# An Error Analysis of Chinese Classifiers used by the Chinese Specialization Students

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## Abstract

This paper aims at making an error analysis of Chinese classifiers used by the Chinese Specialization students of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages. The research question is: Why do Chinese specialization students make errors in the use of Chinese classifiers? The research method used was preparing the test questions on the Chinese classifiers for third year and fourth year Chinese specialization students and collecting data from the answers and analyzing the data. According to the research findings, the mother tongue (MT) interference was the cause of the errors in the use of the Chinese classifiers since the number of the Chinese classifiers is more numerous, and more complicated than those of Myanmar language. This research will enable learners of Chinese language as a foreign language to effectively learn the use of the Chinese classifiers.

**Keywords:** Chinese classifiers, collecting data, error analysis

## Introduction

Chinese language is the language used by the speakers whose population is second to the speakers of the English language as a foreign language. In Mandalay University of Foreign Languages, Chinese is taught as one of the specialization languages. Chinese grammar, as well as four language skills, is taught to the Myanmar students. A Myanmar learner of Chinese who misuses the classifiers will make an impression that he or she turns out to be a bad communicator. Therefore, effective communication skills depend on the correct use of the classifiers in Chinese language.

The paper makes an analysis of the errors in the use of Classifiers, a component of Chinese grammar, made by the Myanmar students learning Chinese as a foreign language, and appropriate teaching methodology is suggested. In many Southeast Asian languages, Classifiers are one of the characteristics of a language. Researchers have done studies of Classifiers in Chinese language. The findings of the researchers are applied in Chinese language teaching in the context of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages.

In this paper, the errors in the use of classifiers made by third year and fourth year Chinese specialization students are presented after collecting data from questionnaires. Sources of their errors are found out through the error analysis.

## Literature Review

While the researchers in China have made researches on the Classifiers, an essential grammatical part of the Chinese language, foreign scholars who have come to study in China also made comparative and contrastive analysis between the Chinese language and their native languages, as well as the error analysis of the classifiers and wrote the research articles, and some of these articles are mentioned as follows:

In Zhao Xiaohong's (2004) "An Error Analysis of the Errors made by the Indonesian students Learning the Chinese Language", students from the

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Department of Chinese Language from the University of Jakarta, Indonesia, were asked to answer a sample question testing the common, daily used 36 classifiers out of 136 classifiers included in their prescribed text: 14 from Second Year; 42 from the Third Year; 20 from the Fourth year (76 in total). Data were collected and assessed. According to the findings, the Indonesian students were not fluent in the use of the Chinese classifiers, and the maximum errors had the root of problem in the use of the classifiers included in the native language and the wrong use.

A level:（1）把（2）杯（3）本（4）遍（5）次（6）道（7）对（8）顿（9）封（10）个（11）根（12）件（13）棵（14）口（15）块（16）门（17）片（18）双（19）条（20）头（21）碗（22）位（23）些（24）张（25）支（26）只（27）座

B Level:（1）顶（2）副（3）架（4）颗（5）名（6）匹（7）台（8）趟（9）套

The students were asked to answer three sample questions, and the errors in the use of the following classifiers derived from the mother tongue interference. The most common errors are found in the following:

| Sr. No | Error | Correction |
|--------|-------|------------|
| 1 | 一只牛 | 一头牛 |
| 2 | 一本本子 | 一个本子 |
| 3 | 一台钢琴 | 一架钢琴 |
| 4 | 四个课 | 四节课 |
| 5 | 一张椅子 | 一把椅子 |

Data were collected on the errors in the use of the Chinese classifiers from the students learning Chinese as a foreign language. Besides, the Chinese classifiers were compared with the classifiers of the native language. There are also researches that make a comparative analysis of the Chinese language and the Thai language as that of the Chinese and the Korean language.

Although the number of classifiers in Chinese is over a thousand, the researchers engaged in the study of classifiers made a base of 136 classifiers from the book 《Hanyu Shuiping Cihuiyu Hanzi Dengji Dagan》 and made a comparative study. So this paper is based on 40 classifiers out of the 136 classifiers, collecting data from the questionnaires of the Third Year and Fourth year undergraduates of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages.

## Aim

This research is aimed at finding the common errors in the use of classifiers made by the Chinese specialization students and providing teaching methods to the effective use of classifiers.

## Data collection and Research Methodology

First, the research findings of the researchers in China and abroad in the aspect of classifiers are studied. The effective teaching methods of teaching classifiers are

focused. Model standardized test questions on the classifiers were distributed to third year and fourth year Chinese specializations students, forty each.  The test was made two times.  Data were collected from the tests.

## Discussion

The common 136 classifiers, as mentioned in 《HanyuShuipingCihuiyu Hanzi DengjiDagang》, are classified into levels: 58 in Level A; 57 in Level B; 15 in Level C; 6 in Level D.  Out of these, out of the most common 40 classifiers, 22 in Level A are: 个、位、只、支、条、本、家、件、架、次、场、辆、瓶、岁、把、杯、段、张、对、双、块、节。

10 in Level B are as follows: 匹、盒、台、套、朵、道、架、粒、首、幅。

 5 in Level C are as follows: 串、艘、束、枝、幢。

3 in Level D are as follows: 具、挑、尾。

From the tests, the most common errors in the use of classifiers made by the Chinese specialization students are due to Mother tongue interference.

Since classifiers in Chinese are more numerous and varied than those in Myanmar language, the Myanmar learners make errors in the use of classifiers.

For example, (个，位) (*yauk* in Myanmar) is used to refer to person;

一个人 is used to refer to one person.

一位老师 is used to refer to a teacher.

For example, (张，把) Myanmar classifier *Lone*

一张床 used to refer to a bed

一把椅子 used to refer to a table

Myanmar classifier *Lone* has two Chinese classifiers referring differently to a "bed" and a "table". As a result, Myanmar learners make errors in the use of these Chinese classifiers.

For example,(匹，头，只)Myanmar classifier *Kaung*

一匹马 a horse

一头牛 an ox

一只鸡 a chicken

As mentioned above, *Kaung* refers to the number of animals. Though in Myanmar language there is only one classifier to refer to the number of animal, the Chinese language has more than one.   That is why Myanmar learners make error in learning the use of Chinese classifiers.

The following table shows the errors made by the Myanmar learners, the Chinese specialization students of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages.

| Sr. No | Error | Correction |
|--------|-------|------------|
| 1 | 两<u>个</u>比赛 | 两<u>场</u>比赛 |
| 2 | 三<u>张</u>椅子 | 三<u>把</u>椅子 |
| 3 | 一<u>条</u>飞机 | 一<u>架</u>飞机 |
| 4 | 两<u>台</u>飞机 | 两<u>架</u>飞机 |
| 5 | 两<u>只</u>牛 | 四<u>头</u>牛 |
| 6 | 五<u>头</u>马 | 五<u>匹</u>马 |
| 7 | 一<u>支</u>雨伞 | 一<u>把</u>雨伞 |
| 8 | 一<u>个</u>餐厅 | 一<u>家</u>餐厅 |
| 9 | 三<u>个</u>事情 | 三<u>件</u>事情 |
| 10 | 两<u>个</u>老师 | 两<u>位</u>老师 |

## Research findings

The data on the errors in the use of classifiers made by the Chinese specializations students of Mandalay University of Foreign Languages show that the cause of errors was mother tongue interference: some classifiers of Chinese do not exist in Myanmar since the number of Chinese classifiers is greater than that of Myanmar classifiers. The Myanmar learners found it hard to memorize the numerous Chinese classifiers, which led to mix up with the Myanmar classifiers and make errors. Since the errors also occur in the use of the classifiers not commonly used, students should study widely the use of classifiers in short stories and articles. Similarly, a comparative approach should be taken for effective teaching of the Chinese classifiers, which will enable the students to overcome their weaknesses in the use of Chinese classifiers.

## Conclusion

In addition to the errors in the use of classifiers presented in this paper, there could exist errors in the use of other quantifiers related to amount. Therefore, the learners of Chinese should study the Chinese classifiers, take the test on classifiers many times and learn the lessons on classifiers. They should study not only the prescribed texts but also books on general knowledge, pieces of literature, articles, newspapers and novels.

## References

မြန်မာစာအဖွဲ့၊ (၂၀၁၆) *"မြန်မာသဒ္ဒါ"*၊ မြန်မာစာနှင့်ဘာသာစကားဦးစီးဌာန၊ ပညာရေးဝန်ကြီးဌာန၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့။

အောင်မြင့်ဦးဒေါက်တာ၊ (၂၀၁၀)၊ *"ဘာသာစကားသုတေသန"* ၊ ခွပ်စာအုပ်တိုက်၊ ရန်ကုန်မြို့။

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