

## **AN ANALYSIS OF SUBSTITUTION ERRORS MADE IN READING STANDARD CHINESE CHARACTERS BY STUDENTS OF THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

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The present study investigated the errors made in reading standard Chinese characters by students of the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi. Each participant was given a passage to read aloud in isolation while being recorded using an audio recorder. Errors were then identified and analysed. The study identified three major types of errors: errors of substitution, errors of omission and errors of addition. In this paper only errors of substitution are discussed because they were numerous.

**Key words:** Reading, pinyin, Chinese characters, radical, components of characters, errors of substitution.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper analyses errors made in reading Chinese characters by learners of Standard Chinese, also known as Putonghua or Mandarin, at the University of Nairobi's Confucius Institute. Analysing character-related reading errors is a major way of testing whether the learners have understood and internalised Mandarin or not. One of the researchers, who is a lecturer of Chinese at the University of Nairobi, noticed frequent errors, made by her students, of the following types: substitution of characters and substitution of components of characters. These in turn caused lexical and semantic errors while some resulted in sentences that were ungrammatical (ill-formed in Chinese). Students may have made these errors as a result of identity of root characters, similarity of characters, and near-similarity in pronunciation.

Learning how to read Chinese requires one to memorise all the characters and recognize them correctly during the reading process. During the first few Chinese language lessons for beginners the standard system of Romanised spelling for Chinese, called Pinyin, is used (Liu, 2013). Pinyin is an alphabetic script that

provides the spelling form corresponding to each character. Thereafter, characters are slowly introduced. Bi (2017: 103-104) conducted research on 'issues in teaching Chinese characters and strategies for foreign learners outside the Chinese character culture circle'. She analysed writing errors made by first year students of Chinese at Gdańsk University in Poland and her research observed that in order to achieve the best results in Chinese character teaching, they should first conduct a comprehensive and meticulous classification of the errors according to the characteristics of Chinese characters. The errors she observed include stroke level errors which can be divided into two types: substitution errors and addition or omission errors. It is our observation that the shapes of some strokes are similar and this makes it hard for students to distinguish between them. This in turn affects the effective reading of the intended character. Chinese characters are usually memorised as a whole. Sometimes the details of writing characters are easily neglected and this can lead to errors of omission or addition at the stroke level. Component level errors usually happen on the combined characters, and it can be divided into the following categories: (i) Substitution errors at the component level which occur when a wrong stroke is used, and (ii) omission or addition errors at the component level occurs when a stroke is omitted or added which causes error in recognition of the character. Chinese characters have their own rules of writing and composition. It is important for the learners to pay attention to these rules to avoid making errors at the overall configuration level.

Shu and Anderson (1997) conducted a study on the "Role of Radical Awareness in the Character and Word Acquisition of Chinese Children" to examine issues related to reading development. The study shows that learning to read includes the acquisition of metalinguistic skills that are used to guide assignment of character meaning. They explained that metalinguistic awareness is the ability to identify and reflect on the structural features of language. Learning to read requires becoming aware of the basic units of spoken language, the basic units of the writing system and the mapping between the two.

In Chinese language some characters directly represent their meaning. For example, in ancient Chinese, the symbol ( 月 ) was the character that represented the object 'moon'. Another type of character considered to be directly

## 28 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

meaningful is the ideograph. An ideograph is “[a] symbol that represents an idea or a thing, rather than the sounds of a word.” (<https://www.vocabulary.com>). Some of the examples include the characters for ‘up’ (上) and ‘down’ (下). They further demonstrate how modern Chinese contains a few compound ideographs in which the components denote the elements in an event or idea, for example the characters for jungle (林), wood (木) and forest (森). It should be noted that the types of characters that have meaning described by the character shape are only about 18% of the total number of characters (Shu and Anderson 1997: 3). The remaining 82% of modern Chinese characters are called standard compound characters. They consist of two parts: a component called a radical which carries information about meaning and one called a phonetic component which provide information on pronunciation that every learner of Chinese has to internalise (Hoosain, 1991; Li, 1977; and Taylor & Taylor, 1995 quoted by Shu and Anderson (1997)).

In most cases, the radical indicates the conceptual category of the character. In other words, there is usually a member-set relationship between a character and its radical. For example, the characters for sister (姐) and aunt (姨) are among the many characters that contain the female radical (女). In other cases, the relationship of the radical to the meaning of the character is direct. For example, the character (唱), which means ‘sing’ has “the mouth (口)” radical. It is easy to see that singing has a connection with the mouth. Although the Chinese writing system is complex, it has a useful logic, which may not be apparent to learners. Learners who understand this logic have an easier time learning to read (Shu and Anderson 1997: 5). Students at the Confucius institute are taught this logic.

In their study Shu and Anderson (1997) used two experiments to examine radical awareness in children. In the first experiment, a total of 220 first, third and fifth graders from a primary school in Beijing were divided into groups of high, average and low verbal ability, based on their classroom teachers’ ratings. For each grade, 90 characters were selected from the national reading textbooks. 30 of the characters were classified as familiar because they had been introduced in the textbooks two grades earlier and the children had encountered them numerous times. The familiar characters for the first graders were those

introduced one semester before the test. At each grade, 30 characters had been recently learned. These characters came from the textbooks students were using in that semester. Finally, 30 characters were classified as unfamiliar to students because they would not appear in the textbook until two grade levels above the students' current grade. Within each degree of familiarity there were 3 types of characters, according to Shu and Anderson (1997: 5):

- (i) There were morphologically transparent characters containing radicals helpful for understanding the meaning of the whole character. For example, the character 烛 which means 'candle' contains the radical 火, which means fire.
- (ii) There were also morphologically opaque characters containing radicals that were unrelated to the meaning of the whole character. An example is the character 错 'mistake' that contains the radical 钅, which means metal.
- (iii) Lastly, there were unanalysable characters, such as 欠 which means 'owe' and cannot be analyzed into parts.

The opaque and unanalysable characters did not contain helpful morphology. So, the difference between these two types and the transparent characters represents the value students were able to derive from using morphology. The children were presented with two-syllable words which were familiar from oral language. One syllable was written as a character, the other was written in Pinyin. According to Shu and Anderson (1997: 83) the "children's task was to circle a character to replace the Pinyin [form] in each two-syllable word. There were three distractor characters with either the same pronunciation or the same phonetic [component] as the correct character but a different radical", as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Correct characters and distractor characters used in the study

Item	Correct answer	Meaning
Tiào 望	眺	It has the radical 目 which means 'eye'. The whole character means 'look into the distance from a high place'.
	Distractors	Meaning
	挑(tiāo)	It has the radical 扌 which means 'hand'. The whole character means 'pick'.

### 30 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

跳(tiào)	It has the radical 𠂔 which means 'foot'. The whole character means 'jump'.
桃(tiāo)	It has the radical 亻 which means 'person', which means 'skittish'.

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The results of Shu and Anderson's (1997) study were the following:

- (i) The morphology was not very important for familiar characters, but had a large effect on performance with recently learned characters and an even larger effect on performance with unfamiliar characters.
- (ii) Transparent morphology mainly helped older students. The third and fifth graders assuredly were using radicals to derive unfamiliar characters as well as to learn and remember characters recently introduced in school. There was little indication of productive use of morphology by first graders.
- (iii) Children with different levels of ability did equally well on the familiar characters, but as familiarity decreased, the performance of higher and lower ability children diverged.

(Shu and Anderson 1997: 85)

Higher ability children got significantly better scores than lower ability children. There are two possible explanations, according to Shu and Anderson (1997: 85); one is that high ability children may have more specific character knowledge than low ability children including knowledge on some characters not yet introduced in school. The other one is that high ability children may have more capability than low ability children in recognising complex characters and using morphological knowledge to assimilate the characters.

Wong (2020) conducted a study on the relationship between orthographic awareness and Chinese reading among Hong Kong's young learners of Chinese as a Second Language (CSL Learners). The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between the learners' Chinese character reading performance and their orthographic awareness. A Chinese character recognition test containing Chinese characters, presented either as single or as two-character words, was prepared. Each student was required to read the characters. After the test, the students' errors were categorised into two types, namely orthographical or morphological ones. Wong (2020: 6) states that orthographic mistakes refer to

cases in which students misread a character due to the similarity of its form with other characters or its sharing of the same component with other characters, such as 每 which was misread as 母 (“mother,” [...]) and 话 in 说话 [was] misread as 活 (“alive,” [...]).

The correct meaning for the character 每 is ‘every’ while that of 话 is ‘word’. Wong (2020: 6) then defines morphological mistakes and gives examples to explain them further as:

cases in which students misread a character due to the similarity of its meaning with that of other characters or some shared word-compounding effects. For example, 南 which was misread as 北 (“north,” [...]) as both characters refer to directions and 分 in 十分 (the two-character word means “10 cents”) misread as 元 (“dollar,” [...]); the two-character word 十元 means “10 dollars”).

The character 南 means ‘south’.

Wong’s (2020) findings also suggest that orthographic awareness played a role in the students’ Chinese character reading. They emphasise the importance of helping CSL learners develop a solid knowledge base in Chinese orthography (Wong, 2020: 11). Wong goes on to say that “[t]he findings also suggest that morphological awareness played a role in the students’ Chinese character reading” (p. 11). The next section deals with the methodology that was employed in the current study.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 The participants**

This was a study targeting all the students taking the Chinese language course at undergraduate level in the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi from September 2014 to September 2015. The population comprised 39 students: 30 females and 9 males, composed of 19 students from Year I, 7 from Year II, 7 from Year III, and 6 from Year IV. Only thirty-three (33) students, comprising 25

## 32 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

females (76%) and 8 males (24%) were used in the study; the remaining six had not fulfilled the university requirements. They had not done all the exams expected of them at their level.

The participants in the present study were introduced to Pinyin for the first six lessons. During the six lessons, the teaching focused on the principal features of the Chinese pronunciation system which include the Mandarin Chinese sound system and the four tones. According to Liu (2013: x), students can gradually achieve a good foundation in pronunciation by doing the exercises on spelling, the four tones, sound discriminations and tone discriminations. Thereafter, they were introduced to Chinese characters.

### **2.2 Data collection procedure**

Each learner was given a short passage to read. The passages were picked from the books recommended for learning Chinese at each level of study. Students in each year were presented with a different passage, according to the level of reading they should have attained. The passages were drawn from Liu (2002), Books 1 to 4. The short passages were from p. 118 of Book 1 for Year I, p. 110 of Book 2 for Year II, p. 61 of Book 3 for Year III and p. 59 of Book 4 for Year IV. An audio recorder was used to record their readings, which were later replayed so that errors could be identified and analysed.

### **2.3 Data analysis procedure**

The researcher listened to each learner's recorded reading to find out if the learners were able to correctly recognize the Chinese characters. Errors were identified where learners failed to correctly recognize the Chinese words. The researcher transcribed the learners' reading, compared them to the short passage and marked errors in bold type.

The researcher selected a competent Chinese teacher who holds a Master of Arts degree in Teaching Chinese language to speakers of other languages and has passed HSK 6 (the highest level test), to confirm the errors. HSK stands for 'Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi' which can be translated as the Chinese Proficiency Test. It is a

Standard Chinese language proficiency test for non-native speakers. It is established to assess their proficiency in Chinese.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper focuses on substitution errors, which are of two sub-types: substitution of characters and substitution of components of characters.

#### 3.1 Substitution of characters

There were errors of substitution of characters as seen in the examples in this section. In (1) below, a character was replaced with another. The errors identified and their corresponding expected responses in Chinese Characters are presented in bold type while their translations in English are underlined.

(1) a) Error

林娜 在 美术 **医院** 学习 美术 专业。

Lin Na in Fine Arts hospital is learning fine arts major

b) Expected response

林娜 在 美术 **学院** 学习 美术 专业。

(i) Lin Na in Fine Arts Institute is learning fine arts major. (literal translation)

(ii) Lin Na is learning fine arts as a major subject in the Fine Arts Institute. (correct translation)

The word *institute* 学院 was replaced with the word *hospital* (医院). The second character of the word *hospital* 医院 is the same as that of *institute* (学院) but the first character of each of these two words is different. This can also be categorised as a lexical error because it involves the replacement of one character with another thereby causing a difference in word meaning.

There are Chinese words that have identical root characters. Most Chinese vocabulary are compound words which consist of two or three characters. Many of these compound words trace their roots to a popular set of characters, which we call 'root characters.' The meaning of these root characters, when combined with the meanings of the other character(s) in the compound word, create the

### 34 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

meaning of the compound word. A good example is already seen in (1) above. The characters 医院, which means ‘hospital’, and 学院, which means ‘institute’, share a similar root character, namely 院. The character ‘院’ has many meanings. Some of the meanings include “courtyard; designation for certain government offices; public place; college, institution” (<https://www.trainchinese.com>). In reading this character it is possible that the learner could not distinguish between the two words because they share a root character.

To illustrate further, a root character/word such as 心 means ‘heart’. It combines with other characters to create new words, for example, 粗心 which means ‘careless’, 黑心 which means ‘evil/ruthless’, 心疼 which means ‘distressed’, 小心 which means ‘careful’, 心寒 ‘disappointed’ and 恶心 which means ‘disgusted’. The root character that is common in all the compound words is 心. It should be noted that in some compound words, the root character comes first in the pair while in others, it is the second one. Table 2 shows some of these compound words.

Table 2: Compound words with the root character 心, which means ‘heart’

Character	Meaning	Character	Meaning	Compound Word	Meaning
粗	Thick, rude, unrefined	心	Heart	粗心	Careless
黑	Black	心	Heart	黑心	Evil/ruthless
心	Heart	疼	Pain	心疼	Distressed
小	Small	心	Heart	小心	Careful
心	Heart	寒	Cold	心寒	Disappointed
恶	Badness, hate	心	Heart	恶心	Disgusted

The error discussed in (2) is yet another lexical one that has resulted from substitution of characters.

(2) a) Error

林娜 在 美术 学院 学习 美文 专业。

Lin Na in Fine Arts Institute is learning fine article major.

b) Expected response

林娜 在 美术 学院 学习 美术 专业。

- (i) Lin Na in Fine Arts Institute is learning fine arts major.  
(literal translation)
- (ii) Lin Na is learning fine arts as a major subject in the Fine Arts Institute.  
(correct translation)

In example (2), 美术, which means 'fine arts', was replaced with 美文, which means 'fine article'. The student failed to recognize the word *fine arts* and instead read the word as *fine article*, which means a good piece of writing or text.

The lexical error discussed in (3) is a result of substitution of characters. The details of the error can be seen below.

(3) a) Error

星期天 她 去 中国人的 商店。

Sunday she goes to Chinese shop.

b) Expected response

星期天 她 去 中国人的 商场。

- (i) Sunday she goes to Chinese mall. (literal translation)
- (ii) She goes to the Chinese mall on Sundays. (correct translation)

The word *shop* (商店) was replaced with *mall* 商场. It should be noted that the first character in each of the words *shop* and *mall* is the same. Therefore, they have identical root characters. The student may have confused one word for the other because of this identity or identicalness.

The example in (4) is a similar error to that in (3). The term *shop* replaced *mall*, as seen below.

(4) a) Error

我们 在 商店 里 一边走一边聊。

We in shop inside walk and talk.

b) Expected response

我们 在 商场 里 一边走一边聊。

- (i) We in mall inside walk and talk. (literal translation)

### 36 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

- (ii) We walk as we talk inside the mall. (correct translation)

商场 ‘mall’ was, once again, read as 商店 ‘shop’. Both words/characters have the meaning of ‘a place for shopping’. The first character in each case is 商, which means ‘trade’ or ‘commerce’.

Another error of substitution is illustrated in example (5) below.

- (5) a) Error

他 给我们买好了 客票。

He bought us passenger ticket.

- b) Expected response

他 给我们买好了 机票。

- (i) He bought us air tickets. (literal translation)

- (ii) He bought air tickets for us. (correct translation)

The term 机票 ‘air ticket’ was read as 客票 ‘passenger ticket’, which makes it a lexical error. The second character in each case is 票, which means ‘ticket’.

In (6), 商场 ‘mall’ was read as business 商屋 ‘house’. The first character 商 ‘business’ in each word is exactly the same. This may be the source of the lexical error.

- (6) a) Error

我们 在 商屋 里 一边走一边聊。

We in business house inside walk and talk.

- b) Expected response

我们 在 商场 里 一边走一边聊。

- (i) We in mall inside walk and talk. (literal translation)

- (ii) We walk as we talk inside the mall. (correct translation)

The student replaced the characters in the text they read with the characters 商屋, which is translated in English as *business house*. The combination of the characters 商 ‘business’ and 屋 ‘house’ results in a compound word *business house* that is not part of the Chinese vocabulary.

The errors of substitution of characters seen in (7) and (8) rendered the sentences meaningless. In other words, they became semantically ill formed.

(7) a) Error

我们 这的 旗袍 不是 机品 生产的。

We here Cheongsams are not machine grade produced.

b) Expected response

我们 这的 旗袍 不是 机器 生产的。

(i) We here Cheongsams are not machine produced. (literal translation)

(ii) Here, our Cheongsams are not produced by machine. (correct translation)

The student read the characters 机品 which means ‘machine grade’ instead of 机器 which means ‘machine’. The first character of each word is exactly the same. The second character of machine grade 机品 has three components of the *mouth* radical 口. The second character of machine 机器 has four of them. The similarity in the components of the two characters may be the cause of the error.

Another reading error of substitution was made on the same character as illustrated in (8) below.

(8) a) Error

我们 这的 旗袍 不是 机哭 生产的。

We here Cheongsams are not machine cry produced.

b) Expected response

我们 这儿的 旗袍 不是 机器 生产的。

(i) We here Cheongsams are not machine produced. (literal translation)

(ii) Here, our Cheongsams are not produced by machine. (correct translation)

The characters 机哭, which means ‘machine cry’, was read instead of 机器 ‘machine’. The first character of each word is exactly the same. The second character of *machine cry* (机哭) has two components of the radical 口 which means ‘mouth’ and 犬 which means ‘dog’. The second character of *machine* (机器)

### 38 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

has four components of *mouth* (口) with 犬 placed in between the two upper ones and the two lower ones. The second character of *machine cry* (机哭) is the same as the upper part of the second character of *machine* (机器). Learners need to memorise these characters to avoid identifying them wrongly in the process of reading.

The substitution of two characters in (9) led to a semantic error. The meaning of the sentence was distorted as a result of this error.

(9) a) Error

这件 衬衫 对 你 很 回话。

This shirt to you very answer.

b) Expected response

这件 衬衫 对 你 很 合适。

(i) This shirt to you very suitable. (literal translation)

(ii) This shirt is suitable for you. (correct translation)

The word *suitable* (合适) was read as *answer* (回话). In each of these two words, the first characters are very different from each other. The second characters resemble though they differ in the radical in each one of them. Whereas the second character of the word, ‘suitable,’ has the radical (辶), the word ‘answer’ has the radical 讠. The radical 辶 is commonly known as 走之旁 (Zǒu Zhī Páng) and its meaning has to do with ‘walking’. The radical “讠” is commonly known as 言字旁 (yánzìpáng) and its meaning is related to *using language orally*. So, it is found in verbs such as *talking* (说话-shuōhuà) and *discussing* (讨论-tǎolùn). This radical is always placed on the left side of a character.

The word *walk* (走走) ‘zǒu zou’ /zou zou/ was replaced with *sit* (坐坐) ‘zuò zuo’ /zuo zuo/ in (10). Once again the two words are close in pronunciation. They also share some strokes but in different positions, for example the stroke *heng* ‘一’ is found in both words.

(10) a) Error

那 天 下 了 课 ， 我 就 一 个 人 在 街 上 坐坐。

That day after class, I just alone in street sat.

b) Expected response

那 天 下 了 课 ， 我 就 一 个 人 在 街 上 走 走 。

- (i) That day after class, I just alone in street walked. (literal translation)
- (ii) That day after class, I just walked alone in the street. (correct translation)

In *sat* (坐坐), the strokes are found in the lower part of the word, while in 走走 they occur in the upper part. There is character reduplication in each one of them. In other words, the two characters of each word are identical. These similarities may have been the cause of the error made by the student. Table 3 shows the strokes shared by the two words. In the same table and the subsequent ones, a tick shows the presence of a stroke, while a blank one shows its absence.

Table 3: The strokes shared by characters of the words *sit* (坐坐) and *walk* (走走)

Strokes	pie	dian	pie	dian	heng	Shu	heng	shu	heng	pie	na
	丿	丶	丿	丶	一	丨	一	丨	一	丿	丶
坐	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
走					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

There is a specific order that should be followed in writing these characters. The table follows the order in which the strokes are written, from the first to the very last one. It also shows the strokes that are similar in the two characters.

The error in (11) involves substitution of characters.

(11) a) Error

我 听 到 美 国 人 说 怎 么 流 利 的 汉 语 。

I heard American speak how fluent Chinese.

b) Expected response

我 听 到 美 国 人 说 这 么 流 利 的 汉 语 。

- (i) I heard American speak such fluent Chinese. (Literal translation)

#### 40 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

- (ii) I heard an American speak such fluent Chinese. (Correct translation)

The word *such* (这么) 'zhè me' was read as *how* (怎么) 'zěn me'. The second character in each case is 么. It is treated as an error of substitution because the first character of the word 'such' was replaced by another one. This lexical error, brought about by substitution of characters in turn caused a semantic one. Just as in the previous two examples, the two words in this example are almost similar in pronunciation.

A lexical error of character substitution is seen in (12) where the student replaced *telephone call* (电话) with *TV* (电视) '. The first character (电), which means 'electric' is part of both words. The second character in each case is different from the other. They may have learnt these two Chinese words at the same time.

#### (12) a) Error

林娜 会 好 朋友 马大为 打 了 一 个 电 视。

Lin Na can good friend Madawei made a TV.

#### b) Expected response

林娜 给 好 朋友 马大为 打 了 一 个 电 话。

- (i) Lin Na give good friend Madawei made a telephone call.  
(Literal translation)
- (ii) Lin Na made a telephone call to Madawei, her good friend. (Correct translation)

The word *give* (给) was also replaced with *can* (会). These two characters have the similar parts, namely 人 and 一. They appear in the upper part of both characters. The same sentence is repeated in (13). One character was replaced by another that is completely different from it. The word *made* (打了) was replaced with *sent* (送了). In (12) and (13) the character for the word *TV* replaced that of *telephone call*. The error of omission seen in (13) where *girlfriend* (女朋友) replaced 'good friend' (好朋友) is beyond the scope of this paper.

(13) a) Error

林娜 给 女朋友 马大为 送了 一个 电视。

Lin Na give girlfriend Madawei sent a TV.

b) Expected response

林娜 给 好朋友 马大为 打了一个 电话。

(i) Lin Na give good friend Ma Dawei made a telephone call.  
(Literal translation)

(ii) Lin Na made a telephone call to her good friend, Ma Dawei. (Correct translation)

In the next example, the sentence in the passage presented to students to read was long, so only the portion of it containing the identified error is reproduced here.

(14) a) Error

想 买 中国 画 送 会 她。

... want to buy Chinese painting send can her.

b) Expected response

想 买 中国 画 送 给 她。

... want to buy Chinese painting send to her. (Literal/correct translation)

The words *send to* (送给) were replaced with *send can* (送会), which is not correct semantically both in Chinese and English. The second character in *send to* (送给) has similar parts to that of *can* (会). The similar parts are 人 and 一. The first one, 人, has two strokes which we call *pie* (𠃉) and *na* (㇇) in Chinese. Just as in example (12), they appear in the upper part of both characters. This could be the source of the learner's confusion in distinguishing between the two characters.

The error in (15) could also be categorised as a lexical error because the words *whole body* (全身) were replaced with *body* (身体). The second character in the former is identical with the first character of the latter.

(15)a) Error

身体 都 不 舒服。

42 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

Body all not comfortable.

b) Expected response

全身 都不舒服。

(i) Whole body all not comfortable. (Literal translation)

(ii) The whole body is not comfortable. (Correct translation)

The student seemed to have replaced the character 全 (*whole*) with 体 (*body*) which also combines with 身 to form 身体 (*body, health*). The characters have their own meaning; 全 means 'whole', while 身 means 'body'. When the two characters are combined to form 全身, it means 'whole body.' These two words (身体 and 全身) are usually taught in the same lesson. It should be noted that the three characters, namely 体, 身 and 身体 all mean the same thing, i.e. 'body'.

The incorrect response in (16) shows that the words *grandfather* (爷爷) and *grandmother* (奶奶) were replaced by *elder brother* 哥哥 and *younger sister* 妹妹, respectively. The word *Canada* (加拿大) was replaced by *dormitory big* (宿舍大). These are lexical errors.

(16) a) Error

我 和 哥哥 妹妹 去 宿舍 大 旅行。

I and elder brother younger sister go to dormitory big travel.

b) Expected response

我 和 爷爷 奶奶 去 加拿大 旅行。

(i) I and grandfather grandmother go to Canada travel.

(Literal translation)

(ii) My grandfather, grandmother and I are travelling to Canada.

(Correct translation)

Kinship terms in Chinese have characters being repeated. For example 妈妈 means 'mother', 爸爸 means 'father', 弟弟 means 'younger brother' and 姐姐 means 'elder sister'. So, the student must have realised that there were two kinship terms in this sentence, hence he/she made a guess by mentioning any of them. There is also a possibility that this student thought that the characters 爷爷

and 奶奶 mean ‘elder brother’ and ‘younger sister’, respectively, because this error was repeated by the same student as illustrated in (17) below.

(17) a) Error

因为 哥哥 妹妹 都 不会 说 英语。

... because elder brother younger sister both cannot speak English.

b) Expected response

因为 爷爷 奶奶 都 不会 说 英语。

(i) ... because grandfather grandmother both cannot speak English.  
(Literal translation)

(ii) ... because both grandfather and grandmother cannot speak English.  
(Correct translation)

Just as in example (17) above, in example (18) below, the word Canada was replaced by *big dormitory* ((宿舍大) dormitory big) by the same student.

(18) a) Error

我 爸爸 在 宿舍 大 当 老师。

My father in dormitory big is teacher.

b) Expected response

我 爸爸 在 加拿大 当 老师。

(i) My father in Canada is teacher. (Literal translation)

(ii) My father is a teacher in Canada. (Correct translation)

The second character of *Canada* (拿) and the second character of *big dormitory* (舍) have the similar parts. The similarity is seen in the strokes 人 and 一 in the upper part of each character. The component 口 which means ‘mouth’ appeared in different positions in both characters. 口 consists of three strokes, namely ‘丨 7 一’. The student read the character for *big* as a separate word from the rest of the characters making up the word *Canada*.

In (19) *study abroad* (留学) was replaced with *running a school* (办学). The first character in each word is different while the second one is exactly the same. This is a more complicated error involving the replacement of a phrase with another one.

(19) a) Error

44 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

我 到 美国 办学 的 第四 天 就是 情人节。

I arrived America run school of fourth day is Valentine's Day.

b) Expected response

我 到 美国 留学 的 第四 天 就是 情人节。

(i) I arrived America study abroad of fourth day is Valentine's Day.  
(Literal translation)

(ii) The fourth day, of my study abroad, in America, was Valentine's Day.  
(Correct translation)

The word *what* replaced *so* in example (20) thus making the sentence semantically incorrect.

(20) a) Error

我 没想到 他 会 什么 做。

I did not expect he can what do.

b) Expected response

我 没想到 他 会 这么 做。

(i) I did not expect he can so do. (Literal translation)

(ii) I did not expect him to do so. (Correct translation)

The Chinese word *Zheme* (这么), which means *so*, was replaced with *Shenme* (什么) which means 'what'. Their pronunciations are almost the same. The second character *me* (么) is the same in the two words. This replacement resulted in a semantically-ill formed sentence. In other words, the student's sentence was meaningless.

The word *need* replaced *important* in (21). The two are related word forms in Chinese and so they share the second character, (要), as seen below.

(21) a) Error

我 知道 情人节 在 西方 是 一个 需要的 节日。

I know Valentine's Day in west is one need festival.

b) Expected response

我 知道 情人节 在 西方 是 一个 重要的 节日。

(i) I know Valentine's Day in west is one important festival.

(Literal translation)

- (ii) I know Valentine's Day is an important festival in the West. (Correct translation)

The characters 有 (*has*) and 要 (*want*) are very close in pronunciation in Chinese. There was an error of substitution which in turn resulted in a lexical error as shown in (22).

(22) a) Error

林娜 有 去 看 他。

Linna has go to see him.

b) Expected response

林娜 要 去 看 他。

- (i) Linna wants go to see him. (literal translation)  
(ii) Linna wants to go to see him. (correct translation)

The word *has* (有) was read as *want* (要). 有 (*has/have*) is pronounced as 'yǒu' /jou/, while 要 (*want*) is pronounced as 'yào' /jau/. The closeness or similarity in pronunciation could be a possible reason for this kind of error. They sound similar but do not have the same meaning. The two verbs are also introduced to learners at roughly the same time.

In (23), there is an error of substitution of a character. One student replaced this question in (23b) with the one in (23a).

(23) a) Error

怎么 办呢?

How to do?

b) Expected response

怎么样?

- (i) How is it? (literal translation)  
(ii) How is it? (correct translation)

In the example above, *to do* (办) replaced the character 样 which does not occur in isolation. The three characters, 怎么样, combine to form the sentence, 'how is it?' This caused a semantic error because the meaning intended was lost or not

46 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

realized when the student used *to do* (办). It should be noted that ‘how to do’ is written optionally with the character 呢, which is a question particle. In Chinese, the question particle 呢 is used at the end of a sentence to form a question or to indicate that a response is expected. Therefore, *how to do* can be alternatively written as 怎么样呢.

The error in (24) is a lexical one because the replacement of characters changed the meaning of the word.

(24) a) Error

中国 东西

Chinese thing

b) Expected response

中国 画

(i) Chinese painting (literal translation)

(ii) Chinese painting (correct translation)

There is a possibility that the student who made this error simply used the word that he/she could recall. The second character of *thing* (东西) is slightly similar to the character 画 which means ‘painting’. The similarity is shown in table 4 below.

Table 4: The strokes shared by characters of the words *thing* (东西) and *painting* (画)

Strokes	heng	shu	heng zhe	pie	shuzhe/ shuwan	heng	shu	heng	shuzhe/ shuwan	shu
	—		└	丿	└	—		—	└	
西	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
画	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Another error of substitution is presented in (25).

(25) a) Error

马大为 是 中文系 学习 汉语。

Madawei is Chinese department study Chinese.

b) Expected response

马大为 **在** 中文系 学习 汉语。

- (i) Madawei in Chinese department study Chinese. (Literal translation)
- (ii) Madawei is studying Chinese in the Chinese department. (Correct translation)

The preposition *in* (在) was replaced with the helping verb *is* (是). This is a semantic error because the change distorted the meaning of the whole sentence.

The incorrect response in (26) shows that the word *pain* (疼) was replaced with *slim* (瘦).

(26) a) Error

他 头 **瘦**。

He head slim.

b) Expected response

他 头 **疼**。

- (i) He head pain. (Literal translation)
- (ii) He has a headache. (Correct translation)

The student may have made this lexical error because the two words share the same radical (疒). This radical is mostly used in writing characters whose meaning is related to sickness, e.g., 疯 ‘mad’, 癌 ‘cancer’ and 瘸 ‘lameness’.

Two lexical errors are seen in (27); one involving the word ‘with’ and another, ‘play’.

(27) a) Error

我们 和 爸爸、妈妈 一起 **玩**。

We and father mother together play.

b) Expected response

我们 跟 爸爸、妈妈 一起 **住**。

- (i) We with father mother together live. (Literal translation)
- (ii) We live with my father and mother. (Correct translation)

#### 48 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

Even if it would still be correct to use *and* (和) instead of *with* (跟) in this example, the student failed to recognize the latter character when reading the text. So, *and* (和) replaced the word *with* (跟). In addition to this error, the word *live* (住) was replaced with *play* (玩). The student made two errors of character replacement within the same sentence.

The error in (28) involves the characters for the words *often* and *swim* (28). In addition to these errors, one word was omitted.

(28) a) Error

我们 飞 去 海 旅行。

We fly go to sea travel.

b) Expected response

我们 常 去 海 边 游泳。

(i) We often go to sea side swim. (Literal translation)

(ii) We often go to swim in the sea side. (Correct translation)

In (28), *often* (常) was replaced with *fly* (飞) while *swim* (游泳) was replaced with *travel* (旅行). The replacement of *often* with *fly* created a semantic error. The only similarity seen is the two characters (游 and 旅) is 方, which is called 'fāng' in Chinese or *square* in English translation and which is in the first characters of *swim* (游泳) and *travel* (旅行). Most of the strokes of the two words are the same. The character for *swim* is written with a radical (氵) that represents *water*.

The error in (29) involves a Chinese particle which is an aspect marker. The aspect marker in question usually indicates an incomplete action.

(29) a) Error

小伙子 笑 看 对 我 说。

Young man smile see to me talk.

b) Expected response

小伙子 笑 着 对 我 说。

(i) Young man smiling to me talk. (literal translation)

(ii) The young man talked to me while smiling. (correct translation)

The character 着, which is a particle, was replaced with *see* (看). This particle (着) is an aspect marker showing an action that was continuing (incomplete action)

and is usually placed after the verb. The two characters are similar. Whereas the character 着 has the strokes 丶 ‘dian’, 丿 ‘pie’, 一 ‘heng’, 一 ‘heng’, 一 ‘heng’, and 丿 ‘pie’, the character 看 has 丿 ‘pie’, 一 ‘heng’, 一 ‘heng’, 丿 ‘pie’, while 着 has three ‘heng’ and 看 has two ‘heng’. The latter does not have the stroke 丶 ‘dian’. Table 5 below shows the areas of similarity and differences between the upper parts of the two characters.

Table 5: The strokes in the upper parts of the characters for the *particle* (着) and the verb *see* (看)

Strokes	dian	pie	heng	heng	heng	pie
着	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
看		✓	✓	✓		✓

Table 6 shows that the lower parts of the two characters are identical.

Table 6: The strokes of the lower parts of the characters for the *particle* (着) and the verb *see* (看)

Strokes	shu	hengzhe	heng	heng	heng
		└	—	—	—
着	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
看	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The replacement interfered with the meaning of the sentence. The student may have missed the correct character because there are many strokes in both characters and most of them are straight, not curved. The error made by this learner is similar to what Bi (2017) reports. In his study he found that the students tend to confuse the usage of a character and its meaning when it is combined with other characters. They also get confused when there are slight changes or variation of strokes, for example in the characters 太 (tai), which means ‘too’ and 犬 (quan), which means ‘dog’, the minimal difference in the strokes can easily confuse the learners (Bi 2017: 99). He recommends that the task of learning characters should be divided into two parts, namely recognition and production, which demands that learners be able to read more characters than write them.

## 50 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

This section had the highest number of errors. The next section discusses substitution of components of characters.

### 3.2 Substitution of components of characters

There were errors of substitution of components of characters. In this section, we analyse the errors made by learners through the substitution of components of characters. Some of these components of characters are radicals. As already explained, in the introduction to this article, radicals are defined as the graphical components of the Chinese character.

There was an error made as a result of the substitution of the radical, which is at the same time a component of a character, as seen in example (30).

(30) a) Error

这件 谈 红色的 衣服 质量 不错。

This talk red cloth quality is good.

b) Expected response

这件 淡 红色的 衣服 质量 不错。

(i) This light red cloth quality is good. (literal translation)

(ii) The quality of this light red cloth is good. (correct translation)

The word *light* 淡 (dàn) was replaced with *talk* 谈 (tán), thus causing a semantic error. The first part of the character of the word *light* has a radical (氵) while that of *talk* has the radical (讠). The component (炎) on the right hand side of both characters is exactly the same. These two words are also close in pronunciation. The similarity in the characters may have been the cause of the error in reading. Such errors could be common in cases where the students are not able to relate the sentence to its background context in order to choose the right character for that context.

It should be noted that Chinese characters comprise several strokes. These strokes are combined in a systematic way to form characters or components of characters. In the texts the students were asked to read, it was observed that characters with certain components were not read as expected. Learners substituted the expected characters with others that had different strokes. For

example, the word *still* (还) was replaced with *pass* (过). The component 不 that replaced 寸 does not resemble it. The components look very different. The error and the expected response are presented in (31) below.

(31) a) Error

不过 我 过 得 想 一 想。

But I pass need think a bit.

b) Expected response

不过 我 还 得 想 一 想。

(i) But I still need think a bit. (literal translation)

(ii) But I still need to think a bit. (correct translation)

The substitution may have occurred because the two characters have the same radical (辶), which therefore causes confusion among the students. This is a lexical error, which has in turn created a semantic error.

In (32) *miss* (小姐) was read as *little sister* (小妹). The first character of each word is the same. In the second character, it should be noted that the radical 女, which means ‘female’ or ‘woman,’ is also the same. This radical can be a character, if used alone and a component of a character, if combined with another character. Therefore, in this example, it is a component of a character.

(32) a) Error

小 妹

Little sister

b) Expected response

小姐

(i) Miss (literal translation)

(ii) Miss (correct translation)

The reader did not correctly recognize the second character. The existence of this radical (女) may be the source of the error. Radicals, or 部首 (*bù shǒu*), as they are known in Chinese, are the graphical components of the Chinese characters. They are the building blocks that appear within characters, making them easier to remember. Most radicals have an element of meaning. Apart from making the task of using a dictionary easier, they help in identifying more building blocks of the characters one is learning (Collins Chinese Dictionary, 2011: xi). However, it

should be noted that some radicals may not be a reliable guide to the meaning of the character. A case in point is the character for *good* (好) which consists of two characters, namely 女 (*Woman*) and 子 (*son*). They exist as characters on their own and can also form a different character with a different meaning when the two of them are combined (Su and Zeng 2015: 2546). It is clear that the radicals in (33) do not give a clue to the meaning of the word ‘good’.

(33) 女 + 子 = 好  
 Woman + son = good

There were three errors of substitution of components of characters but there were no errors of substitution of strokes.

### 3.3 A summary of the categories of errors made

The errors the students made are placed on a table to show at a glance the errors described in this paper. The first two categories were attested in the learners reading while the last one was not identified in their reading.

Table 7: Summary of the categories of errors made by the students

Errors	Present in the students' reading	Absent from the students' reading
Substitution of characters	✓	
Substitution of components of characters	✓	
Substitution of strokes		✓

Errors of substitution of strokes were expected, but none were produced. That is why we suggest that a larger sample should be used to do the same study in future to find out if this last category of errors would emerge. Table 8 shows the percentage of errors made by learners in each of the categories.

Table 8: Percentage of errors made by the students in each category

Errors	Frequency	Percentage
Substitution of characters	36	92.3%
Substitution of components of characters	3	7.7%
Substitution of strokes	0	0
Total	39	100%

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the errors made in reading by undergraduate (Year I to Year IV) students of Chinese language at the University of Nairobi's Confucius Institute. It found out that there were many character-related errors, namely errors of substitution of characters and errors of substitution of components of characters. We also expected to find errors of substitution of strokes but there were none. The greatest number of errors were errors of substitution of characters. It was noted that some students appeared not to have internalised the context of the text they are reading to enable them to use the right Chinese characters. As a result, when they did not recognize characters, they substituted them with what they felt were closest to the character at hand, thus leading to errors. From the analysis, it is possible that most of the errors are attributable to the inadequate mastering of the character usage by the learners. It is important that learners master all aspects of sound and meaning of Chinese characters. The inability to distinguish between various characters arose because they either looked similar or had similar pronunciations.

The results of the analysis are important because they help the students and their instructors to think of the best strategies to use during the learning and reading process. This study has added to the field of applied linguistics, specifically, the area of second language acquisition, which in our opinion is not an extensively researched area in Chinese language teaching and learning in Kenya. It has provided a glimpse of the errors learners of Chinese as a second language make in their reading. This paper shows an area that linguists and other researchers could work on more. Apart from dealing with the errors made in reading characters, errors in the pronunciation of Chinese sounds and tones could be given more attention. A similar research could be done with a larger sample to

check if errors of substitution of strokes will occur. At the moment there is no explanation to account for their absence. It should be noted that in our research, we not only found errors of substitution but also those of addition and omission. The latter will be published later.

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## APPENDIX: A SAMPLE OF READING TEXTS

### Year I reading text

马大为和林娜是好朋友。马大为是加拿大人，林娜是美国人。马大为在中文系学习汉语，林娜在美术学院学习美术专业。星期六，林娜的男朋友得了感冒，他头疼，嗓子也疼，全身都不舒服。林娜要去看他。她知道他很喜欢中国画，星期天她去中国人的商场，想买中国画送给他。可是她不会说汉语，怎么办呢？林娜给好朋友马大为打了一个电话，请大为来帮助她。大为的汉语很好，他帮助林娜买了中国画。林娜很高兴。

### English translation

Ma Dawei and Lin Na are good friends. Ma Dawei is Canadian and Lin Na is American. Ma Dawei studied Chinese in the Chinese Department, and Lin Na studied art in the Academy of Fine Arts. On Saturday, Lin Na's boyfriend caught a cold. He had a headache, sore throat, and felt uncomfortable all over. Lin Na is going to see him. She knew that he liked Chinese paintings very much. On Sunday, she went to the Chinese shopping mall and wanted to buy Chinese paintings for him. But she doesn't speak Chinese, what should I do? Lin Na called her good friend Ma Dawei and asked Dawei to help her. Dawei's Chinese is very good, and he helped Lin Na buy Chinese paintings. Linna is very happy.

### Student 1's reading

马大为和林娜是好朋友。马大为是加拿大人，林娜是美国人。马大为在中文系学习汉语，林娜在美术学院学习美术专业。星期六，林娜的男朋友得了感冒，他头疼，嗓子也疼，全身都不舒服。林娜要去看他。她知道他很喜欢中国画，星期天她去中国人的商场，想买中国画送给他。可是她不会说汉语，怎么办呢？林娜给好朋友马大为打了一个电话，请大为来帮助她。大为的汉语很好，他帮助林娜买了中国画。林娜很高兴。

### Error

星期天她 去中国人的商店。

She goes to Chinese's shop on Sundays.

Expected response

星期天 她 去 中国人的 商场。

Sunday she goes to Chinese's mall. (literal translation)

She goes to Chinese's mall on Sundays. (correct translation)

### Student 2's reading

马大为和林娜是好朋友。马大为是加拿大人，林娜是美国人。马大为在中文系学习汉语，林娜在美术学院学习美术专业。星期六，林娜的男朋友得了--，他--，-子也-，--都不--。林娜要去看他。她知道他很喜欢中国画，星期天她去中国人的商场，想买中国画送给他。可是她不会说汉语，怎么办呢？林娜给好朋友马大为打了一个电话，请大为来--她。大为的汉语很好，他--林娜买了中国画。林娜很高兴。

Error

怎么力呢？

How power?

Expected response

怎么办呢？

How to do? (Literal translation)

How to do? (Correct translation)

Error

星期天她 去中国人的商店。

She goes to Chinese's shop on Sundays.

Expected response

星期天 她 去 中国人的 商场。

Sunday she goes to Chinese's mall. (literal translation)

She goes to Chinese's mall on Sundays. (correct translation)

Error

她知道也很喜欢中国画。

She knows also very likes Chinese painting.

## 58 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

### Expected response

她 知道 他 很 喜欢 中国画。

She knows he very likes Chinese painting. (literal translation)

She knows he likes Chinese painting very much. (correct translation)

### Year II reading text

去年夏天放假以后，我和爷爷奶奶去加拿大旅行。我爸爸在加拿大当老师，他给我们买好了机票。我们是从上海坐飞机去加拿大的。到加拿大以后，我们跟爸爸、妈妈一起住。爸爸租了一套房子，有 90 平方米。房子前边是一个小花园，进门左边是卫生间，右边是厨房。客厅在厨房的北边，卧室在客厅的西边。卧室的左边是爸爸的书房，右边是客房。那儿的天气很好，虽然是夏天，但不太热。我们常去海边游泳。

吃了晚饭以后，我爷爷喜欢出去散步。一天，他跟奶奶出去散步，已经是晚上九点了，他们还没有回家。我爸爸着急了，因为爷爷奶奶都不会说英语，他们迷路了怎么办？就在这时候，他们回来了。我爸爸问他们：“你们去哪儿了？我还以为你们迷路了。”我爷爷笑了笑，说：“我不会说英语，我怕迷路了不能回家。我把我们这条路的名字写下来了。我就不怕迷路了。”爷爷从衣服里拿出一张纸给了爸爸。

“老爸，这是您写的路名？！“NO EXIT”，这不是路名，是“此路不通”的意思。

“啊！此理不通！”

### English translation

After vacation last summer, my grandparents and I went on a trip to Canada. My dad was a teacher in Canada, and he bought our plane tickets. We flew to Canada from Shanghai. After arriving in Canada, we lived with my father and mother. Dad rented a house with 90 square meters. There is a small garden in front of the house, the bathroom is on the left of the entrance, and the kitchen is on the right. The living room is to the north of the kitchen and the bedroom is to the west of the living room. To the left of the bedroom is Dad's study, and to the right

is the guest room. The weather there is nice, although it is summer, it is not too hot. We often go to the beach for swimming.

After dinner, my grandfather likes to go out for a walk. One day, he went out for a walk with his grandmother, it was already nine o'clock in the evening, and they hadn't come home yet. My dad is in a hurry, because neither grandparents speak English, what should they do if they get lost? Just then, they came back. My dad asked them, "Where have you been? I thought you were lost." My grandfather smiled and said, "I can't speak English, I'm afraid I won't be able to go home. The name is written down. I'm not afraid of getting lost." Grandpa took out a piece of paper from his clothes and gave it to Dad.

"Dad, is this the road name you wrote? "NO EXIT", this is not a road name, it means "this road is blocked".

"Ah! This makes no sense!"

### Student's reading

去年夏天放假以后，我和爷爷奶奶去加拿大旅行。我爸爸在加拿大当老师，他给我们买好了机票。我们是从上海坐飞机去加拿大的。到加拿大以后，我们跟爸爸、妈妈一起住。爸爸租了一套房子，有 90 平方米。房子前边是一个小花园，进门左边是卫生间，右边是厨房。客厅在厨房的北边，卧室在客厅的西边。卧室的左边是爸爸的书房，右边是客房。那儿的天气很好，虽然是夏天，但不太热。我们常去海边游泳。

吃了晚饭以后，我爷爷喜欢出去散步。一天，他跟奶奶出去散步，已经是晚上九点了，他们还没有回家。我爸爸着急了，因为爷爷奶奶都不会说英语，他们迷路了怎么办？就在这时候，他们回来了。我爸爸问他们：“你们去哪儿了？我还以为你们迷路了。”我爷爷笑了笑，说：“我不会说英语，我怕迷了路不能回家。我把我们这条路的名字写下来了。我就不怕迷路了。”爷爷从衣服里拿出一张纸给了爸爸。

“老爸，这是您写的路名？！“NO EXIT”，这不是路名，是“此路不通”的意思。

“啊！此理不通！”

## 60 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

### Error

他给我们买好了客票。

He already bought us the passenger ticket.

### Expected response

他 给 我们 买好了 机票。

He gave us bought air tickets. (literal translation)

He already bought for us the air ticket. (correct translation)

The student read 机票 (air ticket) as 客票 (passenger ticket). The second character in each case is (票) which means ticket. They are identical. The student therefore confused 'passenger ticket' with 'air ticket'.

### Error

我们和爸爸、妈妈一起玩。

We and father mother together play.

### Expected response

我们 跟 爸爸、妈妈 一起 住。

We with father mother together live. (Literal translation)

We live with my father and mother. (Correct translation)

Even if it is still correct to use 和 'and' instead of 跟 'with' in this example the student failed to recognize the latter. In addition to this error the word 住 'live' was replaced with 玩 'play'. The student made two errors within the same sentence.

## Year III reading text

我到美国留学的第四天就是情人节。我知道情人节在西方是一个重要的节日。那天下了课，我就一个人到街上走走。在一家商场里我看到一件很有特色的衬衫，我正在想该不该买的时候，听到后边有人用汉语说：“小姐，这件衬衫对你很合适。你穿了一定很漂亮。”我回头一看，是一个美国小伙子。我觉得很奇怪：他是谁？我不认识他啊！小伙子笑着对我说：“你好，我叫吉米。我在北京学习过两年中文，我非常

喜欢北京。”听到美国人说这么流利的汉语，而且他还去过北京，我很高兴。我们在商场里一边走一边聊。我们从美国聊到中国，从生活习惯聊到中文……一会儿，我们已经走到了六楼。看到那有卖花儿的地方，吉米对我说：“请等我一下。”我想，今天是情人节，他可能要给他女朋友买花。一会儿，他拿着一束花儿走过来，把花放到我的手上，很认真地对我说：“这是给你的花。”我没有想到他会这么做，不知道该怎么办，只说了一句：“为什么？”，小伙子说：“为今天的节日，也为我认识了一位漂亮的姑娘。这是我的名片，上边有我的电话和地址。我可以知道你的电话和地址吗？我可以给你打电话吗？”我觉得很奇怪。这儿的小伙子就是这样找女朋友的吗？

#### **English translation**

The fourth day of my study abroad in the United States was Valentine's Day. I know that Valentine's Day is an important holiday in the West. After class that day, I went for a walk on the street alone. In a shopping mall, I saw a very distinctive shirt. When I was thinking about whether to buy it or not, I heard someone say in Chinese: "Miss, this shirt is very suitable for you. You must be very beautiful wearing it. ." I looked back and it was an American boy. I find it strange: who is he? I don't know him! The young man smiled and said to me, "Hello, my name is Jimmy. I have studied Chinese in Beijing for two years, and I like Beijing very much." I am very happy to hear that the American speaks such fluent Chinese, and he has also been to Beijing. We chatted while walking in the mall. We talked about China from the United States, from living habits to Chinese... After a while, we have reached the sixth floor. When he saw that there was a flower shop, Jimmy said to me, "Please wait for me." I thought that it was Valentine's Day, and he might have to buy flowers for his girlfriend. After a while, he came over with a bunch of flowers, put the flower in my hand, and said to me very seriously: "This is a flower for you." I didn't expect him to do this, I don't know what to do, only said one sentence: "Why?" The young man said: "For today's festival, and also for me, I met a beautiful girl. This is my business card with my phone number and address on it. May I know your phone number and address? Can I call you?" I think it's weird. Is this how guys here find girlfriends?

### Student's reading

我到美国留学的第四天就是情人节。我知道情人节在西方是一个重要的节日。那天下了课，我就一个人到街上走走。在一家商场里我看到一件很有特色的衬衫，我正在想该不该买的时候，听到后边有人用汉语说：“小姐，这件衬衫对你很合适。你穿了一定很漂亮。”我回头一看，是一个美国小伙子。我觉得很奇怪：他是谁？我不认识他啊！小伙子笑着对我说：“你好，我叫吉米。我在北京学习过两年中文，我非常喜欢北京。”听到美国人说这么流利的汉语，而且他还去过北京，我很高兴。我们在商场里一边走一边聊。我们从美国聊到中国，从生活习惯聊到中文.....一会儿，我们已经走到了六楼。看到那有卖花儿的地方，吉米对我说：“请等我一下。”我想，今天是情人节，他可能要给他女朋友买花。一会儿，他拿着一束花儿走过来，把花放到我的手上，很认真地对我说：“这是给你的花。”我没有想到他会这么做，不知道该怎么办，只说了一句：“为什么？”，小伙子说：“为今天的节日，也为我认识了一位漂亮的姑娘。这是我的名片，上边有我的电话和地址。我可以知道你的电话和地址吗？我可以给你打电话吗？”我觉得很奇怪。这儿的小伙子就是这样找女朋友的吗？

### Error

我听到美国人说怎么流利的汉语。

I heard an American speak how fluent Chinese.

Expected response

我 听到 美国人 说 这么 流利的 汉语。

I heard an American speak such fluent Chinese.( literal translation)

I heard an American speak such fluent Chinese.( correct translation)

The student read 这么 'zhè me' 'such' as 怎么 'zě me' 'how'.

The next section recommends ways in which the errors in reading Chinese characters can be eliminated.

Error

我只说了一包：“为什么？”

I only said one bag: “why? ”

Expected response

我 只 说 了 一 句: “为什么？”

I only said one sentence: “Why? ”(literal translation)

I only said one sentence: “Why? ”(correct translation)

The student read 句 ‘sentence’ as 包 which means ‘bag’. A section of the characters resemble. One character, 包 ‘bag’, has extra strokes. The replacement of one character with another while reading the sentence distorts its meaning completely.

#### Year IV reading text

男：欢迎光临，请问您要买点什么？

女：我想买一件适合我穿的旗袍，打算参加朋友的婚礼时穿。

男：那您一定要选择一件红色的旗袍，看起来很喜气。

女：为什么一定要穿红色的呢？我的朋友结婚，她才穿白色的婚纱，我总不能比她喜气吧。

男：正因为新娘穿得很素雅，您才要穿一件红色的旗袍呀！

女：也对，那请您找一件适合我的红色旗袍，我先试穿一下吧。

女：这件淡红色的质量不错，多少钱啊？

男：890 块。

## 64 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

女：什么？这么贵？普通的名牌衣服也就两三百块，您这的旗袍又不是名牌，怎么这么贵呀？

男：这您就不知到了，我们这的旗袍并不是机器生产出来的，而是用手工一件一件地做的。不但样子好，做工、绣工都非常好。您看这件旗袍，用的是苏州的好绸缎，是苏州老师傅绣的，而且没有两件旗袍是完全相同的。

女：您这么说，我真该把它买下了。不过我还得想一想。

男：好，您再好好想想吧。我保证您跑遍西安城再也找不到材料和做工都这么好的旗袍了。

### English translation

Man: Welcome, what would you like to buy?

Woman: I want to buy a cheongsam that suits me to wear to my friend's wedding.

Man: Then you must choose a red cheongsam, which looks very happy.

Woman: Why do you have to wear red? My friend got married and she only wore a white wedding dress. I couldn't be happier than her.

Man: It is because the bride is dressed so elegantly that you have to wear a red cheongsam!

Woman: Yes, then please find a red cheongsam that suits me. I'll try it on first.

Woman: The light red is of good quality. How much is it?

Male: 890 yuan.

Woman: What? so expensive? Ordinary brand-name clothes are only two or three hundred yuan. Your cheongsam is not a famous brand, why is it so expensive?

Man: You don't know that, our cheongsam is not produced by machine, but made by hand one by one. Not only looks good, but the workmanship and embroidery are very good. You see, this cheongsam is made of fine silk and satin from Suzhou, embroidered by Suzhou masters, and no two cheongsams are exactly the same.

Woman: You said that, I should have bought it. But I have to think about it.

Man: Okay, think about it again. I guarantee that you will travel all over the city of Xi'an and you will never find a cheongsam with such good materials and workmanship.

**Student's reading**

男：欢迎光临，请问您要买点什么？

女：我想买一件适合我穿的旗袍，打算参加朋友的婚礼时穿。

男：那您一定要选择一件红色的旗袍，看起来很喜气。

女：为什么一定要穿红色的呢？我的朋友结婚，她才穿白色的婚纱，我总不能比她喜气吧。

男：正因为新娘穿得很素雅，您才要穿一件红色的旗袍呀！

女：也对，那请您找一件适合我的红色旗袍，我先试穿一下吧。

女：这件淡红色的质量不错，多少钱啊？

男：890块。

女：什么？这么贵？普通的名牌衣服也就两三百块，您这的旗袍又不是名牌，怎么这么贵呀？

男：这您就不知到了，我们这的旗袍并不是机器生产出来的，而是用手工一件一件地做的。不但样子好，做工、绣工都非常好。您看这件旗袍，用的是苏州的好绸缎，是苏州老师傅绣的，而且没有两件旗袍是完全相同的。

女：您这么说，我真该把它买下了。不过我还得想一想。

男：好，您再好好想想吧。我保证您跑遍西安城再也找不到材料和做工都这么好的旗袍了。

**Error**

这件淡红色的衣服质量不错。

This talk red cloth quality is good.

Expected response

这件 淡 红色衣服 质量 不错。

This light red cloth quality is good.( literal translation)

66 Substitution errors made in reading Standard Chinese characters ...

The quality of this light red cloth is good. ( correct translation)

The student read 淡 'light' as 谈 'talk'. The difference is in the first part of each character.

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