

# The Analysis of Chinese Intermediate Students' Error in Using Relative Clauses

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**Abstract:** This research is designed to figure out the error of Chinese intermediate students' in using relative clauses and its reason. The relative pronouns are limited to which, who, whom and whose and the relative adverbs are limited to when, where and why. The theory of analysing the data is error analysis and the research used qualitative method to describe the data. The ways to collect the data are observation and interview. The former one is designed to give a report of students' choice of relative pronouns and relative adverbs. The latter one aims at gathering the reasons for the students' error in using relative pronouns and relative adverbs. There are 10 participants from Grade XI, Class 1 and 10 participants from Grade XI, Class 2 in a public high school in Changji, the Xinjing Uygur Autonomous Region. The participants have been introduced the relative clause and the relative pronouns and relative adverbs. The result shows that the students made 12, 13, 13, 14 errors in relative pronoun "which, who, whom and whose" and made 8, 10, 11 errors in relative adverbs "when, where, why". There are two possible types of the errors, the Interlingua errors and the Intralingua errors. The Interlingua errors are affected by native language in writing and speaking and the intralingua errors are due to their misunderstanding of the language they learned.

**Keywords:** Error Analysis; Qualitative, Relative Clauses; Interlingua Errors; Intralingua Errors

## 1. Introduction

Relative clause is a difficult point of Chinese learners who regard English as foreign language. Students in Grade XI often make errors during the use of relative clause, especially the choice of the relative pronouns and relative adverbs. From the view of Kusdianty, "relative clause modifying noun describes and gives more information about the noun" [1]. He thought that there were two types of relative clause, the relative pronoun and the relative adverbs. Form the perspective of Radden and Driven (2007), the relative pronoun plays a role of connecting the noun and the modifier within the structure of complex sentence [3]. In the study, there are four relative pronouns, which, who, whom and whose and three relative adverbs, when, where and why. Which is used to modify people and thing, and which can be subject, object and refer to a complete sentence [2]. The antecedent of which can be a person and something. Who and whom both can be used for people, and who often works as subject, object of a verb and object of proposition in a relative clause and whom works as object in a relative clause. What's more, whose has a possessive meaning and can relate to a person and also other things. On the other hand, the relative adverbs why is used to explain the reason, where is used to modified a place and when is used for a time. The relation between antecedents and relative clause can be analyzed by the sentence meaning the structure of the relative clause. That is to say, when it comes to the relative adverbs, the relative clause is a complete sentence so the relative adverbs do not play a role of component.

There are lots of researches about the relative clause. For example, the experimental study of Alexandra I. Prentza (2012) examined the formation of restrictive relative clause in Greek and English and investigated its acquisition by advanced Greek learner [4]. The article of Andrea Santi, Nino Grillo, Emilia Molimpakis and Michael Wagner (2019) compared the processing and similarity of relative clauses from the aspects of production and comprehension in terms of memory demands in the case of the filter-gap dependency [6]. In Borgonovo's study showed the acquisition of mood in Spanish relative clause, by English native speakers, which paid attention to the acquisition of the morph syntax-semantics interface [7]. In (2011) Naama, Dorit and Rama's article, they designed an experiment to explore 3 to 5 years old children's acquisition of relative clauses [8]. And the finding was that their acquisition had limited relation to their ages.

During the process of learning relative clause by Chinese intermediate level students, they must

encounter lots of difficulties and make many errors. Therefore, in order to improve learners' learning efficiency and boost their learning spirit, the method of error analysis to remedy their errors is significantly important for both learners and teachers. In Corder's view, "errors are not just to be seen as something to be eradicated, but rather can be important in and of themselves" [11]. In some sense, second language errors are to be viewed as indications a learners' attempt to figure out some system, to impose regularity on the language the learner is exposed to. From the perspective of linguistics supporting error analysis, the causes of error are not only the pedagogical implications, but also the theoretical implications for fields such as psychology and linguistics<sup>[9][10]</sup>. In comparison, there are two main types of errors within an error analysis framework: interlingual and intralingual. The interlingual errors are affected by native language in writing and speaking and the intralingual errors are due to the misunderstanding of the language they learned<sup>[5]</sup>. According to Corder (1982), the errors are classified as errors of omission, errors of addition, errors of selection and errors of ordering<sup>[11]</sup>. Moreover, from the perspective of Brown (2000), there are four causes of errors, the interlingual transfer, the intralingual transfer, the context of learning and the communication strategies<sup>[12]</sup>. The interlingual transfer shows that there are difficulties in learning English as foreign language, which results from the influence of their native language. The reason for the intralingual transfer is that the learners misunderstand the grammar rules and all the learners whose native language is various will make those kind of errors. The reason why the context of learning is one of the causes is that the learners may meet an unfamiliar topics and they has nothing to do with the topic. The influence of communication strategies is that the teachers or communicators may not express the idea clearly and completely.

## 2. Methodology

With the method of observation and interview, the researcher collects the data from 20 participants attending Grade XI in the same public high school. The observation is used to give seven fill-in blank question about the relative pronouns, which, who, whom, whose and relative adverbs when, where and why. There will be a table to show their answers of each question. And the data is analyzed by the descriptive qualitative method. By the mean of interview, the researcher aims at figuring out the causes of errors in using relative pronouns and relative adverbs. During the interview, the researcher is supposed to ask the 5 participants who got the lower marks compared with other participants. There are three questions designed for the interviewees.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Participants' errors in using relative pronouns and relative adverbs.

*Table 1. Participants' answers of relative pronouns and relative adverbs*

No.	Name	Answers of Errors Types in Relative Pronouns and Relative Adverbs							Total
		1 which	2 who	3 whom	4 whose	5 when	6 where	7 why	
1	P1	who	who	who	whose	whose	where	why	3
2	P2	whom	whom	whom	who	when	why	when	5
3	P3	whose	whose	who	whom	when	which	why	5
4	P4	which	who	whom	whom	why	where	when	3
5	P5	whose	why	whom	whose	when	which	whom	4
6	P6	which	whose	whose	which	when	whom	why	4
7	P7	why	who	when	why	whom	when	whose	6
8	P8	which	why	whom	which	when	where	whose	3
9	P9	which	whom	who	whose	when	why	where	4
10	P10	when	who	why	which	when	where	whom	4
11	P11	which	whom	who	whose	which	where	why	3
12	P12	whom	where	whom	who	when	why	whose	5
13	P13	which	whom	whose	whom	when	where	why	3
14	P14	who	when	whom	whose	which	whose	why	4
15	P15	whose	who	why	whom	when	where	which	4
16	P16	where	whom	where	which	when	why	who	5
17	P17	whose	which	who	why	when	where	why	4
18	P18	which	who	whose	whose	why	whom	where	4
19	P19	whom	whom	whom	when	why	where	why	4
20	P20	which	who	who	why	whom	where	when	4
Total		12	13	13	14	8	10	11	

(1) I regard the brain as a computer will stop working when its components fail.

The proper choice of relative pronoun is which, because, in this sentence, the antecedent is computer and it is something. There are twelve participants making error in choosing the relative pronoun which, and five participants chose whose. The relative pronoun whose is used when it comes to the possessive meaning in the relative clause. Two participants used who and whom and three participants used relative adverbs. The results suggests that some participants misunderstand the use of relative pronoun which.

P1: I regard the brain as a computer who will stop working when its components fail.

P2: I regard the brain as a computer whom will stop working when its components fail.

P3: I regard the brain as a computer whose will stop working when its components fail.

P7: I regard the brain as a computer why will stop working when its components fail.

P10: I regard the brain as a computer when will stop working when its components fail.

P16: I regard the brain as a computer where will stop working when its components fail.

The right answer: I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail.

In conclusion, twelve participants made six different errors of the relative pronoun choice.

(2) The essential workers are the ones are putting their health at risk so the rest of us can seek refuge from contagion.

The proper choice of relative pronoun is who, the reason why that is the antecedent of this sentence is the ones referring to the essential worker and they are people. The second reason is that in this sentence, who plays a role of subject. There are thirteen participants making error in choosing relative pronoun who, and five participants chose whom. It is known that whom works as object instead of subject in a relative clause. Three participants used relative adverbs. And one participant used which. The result shows that the participants face some problems in the use of who in the specific sentence.

P2: The essential workers are the ones whom are putting their health at risk so the rest of us can seek refuge from contagion.

P3: The essential workers are the ones whose are putting their health at risk so the rest of us can seek refuge from contagion.

P5: The essential workers are the ones why are putting their health at risk so the rest of us can seek refuge from contagion.

P8: The essential workers are the ones when are putting their health at risk so the rest of us can seek refuge from contagion.

P14: The essential workers are the ones which are putting their health at risk so the rest of us can seek refuge from contagion.

The right answer: The essential workers are the ones who are putting their health at risk so the rest of us can seek refuge from contagion.

In conclusion, thirteen participants made five various errors of the relative pronoun choice.

(3) We filed a complaint against the contractor we hired last month.

The proper choice of relative pronoun is whom. Because the antecedents in the relative clause is contractor, a person. And the relative pronoun works as an object of the verb hired. There are thirteen participants making error in choosing relative pronoun whom, and six participants chose who. Four participants used relative adverbs, and those four participants may have a wrong understanding of relative adverbs.

P1: We filed a complaint against the contractor who we hired last month.

P6: We filed a complaint against the contractor whose we hired last month.

P7: We filed a complaint against the contractor when we hired last month.

P10: We filed a complaint against the contractor where we hired last month.

P16: We filed a complaint against the contractor why we hired last month.

The Right Answer: We filed a complaint against the contractor whom we hired last month.

In conclusion, thirteen participants made five different errors of the choice of relative pronoun whom.

(4) Stephen Hawking was a great scientist and an extraordinary man work and legacy will live for many years.

The proper choice of relative pronoun is whose. Because there is a possessive relation between the antecedent, man, and the following noun work and legacy. The possessive meaning between these two components is the key point to make the right choice. There are fourteen participants making error in choosing relative pronoun whose, and four of them chose whom and which. Two participants used who and another four participants chose relative adverbs. The result suggested that the students had a bad understanding of the possessive meaning in the relative clause thus both the teachers and learners should pay more attention to the grammar rule and practice in the choice of whose.

P1: Stephen Hawking was a great scientist and an extraordinary man who work and legacy will live for many years.

P2: Stephen Hawking was a great scientist and an extraordinary man whom work and legacy will live for many years.

P6: Stephen Hawking was a great scientist and an extraordinary man which work and legacy will live for many years.

P7: Stephen Hawking was a great scientist and an extraordinary man why work and legacy will live for many years.

P19: Stephen Hawking was a great scientist and an extraordinary man when work and legacy will live for many years.

The Right Answer: Stephen Hawking was a great scientist and an extraordinary man whose work and legacy will live for many years.

In conclusion, fourteen participants made five various errors in the choice of whose.

(5) He became notorious for his wild driving along the streets of Cambridge, not to mention the intentional running over students' toes and the occasional spin on the dance floor at college parties, he finally relented.

The proper choice of the relative adverb is when. Because the main sentence and the relative clause without the relative adverb is complete. Therefore, in this relative clause, the relative adverbs are supposed to use. When it comes the meaning between the two sentences, when the best choice. There are eight participants making wrong choice of when in this sentence. Three participants used why, which shows that they know the structure of the relative clause is complete but they do not understand the meaning between the main clause and the relative clause. Two participants chose whom and which. Those four participants did not concentrate on analyzing the structure and the meaning of the sentence. One participant used whose, which is totally wrong.

P1: He became notorious for his wild driving along the streets of Cambridge, not to mention the intentional running over students' toes and the occasional spin on the dance floor at college parties, whose he finally relented.

P4: He became notorious for his wild driving along the streets of Cambridge, not to mention the intentional running over students' toes and the occasional spin on the dance floor at college parties, why he finally relented.

P7: He became notorious for his wild driving along the streets of Cambridge, not to mention the intentional running over students' toes and the occasional spin on the dance floor at college parties, whom he finally relented.

P11: He became notorious for his wild driving along the streets of Cambridge, not to mention the intentional running over students' toes and the occasional spin on the dance floor at college parties, which he finally relented.

The Right Answer: He became notorious for his wild driving along the streets of Cambridge, not to mention the intentional running over students' toes and the occasional spin on the dance floor at college parties, when he finally relented.

In conclusion, eight participants made four errors in the use of when.

(6) Her basin is a stream, she washed the dirt from vegetables.

The proper choice of the relative adverb is where. Because the main sentence and the relative clause without the relative adverb is complete. Therefore, in this relative clause, the relative adverbs are supposed to use. The antecedent in the relative clause is stream, a place. From the following sentence, she washed the dirt from the vegetable in the stream. Therefore, where is the best choice? There are four participants using why and two participants chose which and whom. Meanwhile, one participant used when and whose.

P2: Her basin is a stream, why she washed the dirt from vegetables.

P3: Her basin is a stream, which she washed the dirt from vegetables.

P6: Her basin is a stream, whom she washed the dirt from vegetables.

P7: Her basin is a stream, when she washed the dirt from vegetables.

P9: Her basin is a stream, why she washed the dirt from vegetables.

P14: Her basin is a stream, whose she washed the dirt from vegetables.

The Right Answer: Her basin is a stream, where she washed the dirt from vegetables.

In conclusion, ten participants made five different errors in the choice of where.

(7) It is a complete understanding of universe, it is as it is and why it exists at all.

The proper choice of the relative adverb is why. Because the main sentence and the relative clause without the relative adverb is complete. Therefore, in this relative clause, the relative adverbs are supposed to use. By analyzing the relation between these two sentences and the meaning of the relative clause, why is the best choice. There are three participants choosing when and whose, and two participants used whom and where. And one participant used which.

P2: It is a complete understanding of universe, when it is as it is and why it exists at all.

P5: It is a complete understanding of universe, whom it is as it is and why it exists at all.

P7: It is a complete understanding of universe, whose it is as it is and why it exists at all.

P9: It is a complete understanding of universe, where it is as it is and why it exists at all.

P16: It is a complete understanding of universe, which it is as it is and why it exists at all.

The Right Answer: It is a complete understanding of universe, why it is as it is and why it exists at all.

In conclusion, eleven participants made five various errors in the use of why.

#### 4. Reasons for the Participants' Error

There are three open questions designed for the interviewees to answer and the researcher is supposed to analyze the reasons for the errors the participants made in the use of relative pronouns and relative adverbs.

Q1: Does the Mandarin affect the use of relative pronouns and relative adverbs? How does it have influence on it?

Q2: Do you think these fill-in blank questions is difficult or not? Do you understand the meaning of the each sentence?

Q3: During the process of using the above relative pronouns and relative adverbs, which one is the most difficult one and why?

By analyzing the participants' answer, it is obvious that Mandarin does have influence on the use of relative pronouns and relative adverbs. In Chinese, there is no identical relative pronouns and relative adverbs thus it is something new and challenging for them. Most students though that these seven questions are beyond their knowledge and they did not capture the exact meaning of the sentence, which caused their errors on the choice of relative pronouns and relative adverbs. From participants' point of view, whose is the most difficult one? Because it's tough for them to completely understand

the possessive meaning between the antecedent and the relative clause and sometime there are some hints misguide them to make the wrong choice.

From the above analysis, the interlingual transfer which refers to the contribution made by the native language can cause the error and the lintralingual transfer which refers to the incomplete or wrong understanding of the grammar rule has influence on the error as well. What's more, the context of learning material also affects participants' learning efficiency.

## 5. Conclusion and Limitation

The participants from the public high school in Grade XI made 12, 13, 13, 14 errors in relative pronoun "which, who, whom and whose" and made 8, 10, 11 errors in relative adverbs "when, where, why". The relative pronoun whose is the most difficult one for them. There are three reasons for the errors, the Interlingua transfer, the Interlingua transfer and the context of learning. Therefore, for the teachers, they can try the best to decrease the influence of the native language, select the proper material to use and illustrate the grammar rule more specific in the teaching process; for the students, it is significant that more attentions should be paid to whose.

Even though there are some practical significance for both the teachers and learners, the limitation of the study is obvious. The relative pronouns are limited to who, whom, whose and which. If there are more relative pronouns, the participants' performance might be different. The second limitation is that there is only one question for each relative pronoun and relative adverb, and some participants may speculate the answer from the limited choice and the result may be inaccurate. Therefore, in the further study, more relative pronouns and questions will be added to make the research more reliable.

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