The Problems of Wording and Word Order in learning Chinese as a Second Language.

Interference is one of the most common phenomena when languages are in contact. Bilingual education functions as a way for languages to contact, and interference is naturally expected.

This paper discusses the grammatical problems, focusing at wording and word order, in the learning of Chinese language by students of English medium schools. In these aspects, our main concern is classified into four areas, namely the plural suffix 们 men, the numerals 二 er and 两 liang, the adverbial modifiers and the passive form with 被 nei. The purpose of the present discussion aims at how interference occurs as a result of their familiarity with more than one language.

As a plurality suffix, 们 men is appended to personal pronouns as well as nouns. With pronouns, this suffix is purely a pluralizer. But when appended to nouns, it differs from the English plural suffix -s in many aspects. Its occurrence is limited to nouns denoting persons. Further, it occurs only when the context does not help to indicate the plurality. On the other hand, semantically it covers a wider range than -s does. It carries a meaning of 'and the others'. Besides, it may be either singular or plural in meaning. Strictly speaking, an English noun denotes plural whenever it occurs with -s, but a Chinese noun can be plural inspite of the absence of 们. This essential point, however, is neglected by the bilinguals in question who regard 们 as similar to -s in every respect.

The numerals 二 er and liang express the same number 'two' and yet behave quite differently. Before measure words, with a few exceptions, liang is preferred to 二 except when '2' comes at the end of a number of two or more digits, 二 often occurs instead of liang. The choice depends mostly upon the actual context. The problem, as the bilinguals are concerned, is then the indistinct borderline between 二 and liang, where both of them denote 'two' in English.
When a placeword, a timeword or a prepositional phrase is functioning as an adverbial modifier of a verb, it may occur either before a verb or at the beginning of a sentence. Any violation of the normal order will result in different meaning or meaningless. Except for the front position adverbials, all adverbial modifiers in English, however, follow the verbs. To the bilinguals, they seem to neglect that there is no parallelism in the positions of the adverbial modifiers between the two languages and thus place them after a verb in a Chinese sentence.

There is no distinction of voice in Chinese, the direction of action depending upon the context. A sentence of the passive voice may be expressed in two ways:

1. The passive voice according to the sense (false active)

2. The passive form with bāi

Comparatively, the former is more commonly used. The agent is not given and the form of the verb is not inflected. There is no special grammatical construction to indicate such a passive relation. The latter, indicated by the preposition bāi, is usually limited to disposal verbs, mostly of unfavourable meanings. Recently, under the Western influence, by is mechanically equated to bāi and applied to verbs of favourable meanings or verbs with no disposal implication. This new form of sentence seems to be developing and not completely be accepted in the Chinese grammatical system. In fact, the Chinese passive form is the extrapositional form of the disposal form rather than the active form. The bilinguals' wrong use of the preposition bāi is attributed to their not being aware of the peculiar feature of the bāi construction.