A systematic cross-linguistic study of the native (NL) and the target language (TL) of Chinese learners of English has been called for to understand how the interplay among these different linguistic properties has brought into existence these particular

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Chinese-English Interlanguage (CIL) structures. It has been observed that in syntax, the resemblance of English *there be* sentences with Mandarin *you*-sentences may lead to the presence of the ungrammatical interlanguage forms. In terms of discourse-pragmatic function, Chinese learners' excessive use of *there be* sentences may be a manifestation of the topic-prominence of Mandarin, showing evidence that Chinese learners are more inclined than native speakers of English to use *there be* sentences to present new discourse referents. Semantically, the strong tendency of utilizing definite subjects in Mandarin may predispose Chinese learners to initiate English sentences with existential verb *there be* to shun indefinite subjects at the beginning of the interlanguage sentences. It appears that Chinese learners' NL exerts considerable influence on their acquisition and production of English *there be* sentences. This study attempts to investigate to what extent the multiple dimensions of Chinese learners' mother tongue constrain, under the influence of the typological universals and their interplay with different features of the L1 and the L2, the generation of this particular interlanguage existential construction. It follows then that it is necessary to look into the characteristics of the corresponding structures in both the L1 and L2 to come up with a possible explanation of the IL phenomenon.

## 2. English *there be* existential constructions

Existential sentences (ES) are constructions used to semantically assert existence or pragmatically introduce new discourse information (Baker 1995). In the semantic import of ES, 'existence' is the central and the most constant reading. When it comes to the pragmatic function, ES are presentative in nature. *There be* sentences are the major type of ES in English, in which existential *there* is regarded as a marker of ES (Kimball 1973). In this type of ES, *there be* is followed by a postverbal NP that is often modified by an existential quantifier such as *a*, *some*, *many*, or *a lot* and so on. The postverbal NP is indefinite most of the time. Actually, it is generally agreed that one of the primary functions of *there be* sentences is to allow speakers to avoid using indefinite NPs as subjects of sentences (Baker 1995). The indefiniteness of the postverbal NP is demonstrated in (1) and its contrast (2).

(1) There is a boy/someone/a strange book in the room.

(2) \*There is my sister/everyone/the strange book in the room.

(Safir 1987:72)

In English, *there be* sentences may be seen as existential or presentational in accordance with the discourse-pragmatics of the context. The distinction between presentational and purely existential *there be* sentences is not always clear-cut,

nevertheless. To reach an adequate characterization, it requires fine and subtle differentiations among a wide range of semantic, discourse-pragmatic and syntactic interpretations (Yip 1995). In general, *there be* sentences may be considered presentational if the postverbal NPs denote new referents, serving the clear pragmatic function of introducing a new discourse referent that in turn becomes the topic of discourse. On the other hand, *there be* sentences that do not have such a function are regarded as existential constructions, the more prevailing category of the two (Yip 1995). Major types of *there be* sentences with different configurations, meanings and functions are sketched as follows.

### **2.1 English presentational relatives**

The presentational relative construction (PRC) in English has the pragmatic function of introducing new discourse referents. The postverbal NP in PRC is seen to be highly referential and specific. This type of ‘archetypal fairy-tale-starting construction,’ as Lambrecht (1988) observed, is the result of a universal constraint against the occurrence of new discourse referents in sentence-initial subject/topic position. Thus, PRC is considered a universal construction which appears cross-linguistically, as illustrated in (3).

(3) Once upon a time, there was an old woman who lived alone in the forest.

The above PRC (3) demonstrates the pragmatic function of *there be* sentences for introducing a new discourse referent in non-initial sentence position (Yip 1995).

### **2.2 English existential relatives**

Sentence (4) is an existential with a relative clause:

(4) There are many people who like to live in the suburbs.

The crucial difference between the existential relatives and PRCs is the different referential status they have (Lambrecht 1988, Yip 1995). Unlike the verb in PRC, the existential verb in the existential relative does not introduce an independently existing discourse referent. Also, the referent of the antecedent NP is non-specific. Thus, the antecedent NP in the existential relative “does not exist outside the construction in which it appears. It is the construction that ‘creates’ the referent” (Lambrecht 1988:12). Due to its lack of the presentational function, the

existential relative could be appropriately expressed as a single proposition without *there be*, if it is intended as a generalization, as shown in (5).

(5) Many people like to live in the suburbs.

### 2.3 Participial existential constructions

The existential relatives in English can be replaced by participial clauses. However, the present participle in (6) implies progressive aspect. The past participle in (7) indicates a passive voice of the action.

(6) There are accidents happening all the time.

(7) There were some interesting papers presented at the conference.

(Yip 1995:193)

Different types of *there be* sentences posed various degrees of difficulty for Chinese learners. However, the overgeneration of all the types seemed to be one general tendency of Chinese learners' in using this major subclass of English existential sentences. In the next section, some *there be* sentences produced by Chinese learners are scrutinized.

### 3. *There be* constructions in Chinese-English interlanguage (CIL)

CIL *there be* constructions were found to proliferate in the compositions written by Chinese learners. Schachter and Rutherford (1979) found that the Chinese learners in their study generated an average of 4 *there be* constructions in every 5 compositions. This is an apparently higher frequency of occurrence, as compared to the number produced by the learners of other native languages, who produced an average of 3 in every 4 compositions (Schachter and Rutherford 1979).

A preliminary survey of *there be* sentences in the English learner corpus (English CLT) developed by David Wible (Wible et al. 2001) at Tamkang University in Taiwan revealed a similar overgeneration problem of the Chinese learners of English. Among the total 375 *there be* sentences gleaned, fifty-three (14%) might be judged to be overused, with 10 structurally confusing or semantically unintelligible. The following ungrammatical *there be* sentences were among the CIL *there be* sentences produced by the Chinese learners of English CLT.

- (8) \*There are a lot of classmates want to go abroad.
- (9) \*There are many literature and art organizations like to create their works here.
- (10) \*There are many people fish at night.
- (11) \*There is some distinction exist between acceptability and grammaticality and need to be further clarified.
- (12) \*There were many beautiful flowers bloomed.

These CIL *there be* sentences demonstrate an equivocal presentational function. English existential/presentational *there be* sentences have rather well bounded applications. Pragmatically, *there be* sentences are used in English to present a new discourse referent. Semantically, they are applied to report existence. However, the existential meaning and the pragmatic function are likely to be encoded unnecessarily or redundantly in CIL *there be* sentences, as exhibited in (8)-(12).

The underlined NPs modified by existential quantifiers in the above CIL *there be* sentences are indefinite and non-specific; i.e., they do not denote specific referents as exhibited by the addressers. These CIL *there be* sentences lack the presentational function, which can be judged as such by their semantics alone, even without the discourse context (Yip 1995). The addition of *there be* to these sentences results in their ungrammaticality.

Similar erroneous *there be* sentences were also found in the interlanguage of the Chinese learners of English in Hong Kong. The IL structures were characterized as “omission of relative pronouns” by Bunton (1989; cited in Yip 1995:177). However, the interlanguage structure could not be imputed solely to the imperfect mastery of English relative clauses by Chinese learners (Yip 1995). In fact, “the existential pseudo-relatives” were found side by side with well-formed relative clauses in the learner’s discourse, as in the following example:

- (13) \*There were two important developments occurred in neuroscience  
which contribute to our current knowledge about the brain.  
(Yip 1995:178)

Apparently, this CIL *there be* sentence was created out of the reasons that were more than the mere inability in the learner to produce relative clauses.

Existential relatives in CIL were also found generated excessively or unduly by the Chinese learners of English CLT, although in smaller quantities.

- (14) There are many students who are immature.
- (15) \*There are very different ways that they use.
- (16) \*There are some new opportunities concerning our corpus and Internet writing project that have developed recently.

(14) was structurally correct. However, it is hard to judge whether the presentational function it exhibited was necessary without the context in which the sentence was embedded. (15) and (16) were inappropriate applications of *there be* sentences with a relative clause. Semantically, the intended meaning of all the above sentences could be retained without *there be*.

(17), (18) and (19) were generic statements presented in participial constructions.

- (17) \*There are lots of 'lines' spreading on the palm, and according to which one may tell the luck, marriage or intelligence.
- (18) \*There are few stars taking advertisement of TV except some models, for example, Sindy Kelauf's watch advertisement.
- (19) \*There are three cards impressing me because of the building style.

Since the present participle implied progressive aspect, the application of it in (17) (18) and (19) made the sentences anomalous. It might be that the overuse of *there be* at the beginning of the sentences incited the learners to resort to the participial constructions.

- (20) \*There is a real case happened in Taiwan lately.
- (21) \*There were lots of small bubbles adhered to the leaves.

The incorrect use of past participles in CIL *there be* sentences were seen in (20) and (21). With its imperfective aspect, (20) should be encoded in a present participial construction or an existential relative. (21) could be grammaticized by using an existential relative. The semantic meanings of both sentences, however, could be retained even without *there be*.

The inspection of the previous CIL constructions showed that although CIL *there be* sentences were not always grammatically incorrect, they were apparently redundant in the L2 discourse. They were overly used in the contexts where they were not required. The issue at hand was to find out what caused this overgeneration problem.

In appearance, the aforementioned CIL *there be* sentences bore striking

structural similarity to Mandarin *you*-sentences, as noted by Huang (1987) and Rutherford (1983). It was believed that CIL *there be*, equivalent to Mandarin *you* 'have,' was mostly employed to function as the topic introducer. In syntactic terms, the palpable effect of transfer of Mandarin syntax seemed to be a likely explanation for the overgeneration of some CIL *there be* sentences. Nevertheless, as with most interlanguage phenomena, the overproduction problem could hardly be born out of one single cause. It is necessary to go beyond the individual sentence and take into account the corresponding discourse context to determine the meaning and function of a *there be* sentence (Schachter and Rutherford 1979, Yip 1995). And it seems reasonable to predict that this problematic issue has its roots in the nature of the learners' mother tongue and the TL, and is the result of not only the interaction between linguistic properties of the two languages, but also the effects of the constraining forces of the underlying organizational principles of the languages involved. A comparative study of the corresponding structures in the learners' L1 and L2 is therefore indispensable to attain the feasible explanations for this overgeneration problem of Chinese learners of English. The section that follows gives a concise account of the syntax, the primary functions, and the prominent semantic properties of existential constructions in Mandarin.

#### 4. Existential constructions in Mandarin

In Mandarin, the notion of existence is realized by a handful of existential verbs, including (i) presence verbs, such as *you* (have) and *fang-zhe* (placed), (ii) appearance verbs, such as *lai* (come) and *dao* (arrive), and (iii) disappearance verbs, such as *qu* (go) and *si* (die) (see Teng 1977 for a comprehensive list). Generally, the sentence structures below represent the two main types of existential constructions in Mandarin (Wang 1981):

- (a) (Locative)      You      NP                      (VP)  
(22) (操場上)      有      很多      學生      (在 運動)  
(Caochang-shang) you    henduo xyuesheng (zai yundong)  
'(In the field), there are many students (exercising).'
- (b) Locative      Verb-zhe   NP  
(23) 書桌上      放著      一個相框  
Shuzou-shang    fang-zhe yige xiang kuang  
'A photo frame is put on the desk.'

Four general characteristics are inherent in Mandarin existential sentences (MES): (i) 'existence' is the central interpretation in MES; (ii) MES are presentative

in nature with respect to their pragmatic functions; and (iii) formally, a locative phrase is constantly applied to head MES, manifesting a language-universal tendency that a location is usually needed for anything claimed to exist (Wang 1981). The fourth is the language-specific distinction of MES: its tendency to present the definite preceding the indefinite (see Li and Thompson 1976). This particular feature of MES will be more fully explored later in the study.

#### 4.1 Syntax of Mandarin existential structures

Syntactically, MES has the general structure of the pivotal construction, one subtype of the more general serial verb structure in Mandarin. The pivotal sentence type has the following order (cf. Chao 1968, Li and Thompson 1981):

(NP1) V1 NP2 V2 (NP3)

NP2 functions as a ‘pivot’ relating two verbs, typically serving both as the object of V1 and the subject of V2.

(24) Zhangsan zhize Lisi dashang-le Wangwu.  
 Zhangsan accuse Lisi wound-PFV Wangwu  
 ‘Zhangsan accused Lisi of wounding Wangwu.’

Sentence (24) can be interpreted as biclausal, as shown in (25).

(25) [Zhangsan zhize Lisi][Lisi dashang-le Wangwu].  
 Zhangsan accuse Lisi Lisi wound-PFV Wangwu  
 ‘Zhangsan accused Lisi of wounding Wangwu.’

(Yip 1995:183)

Structurally, *you*-constructions are identical with the pivotal construction in Mandarin (Yip 1995). They both have a string form. Mandarin *you*-construction is formulated as follows (Huang 1987):

... (NP1) ... V... NP2... (XP)

NP1 is the subject. The existence of NP2 is what is being asserted. XP is a predicate, expressed generally with a descriptive clause or phrase, and is semantically associated with NP2. Both NP1 and XP are optional. Existential verb *you* is the



most common and the most frequently applied verb of existence. Huang (1987) specified four types of *you*-sentences in respect of different types of verbs involved:

- (c) with the existential verb *you* “有”  
(26) 有 鬼  
You gui  
‘There are ghosts (here).’
- (d) with a verb of appearance or disappearance  
(27) 有 一 個 人 出 現 了  
You yige ren chu xian le  
‘There appears a man.’
- (e) with a locative verb  
(28) 桌 上 有 一 本 書  
Zhuo-shang you yiben shu  
‘On the table there is a book.’
- (f) with a verb expressing the existence of an event or experience  
(29) 桌 上 有 一 本 書 很 有 趣  
Zhuo-shang you yiben shu hen youqu  
‘On the table there is a book very interesting.’

(Huang 1987:226-227)

Apparently, sentences initiated with *you* -- type (c) and (d) above -- are the closest counterparts to *there be* sentences in English (Huang 1987).

Existential verb *you* resembles *there be* in several crucial ways: they both precede a NP followed by nearly identical syntactic structures, they are used to introduce new information into the discourse, and they can semantically function as the marker of existence (Wang 1981). It is, therefore, generally assumed that the close associations between Mandarin-*you* structures and English *there be* constructions predispose Chinese learners of English to transfer their L1 knowledge into L2 English production.

#### **4.2 Discourse function of Mandarin**

According to the typological distinctions proposed by Li and Thompson (1976), English is a subject-prominent language, in which subject-predicate is the basic grammatical relation, whereas Mandarin is a topic-prominent language. In a topic-prominent language such as Mandarin, it is the topic, but not necessarily the subject that serves as the center of attention in the sentence. The topic is a discourse notion. It must be definite. The topic is always presented first, and the comment second in canonical sentence form in a topic-prominent language like Mandarin.

Topic is always ‘given,’ has already been raised to consciousness, so to speak, while comment represents ‘new’ information, or what is said about the topic. It follows then that before something becomes a topic it has to be introduced, or raised to consciousness. An introduced referent that is to become a topic is therefore itself ‘new’ and, by the conventions of discourse in topic-prominent languages, will appear in the comment.

(Schachter and Rutherford 1979:8)

Schachter and Rutherford (1979) pointed out that Chinese learners’ overgeneration of *there be* sentence was influenced by topic-prominence of Mandarin. Chinese learners were more inclined than native speakers to use *there be* sentences to present new referents, which then became the topic of subsequent sentences. This tendency of Chinese learners was exhibited in (30), in which the *there be* sentence showed a clear function of introducing a new topic to the discourse.

(30) There are many different races that you can find in a small island such as Singapore. The Malays are what you call the natives.

(Schachter and Rutherford 1979:9)

As strong evidence of the influence of the L1 discourse function on L2 performance, Schachter and Rutherford’s (1979) study demonstrated that the typological characteristics of Mandarin contributed, to a considerable degree, to Chinese learners’ overgeneration of the CIL *there be* sentence.

(31) \*There is a tire hanging from the roof served as their playground.

(32) \*There are many new patriots in my country gathered together and established a new country.

*There be* clauses in (31) and (32) exhibited, as Schachter and Rutherford (1979) perceived, the presentational function of introducing new referents, which then served as the topics of the subsequent development. And this phenomenon revealed “a carryover...of L1 function- form constraints to L2” (Schachter and Rutherford 1979:10).

The above phenomenon suggests that the discourse-pragmatic function of Mandarin has a substantial effect on Chinese learners’ application of *there be* sentences. It also demonstrates the necessity to investigate the relationship between the individual *there be* sentences and the interconnected discourse (Schachter and

Rutherford 1979, Yip 1995).

### **4.3 Semantic constraint -- The definiteness effect**

The causes of the overgeneration problem of Chinese learners are not confined to the syntactic and pragmatic domains of Mandarin and English. Obviously, the semantic properties of both the L1 and the L2 are inextricably entangled to be one of the confounding factors contributing to this IL phenomenon. The definiteness effect (DE) of subjects of both Mandarin and English is the most dominant semantic constraint on Chinese learners' employment of *there be* sentences.

#### **4.3.1 Indefiniteness of postverbal NPs in existential constructions**

Definiteness is an important property of NPs. The DE exists in any linguistic environment in which either a definite or an indefinite expression is exclusively acceptable. And a definiteness effect is in place if the indefinite is preferred in the environment, as in existential sentences (ES) (Reuland and ter Meulen 1987), illustrated in (1) and (2). The DE is found in ES in many languages (Safir 1987). Actually, one common feature of ES across languages is that the postverbal NP after the existential verb in most cases are indefinite (Reuland and ter Meulen 1987). In Mandarin, as in many other languages, the postverbal NPs in existential constructions, specifically, *you*-sentences, are indefinite (Huang 1987).

#### **4.3.2 Definiteness of subjects**

The DE also exerts an apparent effect on subjects in Mandarin. Like many other languages, the subjects of declarative clauses in Mandarin cannot be referential-indefinite. Since indefinite expressions are disallowed to appear in the subject position, speakers of Mandarin resort to the existential construction to prevent the appearance of the indefinite NP in the subject position (Huang 1987). The definiteness restriction in the subject position in Mandarin consequently has a considerable effect on the generation of *there be* sentences in CIL (Yip 1995). Mandarin has a strong preference for definite subjects, though the definiteness constraint is not an absolute one (Tsao 1977). The existential verb *you* thus serves the grammatical function of preventing an indefinite NP from occurring in the subject position (Huang 1987).

Indefinite NPs in English, by contrast, can occur relatively freely in the subject position. A quantitative analysis of written texts conducted by Givon (1979:28) showed that "about 10% of the subjects of main-declarative-affirmative-active sentences (nonpresentative) are indefinite, as against 90% definite" (cited in Yip

1995:196). Givon's study suggests that even though discourse-pragmatic pressures preponderantly favor definite subjects, English allows indefinite subjects to occur quite freely (Yip 1995).

The contrast between the ungrammaticality of indefinite subjects in Mandarin and their grammaticality in English is demonstrated in the following corresponding sentences in the two languages.

(33) \*Yige / \*yixie / \*jige ren zai yuenzi li zuozhe.  
 One-CL some several-CL person at yard LOC sit-CONT  
 'A man/ some men/ several men is/are sitting in the yard.'

(34) You yige/yixie/jige ren zai yuenzi li zuozhe.  
 EXIST one-CL some several-CL person at yard LOC sit-CONT  
 'There is/are a man/some/several men sitting in the yard.'

(35) A man in the yard is asking for you.

(Givon 1979:27)

(36) There's a man in the yard who's asking for you.

(Yip 1995:188)

This contrast between Mandarin and English with respect to the definiteness constraint in the subject position is seen to be associated with the topic-prominent grammar of Mandarin. One widely held constraint on grammaticalized topic structures is that "topics must have definite reference" (Yip 1995:86). A functional characterization of topic was given by Chafe (1976) as follows:

What the topic appears to do is limit the applicability of the main predication to a certain restricted domain ... The topic sets a spatial, temporal, or individual framework within which the main predication holds.

(Chafe 1976:50)

Following this characterization, the topic specifies the domain that both the speaker and hearer know in order to build the structure of the discourse; thus, the topic must be definite. The ungrammatical English topicalization cited in Li and Thompson (1976) manifests the unacceptability of an indefinite topic.

(37) \*A dog, I gave some food to it/one/  $\phi$  yesterday.

In Mandarin, a topicalized phrase undergoes the similar definiteness constraint:

- (38) \*Yi zhi mao wo zuotian wei le.  
One CL cat I yesterday feed PFV

(Li and Thompson 1976:464)

The definiteness constraint applies to the subject of a main clause in Mandarin:

- (39) \*Yi ge xiaohai lai le  
one CL child come PFV  
'A child has come.'

(Yip 1995:87)

Similar to the previous examples, a number of quantified NPs with indefinite readings can not occur as subjects in Mandarin at all (Li & Thompson 1976). Based on Li & Thompson's account of the definiteness constraint on subjects in Mandarin and other treatments of topic-prominent languages, Yip formalized the idea that "if no other element is topicalized in a main clause, a subject is topicalized in a 'vacuous' sense invisible on the surface" (Yip 1995:87). The definiteness constraint applies to topics naturally and universally, and a subject that is topicalized, albeit vacuously, is thus constrained by the same definiteness effect (Yip 1995). As a result, when the desired sentence topic is not semantically definite or pragmatically given, the existential verb *you* is needed to introduce it, as shown in (33) and (34). Chinese learners' overgeneration of *there be* sentences in CIL can be seen as the consequence of overusing *there be* to avoid indefinite subjects, and hence manifests topic-prominence in CIL. The definiteness constraint applies to subjects in Mandarin; however, such constraint does not exhibit in subjects in English (Yip 1995).

#### 4.3.3 The definiteness effect on the acquisition of the target structures

The definiteness constraint on subjects in Mandarin was believed to cause a learnability problem<sup>1</sup> for Chinese learners in acquiring existential constructions in English. That is, one primary cause that led Chinese learners to overproduce *there be* sentences in CIL was their difficulty in producing indefinite NPs as subjects without

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<sup>1</sup> The formal study of learnability attempts to explain the 'logical problem of language acquisition' and the degenerate nature of the input available to the learner (Hornstein and Lightfoot 1981). Despite the deficient data and lack of negative evidence in the environment, the child eventually develops L1 competence fully. It is widely held that the L2 learner faces a similar logical problem of acquisition when constructing an IL grammar. White (1985) argues that L2 learners are challenged with the same acquisition problem: the input data do not seem to be sufficient enough to allow the learner to develop desired L2 grammar completely. L2 learnability, however, is more complicated with at least two linguistic systems coming into play.

*there be* in the TL (Yip 1995). In other words, overgeneration of CIL *there be* sentences was essentially due to the transfer of the DE in Mandarin (Yip 1995).

In English, indefinite NPs are allowed to be in the subject position to a much greater degree than in Mandarin. Many of the CIL *there be* sentences examined would be appropriate with the indefinite NP in the subject position, without *there be*. Thus, in order to produce such English sentences, learners would have to widen the DE in the subject position (Yip 1995).

The difficulty is that it may not be easy for learners to relax definiteness constraint on subjects. As observed by Yip (1995), the CIL grammar exhibits a relatively strong definiteness effect; thus it generates mostly definite and only few indefinite subjects. In contrast, English grammar has a much weaker definiteness effect and it generates both indefinite and definite subjects. In this situation when CIL has the narrower grammar, positive evidence in the TL input is supposedly enough to bring about the change in the IL, according to the Subset Principle<sup>2</sup>. Learners can be motivated to form and test hypotheses about the incoming data and relax the definiteness effect by merely receiving positive evidence containing a wider range of indefinite subjects in English. Thus, in principle, positive evidence in the input may be sufficient to trigger the restructuring of the learner's grammar. Nevertheless, as mentioned previously, positive evidence of the relevant kind may not be easy to come by in the input. For though English allows indefinite subjects quite freely, only around 10% of the subjects of declarative sentences in the user corpus investigated by Givon (1979) are indefinite.

The other reason that makes it hard for learners to incorporate indefinite subjects into their L2 grammar, according to Yip (1995), has to do with re-partitioning semantic space as an adult, which is considered difficult for older L2 learners. Slobin's remarks make a point of this issue:

Learning language as a child constrains one's sensitivity to the possible contents of experience as expressed in linguistic terms.... Consider the list of linguistically encoded perspectives that we have been examining: temporal contours of events marked by aspectual forms, movement and trajectories in space, perspectives on agency, indication of definiteness of

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<sup>2</sup> The Subset Principle is a principle of learnability based on the 'no negative evidence' hypothesis. It stipulates a subset-superset relation in grammatical rules, constraints, or parameter-settings. The narrower grammar (the subset) permits a more restricted range of structures than a larger one (the superset) that includes everything allowed by the narrower grammar and other more. The Subset Principle posits that learners, with the positive evidence only, start with the most restrictive possible hypothesis compatible with the available data (i.e., the subset grammar). In the L2 context, the Subset Principle is seen as an analytical tool, logical principle of learnability rather than a learning procedure (see Yip 1995).

participants mentioned in connected discourse. These are precisely the sorts of things that make it hard to master a second language like a native .... Each language has trained its speakers to pay different kinds of attention to events and experiences when talking about them. This training is carried out in childhood and is exceptionally resistant to restructuring in adult second language acquisition.

(Slobin 1986:13-14)

According to the Subset Principle, the presence of indefinite subjects in the input should be in principle sufficient to induce the widening of the grammar. However, as long as the learners hold onto the distinction between definite and indefinite subjects, they would be inclined to map the indefinite NPs onto a separate form<sup>3</sup>, i.e., the *there be* construction.

In conclusion, the aforementioned observations and theories reveal that the overgeneration problem of *there be* sentences of Chinese learners cannot be regarded as a mere mechanical carryover of L1 sentence patterns. As most IL phenomena, multiple factors are in operation simultaneously to give rise to this particular IL structure. It appears that not only the linguistic properties but also the typological characteristics as well as the discourse functions of both languages are at play when Chinese learners of English are realizing their concept and competence of English existential constructions.

## **5. The study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent of the interactions of linguistic properties as well as the operations of the language universals of both the L1 and the L2 during the process of Chinese learners' generation of *there be* constructions by answering the following research questions.

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<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon may be explained in the light of the Uniqueness Principle, according to which a given meaning in a language may be conceived in only one form (Pinker 1984, Wexler and Culicover 1980). That is, the same meaning cannot be expressed by two different forms. Therefore, if the learner has created an erroneous form through some productive mechanism, in principle, the presence of an alternative realization of that form in the input may suffice to preempt the erroneous one. But if the input contains the earlier form as well, both the original and the alternative forms will be retained, since there is positive evidence for both.

## 5.1 Research questions

The present study attempted to answer the following three specific research questions:

- 1) To what extent does the Mandarin *you*-sentence motivate Chinese learners' overgeneration of English *there be* constructions?
- 2) To what extent does the typological organization of Mandarin, namely topic-prominence, contribute to Chinese learners' overuse of English *there be* constructions to introduce a new discourse referent?
- 3) To what extent does the definiteness of Mandarin subjects constrain Chinese learners' application of indefinite subjects in English and thus increase their overuse of *there be* constructions?

## 5.2 Method

Two lines of research were simultaneously undertaken to answer the proposed research questions: (1) an analysis of a corpus of Chinese learners of English, and (2) a multiple-choice substitution test.

### 5.2.1 Corpus analysis

The primary purpose of the corpus analysis was to examine how *there be* sentences were applied in L2 English discourse by Chinese learners. It was hoped that a quantitative measurement of and qualitative understanding of how Chinese learners realized their competence of this specific English structure could be obtained through this type of production analysis. The corpus under investigation contained hundreds of full text essays written by English majors, mostly juniors and a few seniors, of Chinese Culture University (CCU). The essays had been collected over the years by the researcher through her instructing the third-year writing class in the English Department of CCU. The student-written texts covered the major rhetorical patterns and included a variety of self-chosen topics. A preliminary survey done by the research assistants revealed 200 or so pieces of compositions that contained at least one *there be* sentence. A closer investigation assumed by the researcher of those essays embedded with *there be* sentences turned up 60 essays with discernible proficiency levels. And a further evaluation conducted by two experienced raters in terms of *grammar, coherence, vocabulary, and mechanics*<sup>4</sup> of the compositions yielded

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<sup>4</sup> In this evaluation profile, grammar took 40% of the composite score, coherence 30%, vocabulary 20%, and mechanics 10%. To reflect the fact that the focus of this inquiry was a specific syntactic structure and that grammar is the best indication of the learner's competence, grammar aspect deserved the maximum attention.



30 essays in the high-level group, and 30 in the low-level group.

### 5.2.2 Substitution test

The purpose of the substitution test was to examine the extent of the DE on Chinese learners' acquisition of *there be* sentences. The substitution test was conducted with 261 students at CCU. The test was composed of 20 questions, inclusive of 5 major types. Each question contained an erroneous *there be* sentence. The testees were requested to select the correct or probable substitutions for the incorrect *there be* sentence by choosing from the options provided, which included (i) the *there be* sentence with a participial verb, (ii) the *there be* sentence with an infinitival verb, (iii) the *there be* sentence with a relative clause, and (iv) a declarative sentence without *there be* and thereby with an indefinite subject. The order in which the options were presented varied across the questions in order to reduce the effect of testees' tendency to choose the earlier appearing ones. Students were also requested to cross out the options they thought were improbable substitutions. The subjects were notified prior to the test by written and oral instructions that they must write out all the alternatives that they felt correct and rank them in terms of frequency of use or level of appropriateness, according to their intuition. The subjects' performance on one major sentence type, four generic statements with *there be* (see Appendix A), was selected for analysis to determine the extent of the DE on Chinese learners' acquisitions of *there be* sentences.

### 5.2.3 The subjects

The subjects of the substitution test ranged from freshmen to seniors who came from different departments and majored in English, French, Japanese, Chinese literature, physics, and international trade. They all were the students of the present researcher. They were asked to take an English proficiency test<sup>5</sup> prior to the substitution test. Based on their scores obtained on the proficiency test, they were grouped into three different proficiency groups: low-level group (0-15 points), mid-level group (16-24 points), and high-level group (25-40 points).

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<sup>5</sup> The proficiency test was a simulation GEPT (General English Proficiency Test) for intermediate-level English learners in Taiwan. It contained 40 questions, each of which scored one point. The test consisted of 15 questions on vocabulary and grammar, 10 cloze questions, and 15 reading comprehension questions. It was a combination of a part of a previously administered GEPT and a part of a commercial simulation GEPT (Lai and Dunne 2003). The use of a complete set of a formally administered GEPT was abandoned to offset the possible practice effect of repeating the same test by some subjects who had taken the test by themselves.

## 6. Results and discussion

### 6.1 Results of the corpus analysis

The survey of the corpus of the Chinese learners of English showed that there were in total 194 *there be* sentences found in the 60 student-written essays, among which 93 appeared in the high-level group (with a total of 15014 words) and 101 in the low-level one (with a total of 13955 words). The higher frequency of occurrence in the low-level groups indicated that the lower level learners were more likely to employ *there be* sentences in L2 output than the higher level ones. The question needed to address was whether the tendency was due to the cross-linguistic influence brought upon by the L1, or imperfect knowledge and incomplete mastery of the TL structure, or both.

### 6.2 Evidence of cross-linguistic influence

A total of 19 *there be* sentences in the corpus (see (40)-(52), and (58)-(63)) were judged to be apparently overused by the two trained evaluators. One of the significances of this finding was that only 2 of them were found in the high-level group, and the remaining 17 were in the low-level group. The fact indicated that the L2 proficiency played a crucial role in the overgeneration problem of CIL *there be* sentences. It seems only natural to predict that the severity of the problem would decrease as the learners' proficiency moved in the direction toward the TL.

The *there be* sentences listed below were considered overused in L2 discourse, though not every one of them was grammatically incorrect. The cross-linguistic influence of Mandarin with respect to syntax, discourse function and semantics were the apparent causes of these CIL sentences. Their likely equivalents in Mandarin were presented in parallel to demonstrate the correspondence between the structures and the conceptions of these IL sentences and their L1 counterparts.

(40) There are some people preferring watch TV program at home to see movie in the movie theater. (L3)

有 些人 喜歡 在家 看 電視 節目 勝於 到  
 You xie ren xihuan zai jia kan dianshi jiemu shengyu dao  
 EXIST PL people like at home watch TV program more than go to  
 戲院 看電影。  
 xiyuan kan dianing.  
 theater watch movies.

- (41) Smoking is harmful for every one but there are many people who smoke.

(L16)

抽煙 對 每個人 有害 但是 有 很多 的  
Chouian duei mei-ge ren youhai danshi you hen duo de  
smoking to everyone-CL harmful but EXIST very many NOM  
人 抽煙。  
ren chouian.  
people smoke

- (42) \*According to the report, there were two twelve-story buildings in Taipei collapsed. (L2)

根據 報導， 在 台北 有 兩棟 十二層 的  
Genju baodao, zai Taipei you liang-dong shier-ceng de  
according to report in Taipei EXIST two-CL twelve-CL NOM  
建築物 倒塌。  
jianzuwu daota.  
buildings collapse

- (43) \*There were a lot of people lined up to donate blood, money and every kind of *living materials*. (L2)

有 很多 人 排隊 去 捐血、 捐錢、 和  
You henduo ren paiduei qu juanxie, juanqian han  
EXIST very many people line up to donate blood donate money and  
每一種 生活 用品。  
meiyi-zhong shenghuo yuengpin.  
every one-CL living products

- (44) \*Besides, there were lots of people still have lived in the tents. (L2)

此外， 有 很多 人 仍舊 住 在 帳篷裏。  
Ciwuai, you henduo ren rengjiou zhu zai zhangpeng-li.  
besides, EXIST very many people still live-PFV in tent LOC

- (45) \*However, there are million of fan go to see the ball games every season.

(H18)

然而， 有 數以百萬 的 球迷 每一季 都 去看  
Raner, you shuibaiwan de qioumi meiyi-ji dou qu kan  
however, EXIST millions NOM fans every one-CL all go watch  
球賽。  
qioumai  
ball games

- (46) \*I don't think the result would surprise other people, because there were many obvious omens occurred when we got together. (H28)  
 我不認為 這結果 會讓 其他人 驚訝，因為 當  
 Wuo burenwei zhe jieguo hei rang qita ren jingyia, yienwei dang  
 I don't think this result will make other people surprised because when  
 我們 在一起 的時候，有 很多 明顯 的  
 wuomen zai yiqi de shihou, you henduo mingxian de  
 we are together NOM when EXIST very many obvious NOM  
 不祥之兆 發生。  
 buxiangzhzhao fansheng.  
 omens happen
- (47) \*There are the most TV programs belonging to this group. (L8)  
 有 最多 的 電視 節目 屬於 這一類。  
 You zui duo de dianshijiemu shuyu zhe yi-lei.  
 EXIST most many NOM TV programs belong to this one-CL
- (48) \*If there were an accident happened the man who riding a motorcycle has more possibility to be killed than the man who driving a car. (L12)  
 假如 有 意外 發生，騎 摩托車 的 人 比  
 Jiaru you yiwuai fasheng, qi motedche de ren bi  
 if EXIST accident happen ride motorcycle NOM people COMP  
 開車 的 人 較易 喪命。  
 kaiche de ren jiaoyi sangming.  
 drive NOM people easier killed
- (49) \*One year later there was another member came to my house. (L17)  
 一年 之後，有 另 一個 成員 來到 家中。  
 Yi-nian zhho, you ling yi-ge chengyuan laidao jiazhong.  
 one-CL later EXIST another-CL member come to house
- (50) \*We are so rich that there are more and more people have the overweight worry. (L24)  
 我們 是 如此 富裕，以致於 有 愈來 愈多 的 人  
 wuomen shi ruci fuyu, yizhiyu you yulai yuduo de ren  
 we be so rich that EXIST more and more NOM people  
 有 過胖 的 困擾。  
 you guopang de kunrao.  
 EXIST overweight NOM worry

- (51) \*There are more and more people are overweight. (L24)  
有 愈來 愈多 的 人 太胖。  
*You yulai yuduo de ren taipang.*  
EXIST more and more NOM people overweight
- (52) \*This kind of situation could cause there is no more mutual topic between us. (L25)  
這種 情形 可能 造成 我們 之間 沒有  
*Zhe-zhong qingxiang keneng zaocheng wuomen zhijian mei you*  
this-CL situation can cause we between not EXIST  
共同 的 話題。  
*gongtong de huati.*  
mutual NOM topic  
(L: low-level essay H: high-level essay Number: order of the essays)

The previous erroneous *there be* sentences could be grammaticized without distorting the original imports of the sentences by either using the relative clauses, as with (42), (43) and (44), or simply omitting *there be*, as with all the cases.

### 6.3 Influence of Mandarin syntax

In syntax, all the previous CIL sentences (40)-(52) bore the almost identical structure with the *you*-sentences in Mandarin. Obviously, *there be* was used as a straightforward substitution for Mandarin existential verb *you*. This finding confirmed the hypothesis that the direct transfer of Mandarin-*you* sentences into CIL *there be* sentences was one apparent cause of Chinese learners' overgeneration problem.

Another type of overuse could be illustrated by the following examples in one low-level essay. All the *there be* sentences listed below ((53)-(57)) appeared in one single short essay (with 334 words) titled "The Conditions That the Senior Would Face." In this essay, each of the following *there be* sentences was placed at the beginning of one paragraph, apparently functioning as the topic sentence of each paragraph (see Appendix B for the essay in its entirety).

- (53) \*There is to delay for graduating.  
有 延畢 的  
*You yianbi de*  
EXIST postpone graduation NOM<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>In Mandarin, the placing of the particle *de* after a verb, a verb phrase, a sentence, or a portion of a

(54) \**There is to go studying further.*

有 繼續 深造 的

You jixu shzao de

EXIST continue studying NOM

(55) \**There is to get married.*

有 結婚 的

You jiehun de

EXIST marry NOM

(56) \**There is to prepare to work.*

有 準備 工作 的

You zhunbei gongzuo de

EXIST prepare work NOM

(57) \**There is do not know what to do,...*

有 不知道 做 甚麼 的 . . . . .

You buzhidao zuo sheme de

EXIST not know do what NOM

In this particular case, as many as 7 *there be* sentences (with the other 2 *there be* sentences occurring in the middle of the paragraphs, see Appendix B) appeared in a 334-word short essay, revealing an overly high frequency of occurrence. The four infinitival *there be* sentences ((53)-(56)) could be literally translated into their Mandarin counterparts. Clearly, it was a case of excessive use of *there be* sentences, a good illustration of some of the tendencies of Chinese learners of English. The most obvious one was lower level students' tendency to transfer directly from the L1 in the production of the L2. The learner was using the IL structures to express directly the thoughts conceived in Mandarin. According to Schachter (1993), the use of noun complements rather than relative clauses in *there be* sentences was a way for Chinese learners of English to avoid producing relative clauses that they found quite difficult. This may be true with the previous case, given that *there be* sentences with relative clauses may be used to replace the ungrammatical infinitival *there be* sentences. For example, (53) and (54) could be grammaticized respectively by using the relative clause: *There are some students who will delay graduating. There are some students who will study further.* Regardless, these instances of *there be* sentences demonstrated a strong case of overusing *there be* by two accounts. First, there is a high frequency of occurrence of *there be* sentences in one single short essay. Second, all but one *there be* in the essay were unnecessarily redundant and the

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sentence with the verb results in the grammatical process of nominalization of a VP (Li and Thompson 1981).

declaratives with the indefinite subjects may well suffice to express the intended meanings. For instance, *Some students will delay graduating* is clearly sufficient to express the intended meaning of the original sentence.

#### 6.4 Influence of discourse function of Mandarin

Sentences (53)-(57) may be taken as relevant illustrations for another preference of Chinese learners of English. They demonstrated that the Chinese learner might be imposing the discourse function of Mandarin on the L2 production. That is, the student writer was using the *there be* sentence to introduce a new topic at the beginning of each paragraph. On the surface, the writer seemed to be complying with the convention of the TL discourse by stating the main idea at the start of each paragraph. This instance, however, may be seen in the light of language universals as a case of interaction between the L1 and the L2 organizational principles. In other words, the learner's strong inclination to initiate a paragraph by raising some new topic might also be ascribed, to a certain degree, to the discourse preference in Mandarin. Clearly, 6 out of 7 *there be* sentences in the essay were intended to present new topics for upcoming discussion or development. This tendency may also explain the large quantity of *there be* sentences (43 out of 194) occurring at the beginning of the paragraphs in the corpus investigated. Totally, 22% *there be* sentences in the corpus were placed at the start of the paragraphs, a visibly high frequency of occurrence in a particular location in discourse.

The influence of the discourse function of Mandarin was also exhibited in the following individual CIL *there be* sentences. In all of the following sentences, *there be* serves the obvious function for introducing a new topic (the underlined portions) for the subsequent development or discussion in the latter part of the sentences.

(58) \*There will be more systems appear in the future, if we want to get more conveniences, it is necessary for us to know more about them. (L1)

未來 將 會 有 很多 系統 出現， 假如我們

Wueilai jang huei you hendou xitong chuxian, jiaru wuomen

要有 更多的 方便， 我們 有 必要 更 了解 它們。

yiaoyou gengduo de fangbian, wuomen you biyao geng liaojie tamen.

(59) \*There are still some students would think that they could work for few years, and then when they save enough money they could go back to school.

(L4)

仍舊 有 一些 學生 認為 他們 能 工作 幾年，

Rengjiou you yixie xyuesheng renwuei tamen neng gongzuo ji-nian,

然後 在他們 存 夠 錢 後，再 回 學校 讀書。

ranhou zai tamen cun gou qian hou, zai hui xyuexiao dushu

- (60) \**Recently, we can find that there are many companies make a lot of advertisements about how they help people lose weight, or some companies sell tea or medicine that can help people loseweight.* (L24)

最近，我們 會 發現 有 很多 公司 製作了 很多

Zueijin, wumen huei faxian you henduo gongsi zhizuo-le henduo

有關 他們 如何 幫助 人們 減肥 的 廣告，或者

youguan tamen ruhe bangzhu renmen jianfei de guang gao, huozhe

有些 公司 賣 茶 或 藥幫 人們 減肥。

youxie gongsi mai cha huo yao bang remen jianfei.

- (61) \**There was once I hid myself near by the toilet, and I saw after a girl went into the toilet, the Peeping Tom were always waiting in the rest room threw a coin out to the door of toilet.* (L7)

有一次，我 躲 在 廁所 附近，我 看見 一個 女孩 走進 廁所，...

You yici, wuo duo zai cesuo fujin, wuo kanjian yi-ge nyuhai zoujin cesuo,...

- (62) \**There is one thing I could be sure is I must to face many problems in the future if I get marry next month.* (L25)

有 一 件 事 我 能 確 定 的 是 假 如 我

You yi-jian shi wuo neng qyueding de shi jiaru wuo

下 個 月 結 婚，

xia-ge yue jiehun,

我 必 須 面 對 未 來 很 多 問 題。

wuo bixyu mianduei ueilai henduo wunti.

- (63) \**In addition, if I drop the school, there is another question I would face is I could be far from my friends.* (L25)

此 外，如 果 我 退 學，有 另 一 個 問 題 我 將 面 對 的

Ciwuai, ruguo wuo tuei xyue, you ling yi-ge wunti wuo jiang mianduei de

是，我 可 能 遠 離 我 的 朋 友。

shi, wuo keneng yuanli wuo de pengyou.

It was likely that the predilection for denoting the referent explicitly to raise the interlocutors' consciousness and focus their attention on the discourse prompted the Chinese learners to resort to existential constructions in their attempt to produce the TL structures. In summary, the previous examples suggested that Chinese learners were constrained, to a considerable extent, by the underlying universal principle (topic first, then comment) and the discourse function of Mandarin when they were producing L2 structures.



### 6.5 Evidence of the definiteness effect

Most of the previous incorrect CIL *there be* sentences could be improved by omitting *there be* to become declaratives with indefinite subjects, which reflected the fact that Chinese learners were comparatively inept at using indefinite subjects at some point of their L2 development, as compared with native speakers of English. The results of the substitution test demonstrated an obvious effect of definite constraint on Chinese learners' acquisition of *there be* sentences. As shown in table 1, a much higher percentage of the high-level group subjects than the mid-level and the low-level group subjects took the declarative sentence with an indefinite subject as the preemptive choice when replacing the incorrect *there be* sentence, with a total mean of 57% of the high-level group surpassing considerably that of 36.6% of the mid-level group and 31.7% of the low-level group. The findings suggested that as the learners became more proficient in English, they became more inclined to employ the indefinite subject declarative to express a generic proposition than use any other type of *there be* sentences, a manifestation of the process of approximating more to the TL.

**Table 1: Frequency and percentage of each group choosing the *there be* sentence with an indefinite subject**

Question	1		2		3		4		Mean	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (N=64)	19	29.7	22	34.4	26	40.6	14	21.9	20.3	31.7
Mid (N=136)	43	31.6	60	44.1	51	37.5	45	33.1	49.8	36.6
High (N=61)	31	50.8	38	62.3	39	63.9	31	50.8	34.8	57

**Table 2: Frequency and percentage of each group taking the indefinite subject declarative as an improbable choice**

Question	1		2		3		4		Mean	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (N=64)	19	29.7	11	17.2	9	14.1	15	23.4	13.5	21.1
Mid (N=136)	28	20.6	14	10.3	27	19.9	18	13.2	21.8	16
High (N=61)	4	6.6	1	1.6	0	0	1	1.6	1.5	2.5

Table 2 exhibited more supporting evidence for the DE on the Chinese learners' acquisition of *there be* sentences. On average, as many as 21.1% of the low-level group subjects considered the indefinite subject declarative an improbable substitution for the erroneous *there be* sentence. And a lower percent of the mid-level group subjects (16%) bypassed the choice of the indefinite subject declarative as a probable substitution. As a striking contrast, only 2.5% of the high-level group subjects regarded the indefinite subject declarative as an improbable substitution. Obviously, the lower level learners were less accustomed to using indefinite subjects in English. Again, the findings demonstrated that the DE exerted considerable influence on

Chinese learners' acquisition of *there be* sentences.

The question which remained unresolved, however, was: what caused the DE on the L2 production? Did the Chinese learners exhibit a stronger tendency to avoid using indefinite subjects in English declaratives due to the relative paucity of indefinite subject declaratives in the TL input they were exposed to, or because of the fact that Mandarin sentences more often than not start with definite subjects and if an indefinite subject is required, *you* is customarily added as the sentence starter?

According to Yip (1995), Chinese learners' overgeneration problem lay mainly in their difficulty in producing indefinite NPs as subjects without *there be* in the TL. And the overgeneration of CIL *there be* sentences stemmed essentially from the transfer of the DE in Mandarin. In light of the Subset Principle, learners should be able to produce the indefinite subject declaratives without too much difficulty, given the positive evidence in the TL input. Nevertheless, the positive evidence may be too scanty to trigger the restructuring of the TL structure in the learners (see section 4.3). Another powerful constraining force, as Yip (1995) pointed out, came from older L2 learners' difficulty to "re-partition semantic space" in the L2 acquisition. In the case of the definiteness of subjects, Chinese learners would be inclined to map the indefinite NPs on to a separate form, the *there be* construction, if they held onto the distinction between definite and indefinite subjects. And it may require extended exposure to the TL structure as well as adequate instruction, implicit or explicit, for Chinese learners to override this semantic constraint.

## 7. Conclusion

The overgeneration problem of CIL *there be* sentences can not be ascribed to a single source. Like many other IL problems, various factors are at play which give rise to this phenomenon. This cross-linguistic study demonstrated that this overgeneration problem was the result of the dynamic interactions between the syntax, the semantics and the discourse function of both the L1 and the L2. The result of the corpus analysis showed that almost all the overused *there be* sentences in question bore a structural resemblance to the Mandarin *you*-sentence counterparts. Another revealing result gleaned from the corpus analysis was that the typological tendency of Mandarin might be one of the factors that motivated the Chinese learners to use *there be* structures to initiate a new topic in the L2 discourse. This inclination was exhibited in both the individual *there be* sentences and their functions in the connected discourse.

Semantically, a majority of CIL *there be* sentences in the corpus could be improved with no change in meaning by simply deleting *there be*. Apparently, many Chinese learners were not accustomed to using indefinite subjects in English

declaratives. The results of the substitution test exhibited a similar tendency with the Chinese learners. The fact that quite a lot of mid-level and low-level learners failed to choose indefinite subject declaratives as probable substitutions for the erroneous *there be* sentences indicated that the application of indefinite subjects in English declaratives caused significant difficulty in the Chinese learners, which might be in part because indefinite subjects are considerably fewer than definite subjects in English. However, the DE of Mandarin subjects might be a more powerful contributor to this problem. That is, influenced by the typological characteristic of Mandarin, the Chinese learners were predisposed to employ definite subjects in their L1 utterances. This proclivity was still in effect when the learners were using L2 English. Where they needed to express indefinite NPs, they thus involuntarily resorted to *there be* sentences, an equivalent to Mandarin *you*-sentences, both of which are constructions used largely to avoid indefinite subjects.

## Appendix A

以下每個題目的句子是不正確的，請選出正確的代換句子。答案可能不只一個，請根據您的判斷，將正確的答案依序選出並標示順序 (1, 2, 3,...)。錯誤的選項請打 X 號。

### *Type B: generic statements with there be*

**1. There are many TV programs belong to this group.**

- (A) There are many TV programs belonging to this group.
- (B) There are many TV programs that belong to this group.
- (C) Many TV programs belong to this group.
- (D) There are many TV programs to belong to this group.

**2. There are a lot of students want to go abroad.**

- (A) There are a lot of students who want to go abroad.
- (B) A lot of students want to go abroad.
- (C) There are a lot of students to want to go abroad.
- (D) There are a lot of students wanting to go abroad.

**3. There are a few girls love exercise.**

- (A) A few girls love exercise.
- (B) There are a few girls to love exercise.
- (C) There are a few girls loving exercise.
- (D) There are a few girls who love exercise.

**4. There are many people find their lovers in the party.**

- (A) There are many people to find their lovers in the party.
- (B) There are many people finding their lovers in the party.
- (C) There are many people who find their lovers in the party.
- (D) Many people find their lovers in the party.

## Appendix B

### A student essay in the corpus

#### *The Conditions That The Senior Would Face*

Before the graduating from the college, the senior would face many conditions or options. Because of graduating from the college is a big changing point for them. Therefore, for preparing early, the junior should begin to considerate what they would do in the future. Following are five conditions they would face.

There is to delay for graduating. Some college students maybe have vice-major classes, or they have double major classes, so they have to delay for graduation. Except for this, some students have to delay for graduation for their bad grades. Hence, they have no choice to have to delay for graduation.

There is to go studying further. Some senior students might plan to study further for learning more. In this case, there are could be have two choices for them. One is that they might go abroad to study. The other is that they might study in Taiwan.

There is to get married. Some senior students, especially girls, would think that graduating from collage is a good timing to step into another level of life. And some guys would think that it is better to get married, and then to concentrate on working.

There is to prepare to work. Some students would think that it is better to start to work early in order that they could join the society earlier. In addition, there are still some students would think that they could work for few years, and then when they save enough money they could go back to school.

There is do not know what to do, not only the junior but also the senior still think for them the future is a little far. They think everything would go smoothly till that time. For this reason, they do not think so much for the future.

No matter what kind of students, I think everyone really should start to think of what he would do carefully. After all, every choice has relationship with his life.

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## 中國學生過度使用英文「存在性結構」之原因

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中國學生使用英文時有過度使用 *there be* 句型的傾向。相關研究顯示這種過度使用的現象可歸溯於多重原因：受中文「有一」句型的影響，中文特殊語篇功能及其屬於「主題突出性語言」(topic-prominent language) 之特質的作用，以及中文傾向使用限定主詞的特性。本研究旨在深入了解上述因素如何交互作用而導致中國學生過度使用這種特有的中英文中介語 (Chinese-English interlanguage) 句型。分析的資料包括中國學生英文作文中含有 *there be* 句型的 60 篇文章，以及 261 位中國文化大學學生接受代換測驗的結果。作文分析係由兩位研究員獨立進行，並經由反覆比對的方式以達到分析結果的信度及效度。代換測驗則以統計次數頻率來比較不同程度的學生在理解及使用 *there be* 句型上的差異。本研究驗證了先前相關研究的觀察與假設：中國學生 *there be* 句型的過度使用係因〔一〕中文類似句型「有一」句型的轉換作用，〔二〕中文的「主題突出性」導致中國學生傾向使用 *there be* 句型來引介語篇中之新主題，〔三〕中文傾向使用限定主詞的現象導致學生使用 *there be* 句型來規避英文中較常出現的非限定主詞。本研究顯示母語對第二語言習得的影響不侷限於表面句型的異同，相關中英文句型的語意、語言功能和語法的交互作用才是導致中國學生使用某些「中英文中介語」更深層的原因。

關鍵詞：英文存在性結構、中英文中介語言、中文「有一」句型、主題突出性語言、中文語篇功能、限定效果