L1 Transfer in L2 Acquisition of the *There*-Insertion Construction by Mandarin EFL Learners

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Abstract
This study examined the role of the native language (L1) transfer in a non-native language (L2) acquisition of the *there*-insertion construction at the syntax-semantics interface. Specifically, the study investigated if Mandarin EFL learners would make overgeneralization errors in the situation where an L1 argument structure constitutes a superset of its L2 counterpart. Verbs of existence and appearance (EAA) such as *exist*, *appear* are possible with the *there*-insertion construction in which the single argument remains in the underlying direct object position. In Mandarin, some verb classes also allow their single arguments to appear in the verb-subject (VS) order. For example, VEA and verbs of monadic change of state (COS) (*die*, *escape*) are compatible with the VS order. Some verbs of manner of motion (MOM) (*run*, *swim*) are also permissible with the construction. Seventy upper-intermediate and advanced L1 Mandarin EFL learners and 30 native English speakers participated in an acceptability judgement test, the results of which show that L1 Mandarin EFL learners acquired native-like knowledge of the *there*-insertion construction with verbs of EAA, but they have difficulties recognizing the unacceptability of the *there*-insertion sentences with verbs of COS and MOM. Individual results by subjects show that it is possible to recover from L1 transfer. Mandarin EFL learners start to unlearn the overgeneralization errors with MOM verbs by drawing on the semantic properties. The experimental results provide further evidence for the previous findings suggesting that the L2 argument structure acquisition is constrained by L1, and the recovery from L1 transfer is also possible.
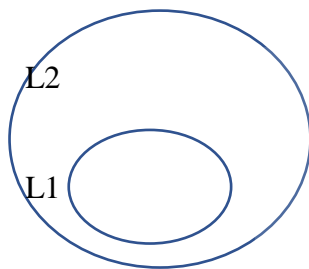
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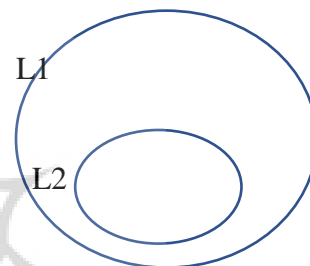
Introduction

The claim that the native language (L1) constitutes the initial state of a non-native language (L2) acquisition has been much debated in L2 acquisition studies grounded in generative grammar (Epstein, Flynn & Martohardjono, 1996, 1998; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996; Slabakova, 2000; White, 2003). According to the Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis (FTFA), the steady-state grammar of L1 in the sense of all abstract properties serves as the initial state of L2 acquisition (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996). When the L1 grammar cannot accommodate properties of L2 input, L2 learners would resort to Universal Grammar (UG) to restructure their interlanguage representations. The resulting interlanguage grammars are therefore under the constraints of UG, namely, full access of UG (White, 2003). However, not all researchers agree on the effects of L1 transfer on L2 acquisition. Epstein et al. (1996, 1998) argue that UG serves as the initial state of L2 acquisition and there is no role of L1 transfer in the acquisition model. Slabakova (2000) termed their hypothesis as No Transfer/Full Access (NTFT) Hypothesis. The NTFT Hypothesis argues that UG constrains the interlanguage grammar at all stages, and L2 learners are restricted to the hypothesis space permitted by UG, excluding the

possibility of L1 effects.

Recently, most L2 researchers have reached a consensus that at least some aspects of L2 acquisition such as argument structure and interface acquisition are greatly influenced by L1 transfer (Gass & Selinker, 1992; Inagaki, 2001, 2002; Ionin & Montrul, 2010; Montrul, 2001; Slabakova, 2015). What is more controversial in recent trends of L2 acquisition is whether L2 learners could get over from L1 transfer in a situation where an L1-L2 argument structure presents a subset-superset relationship. Montrul (2001) examines two types of learnability problems in L2 acquisition of argument structure: undergeneralization errors and overgeneralization errors. According to White (1991), there are two situations that might cause learnability problems for L2 learners, especially when there is a partial overlap between L1 and L2 argument structure properties. Figure 1 presents the first situation when an L2 forms a superset of L1. It is predicted that positive evidence would help L2 learners to realize that a broader grammar is also possible (Montrul, 2001). Figure 2 graphs the second situation when the L2 forms a subset of L1, L2 learners are predicted to have greater learning problems since L1, serving as the initial state of L2 acquisition, will lead L2 learners to posit a broader grammar.

Figure 1. *Subset L1-Superset L2*   **Figure 2.** *Superset L1-Subset L2*

In this paper, I investigate the L1 transfer on the L2 acquisition of the *there*-insertion construction by Mandarin EFL learners which presents a superset L1-subset L2 relation. That is, L1 Mandarin permits a wider range of structures than L2 English allows. Through the analyses of an acceptability judgment test, I show that L1 transfer influences L2 learners' judgments and the effects of L1 even persists at advanced stage, and that to recover from L1 transfer at the syntax-semantic interface it is also possible.

Background and Motivation
The *There*-Insertion Construction and Its Mandarin Counterpart

According to the Unaccusative Hypothesis, the syntactic classification of intransitive verbs as unergatives (UEs) or unaccusatives (UAs) is determined on the basis of the verb meaning (Burzio, 1986; Permutter, 1978). In Levin and Rapport Hovav's term (1995), the distinction between these two types of verbs is syntactically encoded but semantically determined. Unaccusativity is claimed to be language-universal, for different languages present ample evidence for the syntactic distinction. However, unaccusative diagnostics, which are supposed to manifest the UA-UE distinction, tend to be language-specific. Previous studies show that several phenomena such as auxiliary selection in Italian and German (Perlmutter, 1989; Keller & Sorace, 2003), impersonal passives in German (Zaenen, 1993) are diagnostics of deep unaccusativity where arguments of UA verbs move from the object position to the subject position. Diagnostics of surface unaccusativity apply only if the argument of a UA verb remains in the postverbal position such as *ne*-cliticization in Italian or split phrases in German (Alexiadou et al., 2004). In English, the *there*-insertion construction is assumed as a diagnostic of surface

unaccusativity in that the single argument remains to be in the syntactic object position without movement (Hoekstra & Mulder, 1990).

Previous literature identified at least two different types of the *there*-insertion construction with different restrictions on verb selection (Deal, 2009; Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 1995; Milsark, 1974). The first type of *there*-insertion construction has been termed 'inside verbals' (Milsark, 1974), as exemplified in (1a). This subtype refers to the syntactic configuration taking the form "*There* V NP PP" where the prepositional phrase (PP) is selective (Burzio, 1986). The PP is always locational and optional when the location is not emphasized. The reason for this term is that the logical subject noun phrase (NP) occurs inside the verb phrase (VP), base-generated in the object position, remaining postverbal through derivation. Lexical verbs appearing in the construction can be characterized as belonging to a particular syntactic or semantic class. Specifically, such verbs are mainly UAs, especially monadic verbs describing existence and appearance (EAA) (Levin, 1993; Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 1995). UEs, on the contrary, are not acceptable in this subtype, as in (1b). The inside verbal *there*-insertion construction, therefore, serves as a diagnostic of the distinction between UAs and UEs. Another property of this construction is the effect of the definiteness effects on the postverbal NPs (Levin, 1993; Milsark, 1974), which manifests as a restriction that generally allows indefinite NPs but not definite NPs, as exemplified in (1c) and (1d).

(1)
a. There arose many trivial objections during the meeting. (Milsark, 1974, p. 154)
b. *There danced a little girl in the room.
c. There appeared a ship on the horizon.
d. *There appeared the ship on the horizon. (Levin, 1993, p. 89)

The second subtype of *there*-insertion construction is known as 'outside verbals', as exemplified in (2a), which refers to constructions taking the form '*There* V PP NP' (Milsark, 1974). In this subtype, the logical subject NP shows up to the right of the VP with an intervening PP. The PP is always directional and required. Because of this syntactic difference, the unaccusative restriction is not found in this subtype, and both UAs and UEs are acceptable, as in (2b) and (2c). Furthermore, more verbs are compatible with outside verbals than inside verbals (Milsark, 1974). Based on this observation, only the inside verbal *there*-insertion construction is a valid unaccusative diagnostic. In addition, the definiteness restriction does not manifest in the outside verbal *there*-insertion construction, in contrast to the inside verbal *there*-insertion construction, as illustrated in (1c). From a pragmatic perspective, this construction requires that the NP is both discourse-novel and prosodically heavy (McNally, 1997; Ward & Birner, 1996); i.e. verbs compatible with this construction should be informationally light, and the referent of the NP in the sentence should be discourse-new.

(2)
a. There walked into the bedroom a unicorn. (Milsark, 1974, p. 224)
b. There darted into the yard a little boy. (Levin, 1993, p. 89)
c. Suddenly there flew through the window that shoe on the table. (Milsark, 1974, p. 246)

In summary, only the inside verbal *there*-insertion construction is relevant to diagnose the UA-UE distinction, and the postverbal NPs in this construction generally observe the definiteness restriction. The outside verbal *there*-insertion construction, on the contrary, allows a larger set of

verbs, including UEs, and exhibits no definiteness restriction on the NPs. In this study, I focus on investigating the acquisition of the inside verbal *there*-insertion (henceforth *there*-insertion for short) construction.

In Mandarin, existential sentences, which are also called presentative sentences, are found to be sensitive to the UA-UE distinction (Laws & Yuan, 2010; Yuan, 1999). The well-formedness of (3a) and (3b) indicates that UAs in Mandarin can appear either preverbally or postverbally. UEs, in contrast, can only appear preverbally, as shown in (3c) and (3d).

(3)
a. laoshi lai-le.
teacher   come-PERF
'The teacher came.'
b. lai-le   yige   laoshi.
come-PERF   one-CL   teacher
'There came a teacher.'
 c. keren   xiao-le.
 guest   laugh-PERF
'The guest laughed.'
 d. *xiao-le   keren.
 laugh-PERF   guest
'There laughed a guest.'

Huang (1987) discusses verb selections and the UA-UE distinction in the verb-subject (VS) construction in Chinese. He indicates that *you* (*exist*) sentences are the closest counterparts of *there*-be sentences in English. Verbs of coming into existence, such as *lai* (come), *fasheng* (happen), *dao* (arrive) and verbs of going out of existence or change of state verbs (COS) (Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 1995), such as *si* (die) and *pao* (escape) are permissible with the VS order either with or without a locative phrase in the initial place, as in (4a & b). The locative phrases in this situation must be classified as adjuncts (Liu, 2007; Laws & Yuan, 2010). Postverbal NPs are always indefinite, as in (4b), and the definite NPs will make the sentence unacceptable, as in (4c). Transitive verbs such as *fang* (put), *gua* (hang), and *xie* (write) and positional verbs such as *zuo* (sit), and *tang* (lie) allows the VS order in a more restricted way. The initial position must be filled with a locative expression, which is an obligatory argument of the verb, as illustrated in (4d) and no DE is observed at all (Huang, 1987). Agentive verbs of manner of motion (MOM) like *pao* (run) and *zou* (walk) are also compatible with the VS order in Mandarin (Hu, 1995; Yang & Pan, 2001), as in (4e).

(4)
a. lai-le   liangge   ren.
come-PERF   two-CL   man
'*There came two men.*'
b. wuzi-li   lai-le   ji-ge   keren.
room-in   come-PERF   several-CL   guest.
'*There came several guests in the room.*'
c. (jianyu-li) pao-le   yige   fanren /*ta/ *neige   ren.
prison-in   escape-PERF   one-CL   prisoner / he/ that   man
(Lit. '*There escaped a prionser/*him/*that man from the prison.*')

d. shafa-shang zuo-zhe sange   nanhai.
sofa-top   sit-DUR three-CL boy
'On the sofa there sat three boys.'
e. jieshang   pao/zou   zhe ji-ge   ren
street-on   run/walk ASP several-CL man
'On the street runs/walks several men'

A brief overview of the English *there*-insertion constructions and its Mandarin counterparts, above, indicate that there are differences between English and Mandarin presentational sentences in how it makes a UA-UE distinction. Syntactically, UAs in Mandarin can be used in the bare VS construction, while English needs expletive *there*-insertion to allow the postverbal NP to remain *in situ*. Semantically, verbs of EAA is permissible in the *there*-insertion construction and its Mandarin counterpart. However, it should also be noted that verbs of COS and MOM, which are not possible in the *there*-insertion construction, are compatible with the VS structure in Mandarin. L1 Mandarin allows a wider range of verbs than L2 English does in the verb-subject order.

Previous L2 studies on the role of L1 transfer
In the past two decades, a great number of studies focused on the L2 acquisition of the lexicon and argument structure. According to Juffs (2000), L2 acquisition of the verb meaning and its argument structure as well as syntactic behaviors causes an interesting learnability problem. On one hand, L2 learners have to find out how verbs are classified into semantically coherent classes with the positive clues in the L2 input. On the other hand, they also need to figure out that some verb classes sharing the same semantic characteristics across languages behave similarly in syntactic manifestations, while some other verb classes also sharing the same semantic properties cross-linguistically exhibit totally different syntactic behaviors. For example, verbs of COS like *die* is disallowed in the *there*-insertion construction, whereas it is completely possible in Mandarin VS order.
By testing the role of L1 influence on the L2 acquisition of agentive verbs of MOM (*march*, *walk*) and COS (*break*, *melt*) in Spanish and English, Montrul (2001) suggests that L2 learners assume the lexico-syntactic representations of verb classes on the basis of their L1. Dyadic verbs of COS in both Spanish and English allow a transitivity alternation (*The boy broke the cup / The cup broke*). Agentive MOM verbs in English can have a transitivity alternation when combined with a PP such as in the sentence of *The general marched the soldiers to the camp*, whereas they cannot be used in a causative construction in the presence of a PP in Spanish. Two experiments were designed respectively on L2 English and L2 Spanish in order to investigate the L1 effects. Leaners whose L1 is English took part in the Spanish study, whereas learners whose L1 is Spanish participated in the English study. In her experiment, she recruited a separate group of Turkish learners in these two studies, for verbs of MOM in Turkish behave similarly in Spanish. The experimental results indicate that in L2 English study, Spanish and Turkish learners made undergeneralization errors, and they incorrectly reject verbs of MOM while correctly accepting COS verbs. In the L2 Spanish study, English speakers made overgeneralization errors, accepting both verbd of MOM and COS. On the other hand, Turkish speakers behave differently from the English speakers. The results confirm that L1 restricts the L2 acquisition of argument structure to certain extent. Montrul (2001) further discusses the possibility to recover from L1 transfer. She, in line with White (1991), claims that it is more difficult to unlearn overgeneralization errors than undergeneralization ones.

White (1991) mentions that undergeneralization errors are easier to overcome because L2 input provides much positive evidence for L2 learners. Overgeneralization errors, on the contrary, are much more difficult to unlearn given the fact that there is no positive evidence available that can make L2 learners know the incompatibility of the other possibilities. Inagaki (2001) investigates the differences between Japanese and English in the way a PP occurs with motion verbs. In English, both verbs of MOM (*walk*, *run*) and verbs of directed motion (*go*) can be used with a PP, whereas only verbs of directed motion can occur with a goal PP in Japanese. He finds a similar pattern of L1 transfer in the L2 acquisition of the syntax-semantics correspondences in L2 English study and L2 Japanese study. He further suggests that L1 effects persist when an L2 argument structure forms a subset of its counterpart in the L1.

the field of second language acquisition, there are debates on whether L2 leaners could recover from the L1 transfer, especially L1-induced overgeneralization errors. White (1991) argues that L2 learners would overcome overgeneralization errors relying on the indirect negative evidence. They either began to either notice the absence or relatively low frequency of unacceptable expressions. The FTFA Hypothesis predicts that the transfer stage will eventually be overcome by L2 learners and they usually resort to UG to restructure their interlanguage grammar (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). The Fundamental Difference Hypothesis, on the contrary, claims that L2 learners could only resort to their L1 in L2 acquisition, and the novel and subtle knowledge on the syntax-semantics interface is not possible (Bley-Vroman, 1990). Thus, overgeneralization errors are difficult to overcome in the end-state grammar.

The present study

The present study aims to investigate the role of L1 transfer and the possibility to recover from L1 transfer. Specifically, this paper investigates if Mandarin EFL leaners would overgeneralize monadic verbs of COS as well as verbs of MOM in the *there*-insertion construction and if it is possible for Mandarin EFL learners to recover from the L1 influence. Verbs of COS and verbs of EAA belong to the category of UAs, while verbs of MOM belong to the category of UEs. It is assumed that Mandarin EFL learners would have greater difficulties to unlearn the errors on COS verbs compared to MOM verbs. Therefore, the study poses the following two research questions.

Q1.Do Mandarin EFL learners incorrectly accept monadic verbs of COS and MOM in the *there*-insertion construction?
Q2.Is it more difficult for Mandarin EFL learners to unlearn the overgeneralization errors on verbs of MOM than verbs of COS in the *there*-insertion construction?

According to the FTFA hypothesis, L2 learners are constrained by their mother tongue in L2 acquisition (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996). The following two hypotheses were therefore formulated with respect to the two research questions.

Hypothesis Ⅰ: If Mandarin EFL learners of English are constrained by their L1 Mandarin, they would be expected to incorrectly accept monadic verbs of COS and MOM in the *there*-insertion construction. Though verbs of COS and MOM are not permissible in the there-insertion construction, they are allowed in Mandarin VS order.

Hypothesis Ⅱ: If Mandarin EFL learners are sensitive to the lexical properties that distinguish UAs from UEs, they would be expected to have greater difficulties with verbs of COS compared to verbs of MOM. UAs, especially verbs of EAA, are compatible with the *there*-insertion construction. Verbs of MOM are UEs, which are not allowed in the construction.

Mandarin EFL learners would be sensitive to the UA-UE distinction first, because the fundamental features of UAs and UEs are different.

Method

Participants

Seventy Mandarin EFL learners as well as 30 native English speakers (henceforth NS) participated in this study. All L2 participants are university students who had started to learn English as a foreign language in a Chinese environment. None of them have been to English-speaking countries before. Following Chung (2014), L2 subjects were classified into different levels of proficiency by having them take a proficiency test (Quick placement test [QPT], 2001). The QPT test has a maximum score of 60. Their proficiency levels were then compared with the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) levels and divided accordingly. This resulted in two groups, an upper intermediate level learner group (henceforth Group 1) and an advanced level learner group (henceforth Group 2). The number of L2 participants and their respective levels are listed in Table 1. An independent t-test suggests the QPT scores between the two groups of learners are significantly different (t (66) = 15.51, p <.001).

Table 1. *Number of subjects by proficiency level*

QPT scores	QPT level (ALTE level)	L2 Participants (N)
40–47 (M=42.86, SD=1. 97)	Group 1 (Upper intermediate)	35
48–54 (M=50.06, SD=1.86)	Group 2 (Advanced)	35
Total		70

Materials and Procedure

An acceptability judgment test was designed to probe into the L2 acquisition of the *there*-insertion construction. As discussed in section 2, not all UAs are compatible with the construction, and mainly only verbs of EAA are allowed. Four UAs of EAA (*appear*, *arise*, *exist*, *remain*), 4 monadic verbs of COS (*die*, *escape*, *decay*, *disappear*) and 4 UEs of MOM (*swim, run, walk, jump*) were selected for testing. The verbs in the test sentences would mainly be used in the past tense, so we checked the frequency with which they were used in the present and past tense, to ensure that none were used predominantly in one tense or the other, which could potentially skew the results. Their frequencies in both the past and present tense were checked using the English Lexicon Project Web Site corpus.

As for verb frequency in the past tense, monadic COS verbs (Mean = 51.42, SD = 71.54) are slightly more frequent than agentive verbs of MOM (Mean = 40.36, SD = 36.11); verbs of EAA is the least frequent among all the verb classes (Mean = 5.73, SD = 3.97). The one-way ANOVA test revealed the overall lexical frequency of the three verb classes was not significantly different (F (2, 11) = 1.059, p = 0.386). As for verb frequency in the present tense, verbs of MOM (Mean = 167.01, SD = 145. 84) is more frequent than monadic verbs of COS (Mean = 82.11, SD = 120.59); verbs of EAA (Mean = 22.13, SD = 13.40) is also the least frequent verb class. The one-way ANOVA showed that there is no significant difference among the three verb classes in the present tense, F (2, 11) =1.767, p = 0.225).

Each verb was used as the main verb in a template taking the form of '*There* V NP PP'. This resulted in 12 items, as in (5). Only indefinite articles were used in this experiment because postverbal NPs in this construction are always indefinite. To counterbalance the grammatical and ungrammatical sentences in the test, more grammatical sentences with those verbs in the

canonical subject-verb order were also created, as in (5d). The final stimulus set contained 50 test sentences including 38 filler sentences, which will not be discussed here.

(5)
a. existence and appearance
There appeared a new trend in the country.
b. manner of motion
*There sang a little boy in the room.
c. monadic verbs of change of state
*There died an old man in the accident.
 d. Canonical subject-verb order
The old man died in the accident.

Following Laws and Yuan (2010), participants were asked to judge each sentence on a 5-point Likert scale: with -2 representing completely unacceptable and 2 completely acceptable. The procedure was the same for NS group, except that they conducted the test through Google Forms, whereas L2 participants were given the test on paper in a classroom setting where detailed instructions were given in Mandarin in advance to make sure the participants understood the requirements. It took about 15 minutes to complete the entire task. One learner from Group 1 and one from Group 2 were eliminated from the final analysis due to the incomplete answer. The results were submitted to a two-way mixed ANOVA, with group (Group 1, Group 2 and NS group) as the between-subject factor and verb type (existence and appearance, change of state, manner of motion) as the within-subject factor.

Results

General Results

The results are reported in terms of the mean acceptability judgment scores. The overall results of judgements on the three verb classes by the three groups (Group 1(N=34), Group 2 (N=34), NS Group (N=30) are graphically represented in 3.
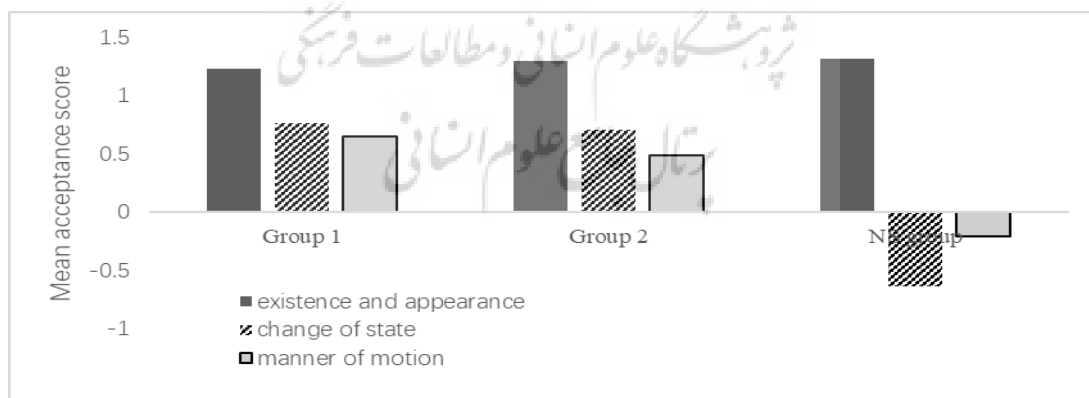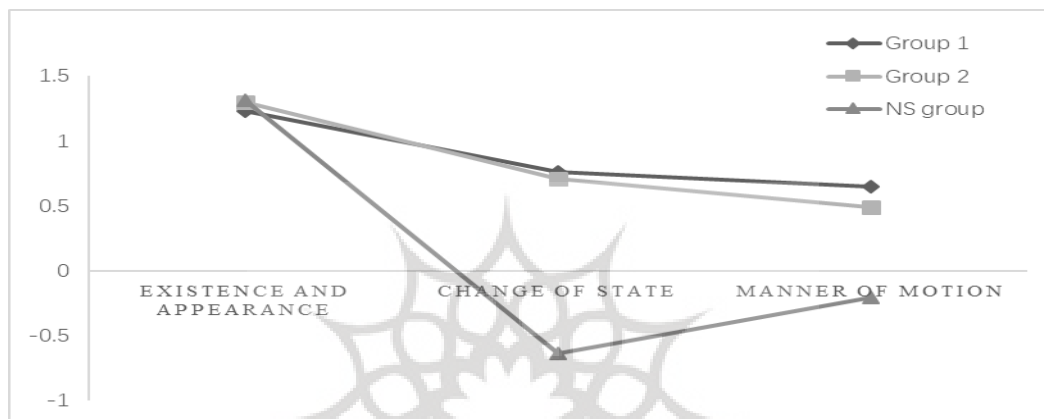

Figure 3. *The mean acceptance scores on the three verb classes by the three groups*

As shown in Figure 3, the NS group, as predicted, accepted only verbs of EAA in the *there*-insertion construction, while rejecting monadic COS and MOM verbs. The L2 participants showed a similar pattern on verbs of EAA as native speakers, but they differed from the NS group in their judgments of verbs of COS and verbs of MOM. It seems that there is some progress

between Group 1 and Group 2 in rejecting MOM verbs. Advanced learners began to realize the unacceptability of verbs of MOM. However, there is not much difference between their judgments of COS verbs.

Two-way repeated measure ANOVAs revealed a main effect for verb type (existence and appearance, change of state, manner of motion), $F(2, 190) = 75.52$, $p < 0.001$, group $(F(2, 95) = 6.68, p = 0.002)$, and an interaction effect between group and verb type, $F(4, 190) = 12.87$, $p < 0.001$. Figure 4 present the contrasts among the three verb classes of all the groups. The three groups converge on their judgments on verbs of EAA ($p = 0.879$). Group 1 and Group 2 converge on their judgments on verbs of COS ($p = 0.810$). None of the L2 groups behave in a nativelike pattern on verbs of COS. As for MOM verbs, Group 2 learners began to behave in a nearly target-like pattern ($p = 0.063$), while Group 2 learners do not ($p = 0.016$).


Figure 4. *The mean acceptance scores of the three groups*

Verbs of MOM belong to a subtype of UEs, which is unacceptable with the *there*-insertion construction. Monadic verbs of COS, though classified as UAs, are also not compatible with the construction. Figure 5 and 6 contrast the mean scores between verbs of EAA and COS as well as verbs of MOM respectively. As predicted, Mandarin EFL learners tend to overgeneralize both verbs of MOM and COS by rating them higher than native speakers did. They tend to overcome the problems in MOM verbs, but they still have problems in rejecting COS verbs.
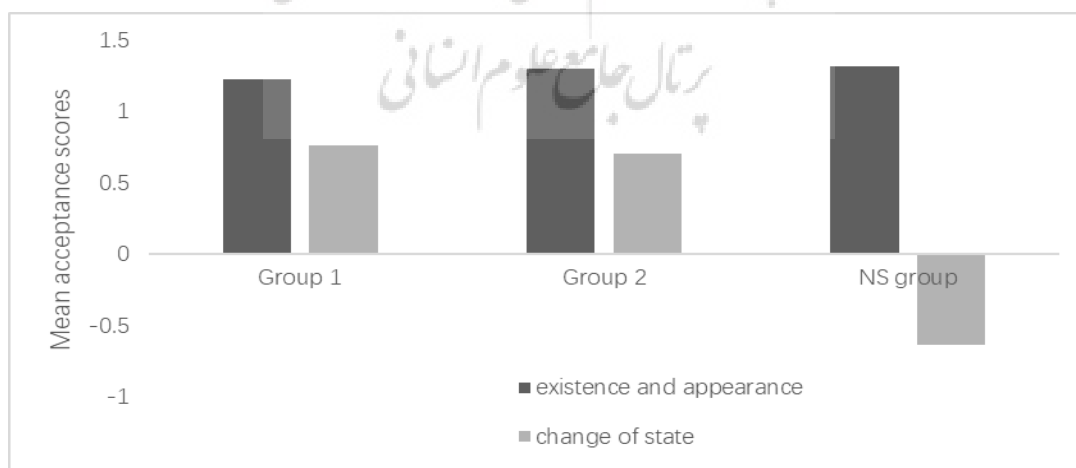
Figure 5. *The mean response rate between existence and appearance verbs and monadic change of state verbs*
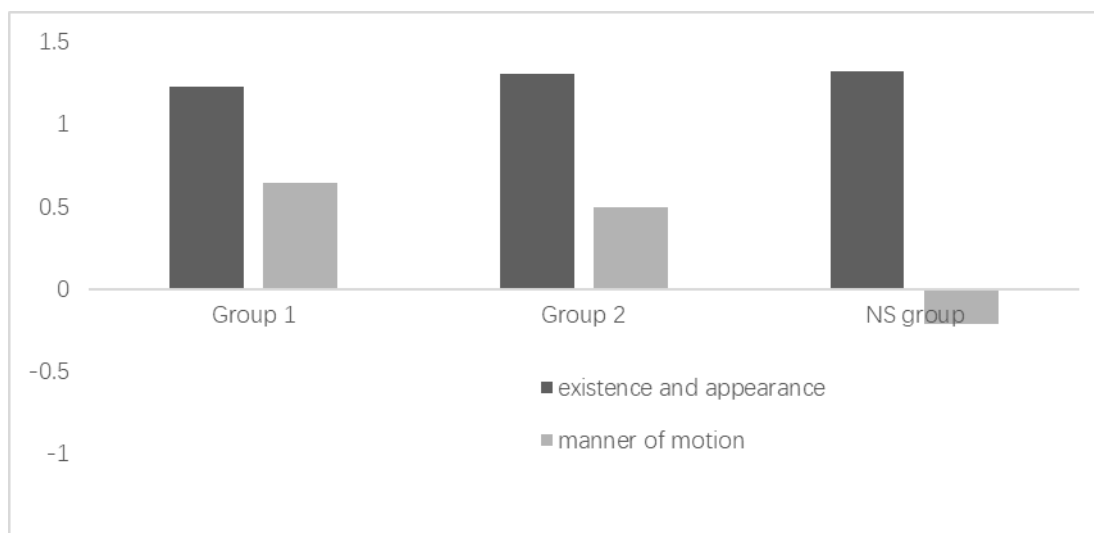
Figure 6. *The mean response rate between existence and appearance verbs and manner of motion verbs*

Individual Results by Participants

Following Montrul (2001), individual results in terms of subjects are reported in order to know if individual results conform to the group results.

Table 2. *Accuracy rate of the three groups*

Verb type	Group 1(*N*=34)		Group 2 (*N*=34)		NS(*N*=30)	
	count	%	count	%	count	%
existence and appearance (EAA)	25	74	28	82	26	87
change of state (COS)	9	26	9	26	25	83
manner of motion (MOM)	7	20	11	32	23	77

Table 2 presents individual results with the *there*-insertion construction by participants to look at how many participants consistently accepted at least three verbs out of four in existence and appearance verb classes and rejected three out of four in the rest of the verb classes (70% accuracy). Over 70% of learners at two proficiency levels accepted verbs of EAA, confirming the group results that L2 learners behave in a way similar to native speakers in this verb class. As for COS class, only 26% of participants rejected the sentences, also confirming the group results that there is no progress in this subtype. As for MOM verbs, over 30% of advanced learners rejected the sentences.

Discussion and Conclusion

The two research questions that underlie the present study are repeated here for convenience:

1.Do Mandarin EFL learners incorrectly accept monadic verbs of COS and MOM verbs in the *there*-insertion construction?
2.Is it more difficult for Mandarin EFL learners to unlearn the overgeneralization errors on verbs of COS than on verbs of MOM in the *there*-insertion construction?

The answer to the first research question is 'yes' and the first hypothesis is confirmed. Mandarin EFL learners' overall judgments of verbs of EAA in the *there*-insertion construction are already like native English speakers. The experiment, however, showed that Mandarin EFL learners at upper-intermediate level tend to make overgeneralization errors by accepting MOM verbs and monadic COS verbs in the *there*-insertion construction. Advanced level learners, on the contrary, had acquired nearly native-like knowledge of MOM verbs but still behaved in a non-target-like way in their judgment of monadic COS verbs in the *there*-insertion construction.

The experimental results are consistent with the findings of previous studies on L2 acquisition of the argument structure where L1 constitutes a superset of L2 (Inagaki, 2001; Montrul, 2001; White, 1991). Previous research suggests that L1 influence lasts persistently when the L2 argument structure forms a subset of its L1 counterpart. Inagaki (2001) investigates English L2 learner's acquisition of Japanese verbs of MOM with a goal prepositional phrase (e.g. *I ran to the park*). In Japanese, verbs of MOM are ungrammatical with a prepositional phrase indicating direction, while they are acceptable in English. In this situation, verbs of MOM in L1 English have a wider argument structure compatible with a goal prepositional phrase than in L2 Japanese. Because of the lack of negative evidence to show the ungrammaticality of verbs of MOM with a goal prepositional phrase in L2 Japanese input, English learners at an advanced level tend to incorrectly accept MOM verbs with a goal phrase. Inagaki (2001) suggests that advanced English L2 learners of Japanese still had problems in recognizing the ungrammaticality of verbs of MOM with a goal phrase, and the reason is due to persistent L1 transfer.

Returning to the data of the present study, Mandarin EFL learners have no problems with verbs of EAA in the *there*-insertion construction, despite the fact that the *there*-insertion construction has a very low frequency in English textbooks. L1 Mandarin allows COS verbs such as *die* and MOM verbs such as *run* in the VS order, which poses great learnability problems for Mandarin EFL learners to unlearn L1-induced overgeneralization errors. In this study, Mandarin EFL learners, especially at intermediate level, after years of exposure, have not learned that MOM verbs and COS verbs in the *there*-insertion construction are unacceptable in English, owing to the fact that there is no positive evidence that would inform them the unacceptability of these forms. Advanced learners, in contrast, have recognized that verbs of MOM are not acceptable with the sentences, but they still had difficulties realizing that COS verb with the *there*-insertion construction are unacceptable in English, implying that L2 learners get stuck in the L1 representation and fail to acquire the knowledge. These results also indicate that L1 transfer tend to persist in a situation where an argument structure in the L1 constitutes a superset of its counterpart in the L2.

The experimental results also provide an affirmative answer to the second research question, and the second hypothesis is also confirmed. Even though the group results show that all the three groups only behave similarly in verbs of EAA, individual results by subjects indicate that 20 % of intermediate learners and 30% of advanced learners had recognized the unacceptability of MOM verbs with the *there*-insertion construction. 26% of participants of two proficiency levels rejected COS verbs with the construction. As predicted by the FTFA Hypothesis, when the L2 input cannot accommodate L1 representation, L2 learners would draw on UG to overcome the transfer stage (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996). Despite the fact a great number of participants in the study are still fully constrained by their L1 Mandarin, whereas a small number of participants had begun to move forward in a native-like pattern and displayed evidence of unlearning ungrammatical forms.

What is interesting in the study is that L2 learners start to overcome L1 transfer effect on verbs of MOM rather than on verbs of COS. Although L2 learners tend to accept MOM verbs and

COS verbs, these two verb classes have different syntactic properties. Verbs of MOM are UEs, the argument of which is base-generated externally like the subject of a transitive verb, while monadic COS verbs as well as verbs of EAA are UAs, the argument of which is base-generated internally like the direct object of a transitive verb. Some MOM verbs like *run* and *swim* are possible with the VS order, so Mandarin EFL learners inclined to accept the incorrect forms of them with the *there*-insertion construction. By relying on the semantic properties of verbs, as proposed by Montrul (2001), Mandarin EFL learners come to know that different syntactic representations between MOM verbs and EAA verbs. The UA-UE distinction is assumed to be universal, but different languages encode the distinction in different syntactic manifestations. In Mandarin, monadic verbs of COS are completely acceptable with the VS order, which is the syntactic manifestation of the UA-UE distinction in Mandarin. In English, however, only verbs of EAA are possible with the *there*-insertion construction. Thus, L2 learners are faced with a more difficult learning task. They have to distinguish different verb classes of UAs by relying on the indirect negative evidence and by noticing the absence of the unacceptable forms. As suggested by Sorace and Shomura (2001), L2 learners are sensitive to the UA-UE distinction, but they have problems in learning how precisely the distinction is manifested syntactically.

To sum up, the empirical findings of the present study are fully compatible with the FTFA Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996). Mandarin EFL learners initially transfer their L1 syntactic properties of verbs to their L2 and therefore made overgeneralization errors to accept ungrammatical sentences with MOM verbs and monadic COS verbs. By resorting to the semantic properties of verbs that underlie the UA-UE distinction, they are also able to recover from L1 transfer. Some EFL learners, especially at advanced level, began to develop in a target-like manner in judging sentences with verbs of MOM. However, monadic verbs of COS pose a greater difficulty for Mandarin EFL leaners than verbs of MOM. Though individual results show that some learners could recover from L1 transfer, the group result of advanced learners, compared to that of intermediate-level learners, did not make much progress in their judgments of sentences with monadic verbs of COS. More research, therefore, should be conducted with more advanced or near-native EFL learners to see if the unacceptability of the *there*-insertion construction with monadic COS verbs can be fully acquired or not.

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