

An Analysis of Acquisition of Chinese Prepositions by Native Speakers of Shona

**Muchinei Musona, University of Zimbabwe
Herbert Mushangwe, Hebei University**

Abstract

The present study focuses on the acquisition of Chinese prepositions by native speakers of Shona language in Zimbabwe. Shona prepositions do not appear in a phrase as words, rather they exist as inflecting morphemes, thus considering that in Zimbabwe English is used as the language of instruction for teaching Chinese language; will the native speaker of Shona language learning Chinese prepositions be affected by English or Shona? To answer this question, a survey was therefore conducted among 29 native speakers of Shona language who are intermediate speakers of Chinese language. Analysis of these students' use of Chinese prepositions showed that the majority of students know how to use Chinese prepositions mainly because they are used to these given prepositional phrases rather than the equivalence of these Chinese prepositions with either Shona or language of instruction. The research shows that some few students would either misplace or completely omit some Chinese prepositions. It was concluded that native speakers of Shona language require a kind of practice where they are given Chinese prepositional phrases with their Shona equivalent phrases so that they gradually get used to Chinese prepositional phrases. It was also suggested that further experimental researches should be done to explore the best way for teaching Chinese prepositions to foreigners.

Keywords: Prepositions, acquisition, Shona, Chinese, language of instruction

Introduction

Ding (2010:364) defines the term preposition as a kind of functional word that can be added before a noun or pronoun to construct a prepositional phrase expressing place, direction, reason, target, comparison, action means or basis. The role of prepositions in any given language cannot be underestimated because they express the relationship of words, as Carter and McCarthy (2006:462) would put it, "prepositions express a relation in space between two or more entities or a relation in time between two events, or various other abstract relations such as instrument and cause." In other words prepositions show the relationship between one thing and another, linking words such as nouns, pronouns and phrases to other words in a given phrase. Prepositions constitute an important component in second language acquisition, Liu (2000) argues that although prepositions are limited in quantity, but their functional in any language is far much more important than other functional words.

In second language learning many students find it challenging to use prepositions of the target language mainly because the meaning and use of prepositions in the target language differs from the way the equivalent prepositions in their mother tongues are used. According to Lado (1957:2) "those elements which are similar to [the learner's] native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult". This paper is based on the premise that due to

differences between Chinese prepositions and Shona prepositions native speakers of Shona learning Chinese language might find it challenging to acquire those Chinese prepositions that do not exist in Shona language and the reverse is also true. Use of prepositions in these two languages differs in terms of the position where they are placed thus affecting the object-subject relationship. It should be noted that Shona and Chinese belong to different language families; Shona belongs to the African Bantu language family while Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, thus this implies that it is not surprising for Shona native speakers to have challenges in learning Chinese language. Based on the language transfer theory a Shona speaker acquiring Chinese language is expected to be affected by his or her mother tongue (Shona) since it is assumed that the learner's mother tongue will positively or negatively affect his the learner's second language acquisition (Wang, 2009; Behjat and Sadighi, 2010).

However, considering the fact that all the available resources for teaching Chinese in Zimbabwe are found in Chinese and English language only and the current teaching system in Zimbabwe use English as the language of instruction now the question is; will the native speaker of Shona language learning Chinese prepositions be affected by English or Shona? This paper therefore attempts to analyze the nature of errors by native speakers of Shona during acquisition of Chinese prepositions as well the possible causes of these errors. This study is expected to benefit both Chinese language teachers and Chinese language learners.

Significance of this research

It is generally agreed that progression in language learning is dependent on a range of variables such as social factors, process factors such as resources, teaching, learning, interaction etcetera, and individual or group factors such as aptitude, motivation, learning style etcetera (Johnstone, 2003). Among these factors appropriate resources represent one of the most important factors that should be available. According to Crystal (1987) the learning of a foreign or second language requires that learning resources be available which allow for a firm grasp or appropriation of the foreign or second language and a mastery of the language that is relatively close to that of a native or mother-tongue speaker. In other words for successful second language acquisition it is important to provide appropriate resources to help students grasp the target language. According to Hunt; Barnes; Powell; Lindsay and Muijs (2005) appropriate resources provide a stimulus for foreign language learning. Therefore, analyzing the acquisition of Chinese prepositions by native speakers of Shona will provide the necessary resources that will help other Chinese language learners learning Chinese language both in and outside Zimbabwe.

According to Scott and Manglitz (1997), the other areas that have been found to affect students' foreign language learning include their syntactic abilities such as use and understanding of the grammatical rules of language, as well as semantics including understanding of word meaning and concepts. Prepositions are very important in a language because they are used in every day conversation, and their use affects the grammar and the appropriateness of information. Boquist (2009:4) asserts that prepositions are hard to understand and they are also hard to teach, however, since prepositions indicate the relationship between words they cannot be ignored in second language learning. Prepositions are central in any language because they make phrases clear and definite; for instance if we say "the ball is on the table" we know where the ball is mainly because of the preposition "on" used in this phrase, so one will not go to look for the ball "under the table". If a student is not able to use prepositions properly we can as well conclude that he or she has not yet fully acquired the language. In order to promote the teaching of Chinese in Zimbabwe it is therefore necessary to examine the acquisition of Chinese prepositions by native speakers of Shona

language in order to find out the challenges faced by students as well as ways of countering such challenges. Apart from being a reference work for teaching Chinese prepositions to native speakers of Shona, this research is also expected to motivate similar researches in other countries where Chinese is taught, thus promoting the world wide teaching of Chinese language.

Background

There has been considerable research into the influences of students' native language in target language acquisition. For instance, Moulton (1962) did a contrastive study of English students learning German. Moulton classified the range of second language learners' segmental errors into four categories, namely, phonetic errors, phonemic errors, allophonic errors and distributional errors. Such a taxonomic error analysis made German teachers to be sensitive to how these pronunciations errors were made and also as to why they were made. As forwarded by Moulton (ibid) it is only when the 'why' question has been realized that corrective measures can be exercised. From prosodic literature, Adams (1979:4) concluded that, "...the speaker's first language habits can be remarkably tenacious and in certain systems-particularly the early acquired prosodic system- first language interference can be a major obstacle to proficiency". In other words when learners learn any foreign language errors which can be traced back to the mother language seem to be almost obvious. It is therefore almost obvious that native speakers of Shona language will try to transfer their knowledge of prepositions to Chinese language phrase thus leading to ill-formed phrases. These errors can only be corrected when we answer the question why students will formulate such wrong phrases.

Concerning acquisition of prepositions in second language, Swanepoel (1998) believes that prepositions are notoriously hard to learn; however little if not none has been written about acquisition of prepositions by native speakers of Shona. This could be due to the fact that the available literature about Shona prepositions seems not to be consistent about what could be called prepositions in the Shona vocabulary. While some researchers argue that "pa-, ku- and mu-" are the main Shona prepositions (Mpofu, 2009; Smith, 2000), on the other hand the same "pa-, ku- and mu-" prefixes are recognized as noun prefixes. For instance, Brauner (1995: 27) refers to "pa-, ku-, and mu-" as locative class prefixes. This is mainly because Shona language is an inflecting or agglutinative language (Doke, 1931). Lyons (1968:187) defines agglutinative language as a language in which the words are typically made up of series of morphs with each morph taking the place of a morpheme. Nurse and Philippson (2003) also pointed out that most Bantu languages have few real prepositions. Thus when some English prepositions are translated into Shona they appear as inflections rather than words, a thing which might make it difficult for native speakers of Shona to understand the concept of prepositions.

Due to the above controversies, Shona prepositions differ from Chinese and English prepositions. According to Li (2011:69), the majority of prepositions in modern Chinese language evolved from the verbs in ancient Chinese language, for example; 把 bǎ, 在 zài, 将 jiāng, 让 ràng, 给 gěi, 为了 wéile, 向 xiàng and so on, even today most of these prepositions still maintained their function as verbs. This implies that Chinese prepositions are different from English and Shona prepositions because none of English prepositions or Shona prepositional inflections are related to verbs. In some cases English prepositions differ from both Chinese and Shona prepositions for example some English prepositions which are used to show physical spatial relations are substituted by "nouns of locality" in Chinese and Shona language. For instance the prepositional phrases "on top," "in the middle," or "to the east," in Chinese nouns "上面 shàngmiàn", "中间 zhōngjiān" or

“东边 dōngbiān” are used, while in Shona nouns such as; “pamusoro”, “pakati” and “kumabudazuva” respectively are used as equivalent phrases.

Therefore, it is likely to be confusing for native speakers of Shona to grasp the concept of prepositions let alone to understand the complexity of Chinese prepositions. Considering the fact that Chinese prepositions are ironically considered limited in number, that is nearly 130 compared to 3 Shona prepositional prefixes (pa-, ku-, mu-), and the fact that Chinese prepositions play a very important role in the Chinese language grammar system (Bai and Zhao 2009:102), the question is; how will native speakers of Shona who are taught Chinese language in English would acquire various Chinese prepositions?

Hypothesis and research questions

This research draws its hypothesis from the language transfer theory. According to Dulay et.al (1982) interference refers to the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language. Based on this theory the assumption is that native speakers of Shona learning Chinese language should exhibit the interference of their first language (Shona). However, due to the fact that Zimbabwean students are taught Chinese in English, thus it is likely that the acquisition of Chinese preposition by native Shona speakers might be influenced by both English and Shona. Therefore, in this paper we attempt to answer the following questions; what could be the errors that native speakers of Shona language make when acquiring Chinese prepositions? Do these errors emanate from both English and Shona or from Shona only?

Methodology

This research is basically a qualitative research; however quantitative analysis methods were also used to provide error percentages on certain prepositions. The data used in this research was collected from 29 Chinese language students who had passed Chinese Proficiency Test level 4. This Chinese examination popularly known as Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi or HSK in short is used to determine students' Chinese competency. According to Hanban website <http://www.hanban.edu.cn> if a student passes HSK level 4 it implies that he/she has an intermediate Chinese language competence and he/she is capable of communicating with Chinese speakers at a high standard. At the time when this research was done all the participants were aged between 19 and 25 years, studying Chinese language at the University of Zimbabwe.

About 200 erroneous prepositional phrases were collected from students' home works, essays, past examination papers and presentation works and from these phrases a total of 15 frequently used prepositions were observed. For the purposes of analyzing the acquisition of Chinese prepositions by Shona native speakers, 5 commonly used yet easily misused prepositions were then used for an in-depth survey, the prepositions which were used in this paper are; 给 gěi, 对 duì, 从 cóng; 比 bǐ, and 在 zài. This survey was meant to establish the nature of errors, percentage of errors as well as the possible causes of these errors. A questionnaire was then designed where participants were required to translate Shona phrases to Chinese and use certain prepositions in a sentence. Out of 31 questionnaires which were distributed 29 only were retrieved back.

From the students responses 5 erroneous phrases with the highest occurrence frequency per each preposition were analyzed. Following the main principles of error analysis theory each erroneous sentence was analyzed under the following headings: wrong phrase; correct phrase; error type; error description; error percentage after which possible causes of these errors were also given. According to the (Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 1998) Error Analysis (EA) is defined as the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners.

Error analysis attempts to classify different types of errors on the basis of the different processes that are assumed to be the possible causes. Thus in this paper we attempted to analyze the errors that intermediate students make when translating Shona phrases which are supposed to be prepositional phrases in Chinese when translated to Chinese, attempts were also made to give the possible causes for these errors. This was done by comparing the grammatical construction patterns in Shona, English and Chinese prepositional phrases. According to Chen (2008) it is only through comparing the learner's mother language and the target language that we can predict the errors than occur during the process of learning.

Data analysis

Responses to the first part of the questionnaire showed that students were able to use 4 of the 5 Chinese phrases to formulate prepositional phrases. This was not surprising because all the students studied Chinese language for at least 3 years, thus they depended much on the phrases they previously read or used in daily Chinese conversation. However, the majority of students failed to use the preposition “给 gěi” to formulate a prepositional phrase, rather they used the word as a verb. Some of the responses which were given by the respondents include the following phrases;

1. 请给我钱。Qǐng gěi wǒ qián (give me some money)
2. 能给我米饭吗? Néng gěi wǒ mǐ fàn ma? (Can you give me some rice?)
3. 我不给你理由。Wǒ bú gěi nǐ lǐ yóu. (I cannot give you the reason).

It was apparent that though these students are intermediate students the concept of prepositions is not clear to them, rather they know how to use given words depending on their meanings. Similar results were also observed on the responses for the second part of the questionnaire which required students to translate given Shona phrases. Below is an analysis of the results which shows different errors made by the 29 students who responded to our questionnaire. As shown on table 1 (Appendix 1), nearly half of the participants (48%) used a wrong grammatical pattern for the preposition “从 cóng”. The error observed for this preposition can be traced back to either English or Shona. In Shona and English language, the equivalent prepositions for “cóng” are prepositional prefix “ku-” and “from” respectively as can be seen in the following examples;

Ndinobva kuZimbabwe
I come from Zimbabwe

In both Shona and English, unlike in Chinese, the prepositions “ku-” and “from” are mainly placed immediately after the verb and just before the object, as in this case it is placed just after the Shona verb /-bva/ (to come) and before the object /Zimbabwe/. In the English example above it is placed just after the verb /come/ and before the object /Zimbabwe/. We concluded that this error was due to interference of both English and Shona. Though it was not possible to estimate the degree of influence exerted by either Shona or English, we can assume that participants' grammatical patterns are shaped by these two languages.

Table 2 (Appendix 1) shows a low error percentage which suggests that a number of participants managed to use the preposition “duì” properly. According to Ding (2010:365), the preposition “duì” is used to introduce the object related to the predicate verb or adjective and to form a preposition-object phrase which is usually used as an adverbial or an attributive, meaning “to; in; on; over towards” and “with regards to or concerning”. Only 7% of the participants wrote phrases with the preposition “duì” following the English grammatical pattern. In English the Shona sentence *Vakatibata zvakanaka* can be expressed as *they were nice to us*. It is interesting to note that the Shona phrase does not have any word equivalent to the Chinese preposition “duì”. In English, as

seen in the above English equivalent phrase, the preposition “to” is equivalent to the Chinese preposition “duì” and it comes before the adjective “nice”, hence it can be deduced that the errors which were made by students were directly caused by the knowledge of English preposition “to”.

This therefore shows that in learning Chinese prepositions some Zimbabwean students seem to be affected by the language of instruction. The students who made this error seem to have translated the Shona phrase to English first and then retranslated it to Chinese, thus producing this grammatically wrong phrase “他们好对我们 *tā men hǎo duì wǒ men*” which follows the same English grammatical pattern “*they were good to us*”.

The question that might be raised here is that; why would some native speakers of Shona manage to properly use this preposition yet it does not exist in their native language? It is likely that students frequently use this preposition in their conversational Chinese, thus though it does not exist in their first native language they can still use it properly. From this analysis we can project that Chinese language beginners are likely to depend more on English grammatical patterns when formulating Chinese phrases, a strategy which will cause grammatically wrong phrases due to language of instruction.

Table 3 (Appendix 1) also shows a lower percentage error (10%) for the preposition “bǐ”, this suggests that a number of students grasped the construction pattern for comparison. The Chinese grammatical pattern for comparing things is /A + 比 bǐ+B + adjective/, this differs from the one used in Shona which is as follows: /A + adjective + B + description of comparison]. Due to the fact that the pattern /A + 比 bǐ+B + adjective/ which is used for comparison is frequently used in daily Chinese conversations, about 90% of the questionnaire respondents managed to properly translate the Shona comparison phrase to Chinese. According to Ling, Zhang and Zhang (2011: 207) /A + 比 bǐ+B + adjective/grammatical pattern is one of the most frequently used pattern for comparing differences between people, things or actions in terms of their nature or degree of similarity. This explains why some of the participants failed to produce phrases with proper grammatical pattern. The Shona phrase *muni'nina wangu akanaka kundidarika* which was wrongly translated as 我妹妹漂亮比我 seem to follow the English pattern as can be seen in the following translation: *my young sister is more beautiful than me*. There is no direct Shona equivalent of the Chinese preposition “比 bǐ”, the error observed above where participants would place the preposition “bǐ” after the adjective can be only traced to English.

Table 4 (Appendix 1) shows that about 72% of the questionnaire respondents could not use the preposition “gěi”, thus they would omit the preposition. In this case the participants were supposed to use the structure, /gěi + object + verb (or verbal phrase)/. Li (2011:103) outlined 3 different structures in which the preposition “gěi” can be used as shown below:

- (a) gěi + object + verb(or verbal phrase), as in 给他打电话 (*English: call him, Shona: Kumufonera*)
- (b) verb(or verbal phrase) + gěi + object , as in 寄给他 (*English: send him, Shona: Kumutumira*)
- (c) gěi + verbal phrase, eg 给打破了 (*English: be broken, Shona: kuvhunika*)

The above 3 patterns outlined by Li Xiaoqi, do not exist in both Shona and English. In Shona language the equivalent of the Chinese preposition “gěi” is an applied inflecting morpheme. According to Fortune (1984:26) when action of a given Shona verb takes place with reference to some person, thing, even or place an extension morpheme /-ir-/ or /-er-/ is added to the verb radical. This form of Shona verb extension known as applied verb extension is used in similar

circumstances with the Chinese preposition “gěi”, however since Chinese language does not have verb extensions as those in Shona language, native speakers of Shona tend to translate the main verb only thus ignoring the extension. For instance in this case, students translated the main verb “teng-” (*buy 买*) only in the phrase *ndinoda kukutengera chipo*, thus ignoring the extension /-er-/.

The omission of the preposition “gěi” by several native speakers of Shona in this survey might be also attributed to the English equivalent phrase where there seem to no equivalent preposition for “gěi”. The English equivalent phrase *I want to buy you a present* where most English speaking students would take the pattern “to buy you + [something]...” as equal to “买你 mai ni..... [something]”, seem to have influenced some of the participants of this survey.

Table 5 (Appendix 1) shows a situation where participants omitted one of the words that make the pattern for the Chinese prepositional pattern “zài... shàng”. The percentage error was relatively low, with only 24 percent of the questionnaire respondents omitting the noun of locality “shàng”. The Chinese preposition “zài” is normally used together with nouns of locality such as “上 shàng”, “下 xia”, “中 zhong” etcetera in order to show where the action is taking place or to express the static condition of the subject (Lan, 2004). In this case, the preposition “zài” paired with a noun of locality “shang” forms a fixed structure “zài... shàng”. In Shona the prepositional prefix of locality “pa-” which is equivalent to the “zài.... shàng” pattern do not take a pattern where two words are used to form a fixed pattern. In English a single preposition such as “under” (在...之下) or “on” (在...之上) is normally used to represent this “zài... noun of locality” Chinese pattern. Therefore, since this Chinese prepositional pattern is not found in both Shona and English language, some students resorted to omission of the unknown structure.

It should be noted that despite the fact that the “zài.... shàng” pattern does not exist in both Shona and English but, over 60% of the students managed to use this Chinese prepositional pattern without any challenges. This is probably due to the fact that these students are intermediate students with a relatively high Chinese language competence.

Summary of the results and Discussions

Errors that were as a result of the influence of the first language (Shona) and the language of instruction (English) were evident in all the five prepositions which were used for this survey. From these prepositions, it was noted that highest errors were recorded on the use of the preposition “从 cóng” and “给 gěi”. The wrong use of the preposition “从 cóng” was mainly due to wrong grammatical pattern, while for “给 gěi” it was due to omission since this preposition seem not to have an appropriate equivalent preposition in both English and participants’ native language. It can be also argued that these participants were in an environment where they rarely use this preposition, this is so because the majority of students managed to use the prepositions “比 bǐ”, “对 duì” and “在 zài” properly despite the fact that these Chinese prepositions do not have direct Shona equivalent prepositions.

Though this research shows that wrong use of Chinese prepositions could be attributed to the students’ knowledge of both English and Shona, however, considering that all participants in this survey speak both Shona and English, it is difficult to tell which of these languages could be the major source of errors. In this paper we argue that; for a native speaker of Shona, the most challenging area in learning Chinese is mainly when Shona and English share a similar construction pattern that differs from that of Chinese. For instance in this short survey the highest error

percentage made by native speakers of Shona was on the use of the Chinese preposition “gěi” which does not have any equivalent preposition in both Shona and English language.

As already predicted some native speakers of Shona found it very difficult to understand the concept of prepositions because in Shona language prepositions are attached to a word either as prefixes or suffixes; for instance the prefixes /pa-, ku-, mu-, etcetera do not form independent words as in Chinese prepositions where prepositions such as “给 gěi、在 zài、对于 duì yú、对 duì ” etcetera seem to be independent words with a clear grammatical meaning. Therefore, to teach Chinese prepositions to Shona speakers as independent words makes it difficult for the native speakers to grasp how Chinese prepositions are supposed to be used. In this area native speakers of Shona learning Chinese partly benefit from the language of instruction (English) since most of prepositions in English are independent words.

However, as noted that in some commonly used prepositions such as “bǐ” and “duì” despite the fact that these prepositions differ from the participants’ native language’s equivalent prepositions, students still managed to use them properly. From this observation, it can be concluded that if second language learners frequently use certain construction patterns whether complex or confusing they will end up getting used to the pattern. Considering that the participants in this survey were intermediate speakers of Chinese yet some of them were having some problems in using Chinese prepositions, it can be concluded that Chinese language beginners are likely to have serious challenges in acquisition of Chinese prepositions. Below are few recommendations that might be helpful for future researchers, Chinese language teachers and Chinese language students.

Recommendations and future researches

In this paper we recommend that when teaching those Chinese prepositions which do not exist in English and Shona to native speakers of Shona there is need to give many Chinese prepositional phrases with Shona equivalent phrases. Increasing use of Chinese prepositions in students’ daily conversations and practice is likely to be more effective than explaining the concept of prepositions and its grammatical rules. Since the concept of prepositions is too abstract to native speakers of Shona, students should naturally get used to Chinese prepositional phrases so that they naturally assimilate how to formulate such prepositional phrases. There is certainly need to experiment with this teaching method where students whose native languages do not have words or structures equivalent to those in the target language are given several phrases with native language equivalent phrases. Results should be tested against those for a group of students who are taught through explaining the use of given grammatical patterns of the target language.

In this paper we propose that teaching of Chinese in Zimbabwe requires a teacher who is trilingual, or someone who has a good understanding of Chinese, Shona and English. This knowledge of these three languages will help the teacher to understand the possible challenges the students are likely to face, thus appropriate strategies can be implemented to help students grasp the language without too much interference of their native language. We therefore recommend that in order to promote the teaching of Chinese language in Zimbabwe more local teachers should be trained or alternatively the Chinese teachers in Zimbabwe should learn Shona language.

Conclusion

The survey shows that though the acquisition of Chinese prepositions by native speakers of Shona is basically influenced by the students’ own mother tongue (Shona), however there is clear evidence that the language of instruction, which is English in this case, has its own contributions too.

We concluded that when teaching any given language using English or any other language other than the learner's native language as the medium of instruction it would be advisable for the teacher or language instructor to gather enough information about students' native language as well as understanding a triangular relationship between the learner's native language, target language and the language of instruction.

One major weakness of our research is that a limited number of prepositions were used thus the errors observed in this research might not be the only errors that native speakers of Shona make when acquiring Chinese prepositions. Apart from that, we could not establish the extent to which language of instruction interferes in the acquisition of third language aspects such as the target language's sound system and grammar. Therefore, we hope that future researches will explore this area in order to promote second language acquisition.

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Appendix A: Tables of Error Analysis

Table 1: Use of Chinese preposition 从 *cóng*

Wrong phrase	我来从津巴布韦 (wǒ lái cóng jīn bā bù wéi)
Correct phrase	我从津巴布韦来(wǒ cóng jīn bā bù wéi lái)
Type of error	Wrong grammatical pattern
Description of Error	In Chinese when using the preposition “ cóng ” (from in English) though it is normally placed before the object as it is in English but main verb in the phrase should come after the object. Here students followed the English format where the verb would be placed before the preposition.
Error percentage	48%

Table 2: Use of preposition 对 **duì**

Wrong phrase	他们好 对 我们 (tā men hǎo duì wǒ men) They have been nice to us.♣
Correct phrase	他们 对 我们好 (tā men duì wǒ men hǎo)
Type of error	Misplacement of preposition♣
Description of Error	The preposition “duì” is used to introduce the object of action. Thus, in the above phrase it should come before the object wǒmen and the adjective “ hǎo ” should come after the object.
Error percentage	7%

Table 3: Use of preposition 比 **bǐ**

Wrong phrase	我的妹妹漂亮 比 我 (wǒ de mèi mèi piāo liàng bǐ wǒ)
Correct phrase	我的妹妹 比 我漂亮(wǒ de mèi mèi bǐ wǒ piāo liàng)
Type of error	Wrong grammatical pattern
Description of Error	Students used a wrong grammatical pattern where they used the preposition 比 bǐ after the adjective. In Chinese when comparing the difference between two sides, the structure A [比 bǐ] B + adjective) is used, rather than A + adjective + [比 bǐ] B.
Error percentage	10%

Table 4: Use of preposition 给 **gěi**

Wrong phrase	我想买你礼物 (wǒ xiǎng mǎi nǐ lǐ wù)
Correct phrase	我想给你买礼物 (wǒ xiǎng gěi nǐ mǎi lǐ wù)
Type of error	Error due to omission of preposition
Description of Error	In Chinese, when introducing action or service done for somebody or something, the preposition “gěi” is normally used before the object.
Error percentage	72%

Table 5: Use of preposition 在...上

Wrong phrase	在学习他最努力 (zài xué xí tā zuì nǔ lì)
Correct phrase	在学习上, 他最努力(zài xué xí shàng , tā zuì nǔ lì)
Type of error	Omission of an important word in a fixed grammatical structure
Description of Error	Students omitted the noun of locality “shàng”. In Chinese language when expressing or referring to a static condition of the subject a fixed prepositional structure “zài... + ... noun of locality” is normally used.
Error percentage	24%

Appendix B: Questionnaire

NB* Where you cannot write characters you can write in pinyin

1. Use the Chinese prepositions below to make a sentence (Each preposition just one sentence)

- a. 在 _____
- b. 从 _____
- c. 比 _____
- d. 对 _____
- e. 给 _____

2. Translate the following Shona phrases to Chinese

a. Ndinodzidza paYunivhesiti ye Zimbabwe(I learn at the university of Zimbabwe)

b. Ndakazvarwa muna 1990 (I was born in 1990)

c. Kubudikidza nerubatsiro rweshamwari Chinese yangu yakakwirira (With the help of my friend ,my Chinese level improved)

d. Ndinobva ku Zimbabwe (I come from Zimbabwe)

e. Akatora bhuku mubhegi (He took the book from the bag)

g. Munin'iana wangu munaku kundidarika (My young sister is more beautiful than me)

h. Vakatibata zvakanaka chaizvo (They were so good to us)

I. China yakakura kudarika Zimbabwe (China is bigger than Zimbabwe)

J. Ndakaverenga bhuku ririmaererano netsika namagariro eChina (I read a story about Chinese culture)

H. Chiringazuwa ichi chinofanirwa kuturikwa kumadziro (The clock should be hanged on the wall)

I.Pasi hutungamiri hwake tinokunda mumakwikwi (Under his leadership we will win the game)

j. Pakudzidza anoshanda nesimba zvikuru (When it comes to the learning, he is so committed.)

k. Ndiri kuda kukutengera chipo (I want to buy you a present)

l. Ndirikuda kudzidza nezve Chinese medicine (I want to study about Chinese medicine)
