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USE OF TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND PHRASES IN CHINESE AND ENGLISH NEWS WRITING

J. THOMAS MCALISTER
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

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J. Thomas McAlister

Abstract

Since Kaplan (1966), techniques for contrastive rhetoric have been used to examine the differences in the ways that various language cultures express ideas in discourse. A number of these studies have focused on apparent differences in Chinese and English structures, particularly in student writing and academic research articles. This study examines a particular function in language—transitions. With a focus on online news articles, this study compares and contrasts the way transition words and phrases are used in news writing. From a random selection of articles in both Chinese and English, the specific and general transition types are calculated in order to discover trends in the respective languages. The results suggest that differences do exist between the two language cultures with a focus on information in Chinese and a focus on perspective in English.

Writing instructors within the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) have long struggled to assist their students in learning not only the grammatical nuances of the English language, but also the organizational style that is preferred within the Academic English community. Albeit, native and non-native speakers alike do need to be taught this organizational pattern. Nonetheless, this issue is compounded in the fact that many older English language learners (ELLs) may have already been taught a particular writing style that is favored within their own academic/speech communities.

Differences in rhetorical style seem evident as ELLs begin to organize ideas into larger compositions in order to complete writings for the purpose of argumentation and persuasion. Since Robert Kaplan's 1966 article "Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education", the field of contrastive rhetoric has grown. In this seminal work, Kaplan argued that certain cultures argued in particular styles (see Diagram 1). These styles were categorized geographically and culturally. According to Kaplan, Semitic cultures, such as Arabic, used parallel structures to argue a point; whereas cultures stemming from the Romance languages or Russian were prone to digression.

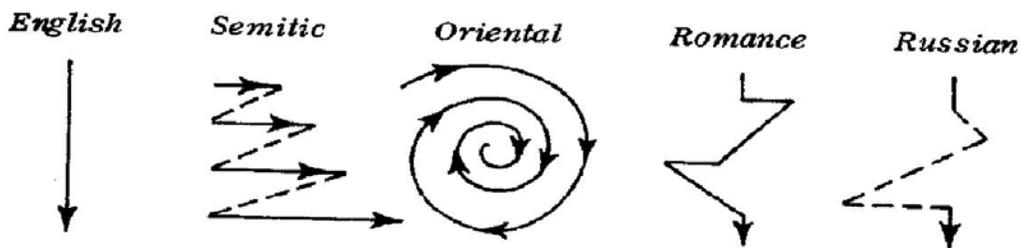


Diagram 1. taken from Kaplan, 1966 (p. 21)

In the case of “Oriental” languages, Kaplan claimed that the rhetoric talks around the point, rather than directly addressing it (1966, p. 17). In this generalization, Kaplan states that such writing “would strike the English reader as awkward and unnecessarily indirect” (1966, p. 17). Kaplan mentions in his notes that he “means specifically Chinese and Korean but not Japanese” (1966, p. 25).

In the decades following, Kaplan’s article has been supported and denounced by a number of authors (Neubauer & Riddle, 1986; Mohan & Lo, 1985 is discussed below), and the article has been cited in 1692 different articles and books according to Google. Yet, the attention to differing practices of rhetoric has sparked a new way to examine cultural trends in writing style. The purpose of contrastive rhetoric is to identify and understand differences in how specific cultures approach the process of argumentation and persuasion.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the differences in how transitional words and phrases are applied in Chinese and English. First, further investigation into the literature of Chinese-English contrastive rhetoric studies will be conducted as well as recent methods for applying contrastive rhetoric. Then the methodology applied to this particular study will be explained. A discussion of results will follow. Finally, the conclusion will examine limitations and implications of what has been discovered.

Chinese Rhetoric

In Bernard A. Mohan and Winnie Au-Yeung Lo’s 1985 article, “Academic Writing and Chinese Students: Transfer and Developmental Factors”, the authors challenge Kaplan’s findings that the rhetorical styles uncovered in the research were representative of the cultural styles of

writing. Mohan & Lo claimed that Kaplan analysis failed to consider the fact that the writers being analyzed were students:

While English-speaking students may be competent speakers of the language, they are not necessarily competent writers. Lack of competence at the discourse level of writing is widespread. Drawing on national assessments of writing, Brown (1981) suggests that only 50 to 55 percent of 17-year-olds in the United States write competently and that writing problems at this age are largely at the discourse level rather than at the sentence level. (1985, p. 522)

Furthermore, Mohan & Lo (1985) claim that Kaplan had failed to provide error analysis for the students in question, seeing as they were ELLs. Although, the authors go on to state that “Even if we were given a quantified error analysis of Chinese students' writing which showed a lack of linear development, this would not prove that negative transfer is operating” (p. 521).

Mohan & Lo assert that careful investigation into Chinese literature and education reveal that the indirect style proposed by Kaplan is not supported. Examples from the writings of Confucius and Mencius were provided (p. 519). Furthermore, the author's cite Chinese researchers who condemn the indirect style as well as Beijing University's comments promoting writing “in a concise manner” (p. 520).

The their conclusion, Mohan and Lo claim that the real issue at hand rest not in cultural transfer but rather in pedagogical practices in language instruction:

...if there are differences in the ability of Chinese and Western students to organize essays in English, the source of these differences does not lie in a preference for "indirectness" in the language and culture of Chinese. Rather, it lies

in the emphasis of the English language instruction programs to which students are exposed. (p. 528)

The authors stress the need to consider developmental factors when noticing differences in student writing as opposed to transfer.

In response to Mohan & Lo's article, Joan Gregg argued the "that authors too readily dismiss traditional conventions of writing in Chinese as a significant source of interference" (1986, p. 354). In her argument, she claims Chinese students had learned well the Chinese formula for argument instruction which that culture prefers due to its concern for the society as a whole rather than from an individualistic perspective (p. 356). In response to Gregg's claims, Mohan challenges Gregg to produce evidence to support her viewpoint (1986). He reasserts his own evidence and stresses the distinction between ELL student writing and professional writing written for a native speaker audience. An examination of student writing is not an accurate source of evidence for cultural rhetorical practices. Thus, those wishing to examine cross-linguistic differences in rhetoric need to examine writings from within the culture as opposed to those who may be struggling to emulate a different cultural style.

That same year, Thomas Ricento also responded to the article by Mohan & Lo. In his response, Ricento claimed that "it is risky to infer L1 rhetorical patterns from ESL student compositions. But it is equally unsound to claim that a hypothesis (i.e., the purported indirectness of Mandarin prose [see Kaplan, 1966]) has been disproved when the claim is made on the basis of a small corpus of short texts" (p. 565). Ricento provides a counter-example of Confucian writing and also challenges the definition of expository writing itself (p. 566). He further asserts that contrastive rhetoric research has found evidence in cross-linguistic rhetorical styles and that

the field had grown greatly since Kaplan's work. In defense, Mohan writes that Ricento "overlooks the importance of testable research hypotheses and obscures the original position of our article" (1986, p. 569). Mohan asserted that it was their original work that provided a counter-example to Kaplan's claims. Therefore, the 1966 assertion was revealed to be lacking evidence in the first place rather than being "disproven" (p. 570). Mohan further states that the ethnocentric views asserted by contrastive rhetoric are problematic (p. 571).

In the decades since Mohan's debate, developments in the field of contrastive rhetoric have demonstrated differences between English and Chinese writing. Carolyn Matalene writes, "Many of us from the West who have lived and taught in China realized-viscerally-that our encounters were being governed by cultural, linguistic, and, yes, rhetorical norms so different from our own that we were driven to search for whatever explanations we could find" (1997, p. 163). She reassures those who argue that these differences are negative that the purpose of contrastive rhetoric is not to disparage differences in practice, but rather to acknowledge these practices as being culturally valued.

Matalene's writing was in response to Liu Yameng's claims that directness was a rhetorical strategy that has been promoted in Chinese writing styles (1996). Similar arguments have been posited by Mohan & Lo (1985) as well as a more recent article by Kirkpatrick (2005), who focused on the influence of Chen Kui in the history of Chinese rhetoric. In Ulla Connor's book, *Contrastive Analysis: cross-cultural aspects of second language writing*, she summarizes that historical factors related to the differences noted in the Chinese writing style by Matalene and others were less important than "cultural orientations toward self, other, society, and social interaction" (1996, p. 41).

Recent articles have pointed out these differences more clearly. Loi & Evans (2010) found that the introductions to Chinese articles in educational psychology were less likely to take a critical stance, employ explicitness, or specify the value of the research. However, the authors were hesitant to claim that these observations should be not “be attributed solely to cultural coventions” (p. 2820). On the other hand, Taft, Kacanas, Huen, & Chan (2011) claim that first language influences one’s preferences in rhetorical style. Taft *et al.* compared native speakers of Chinese, Spanish, and English. The authors concluded that these preferences are possibly subconscious, and need to be better understood (p. 514).

Methodology

In order to examine differences in the use of transitions in Chinese and English, this study will examine online news articles in the two languages. Thirty articles were gathered from three news websites that provide news to readers of both languages. Five English and five Chinese articles were randomly selected from each of the three news sources. The news sources are China Daily, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and the Microsoft Network (MSN).

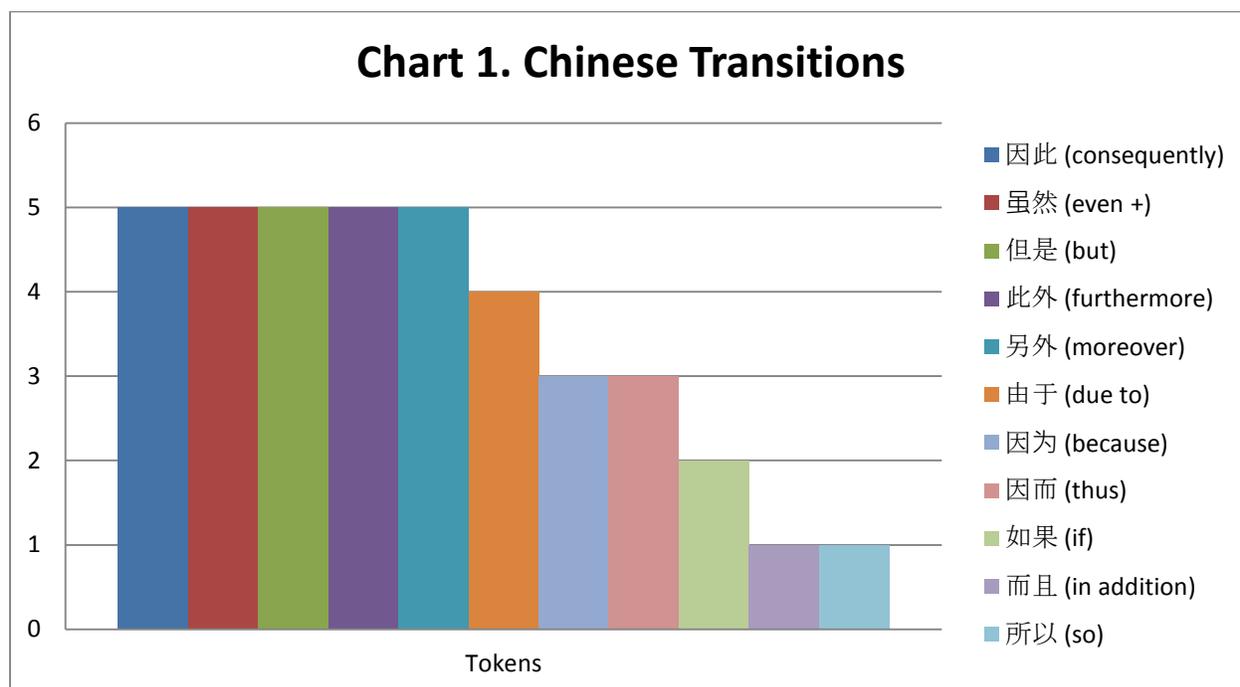
New articles were the chosen medium. Because news articles by nature describe chronology of events and sometimes propose cause and effect natures, the opportunity to gather transitional words and phrases seemed greater. Moreover, most previous research has examined student writing or peer reviewed research. No articles focusing on the medium of news was discovered. This opportunity lends itself to seeing how genre may affect differences in how information is presented. Originally it was proposed to examine the same story in both languages; however, each website it made specifically for each target audience. Therefore, the headlines and

the stories are not necessarily the same. During the initial research, only one story on the same topic was discovered on the BBC website, but not on the others. In the end, the topics were not relevant and a random selection of convenience was made.

To compare, a list of thirty-two Chinese transitional words and phrases were looked for in the articles selected. The same concepts (translations of the Chinese words) were searched for in the English language articles. The results were then compared and contrasted to see if what apparent differences were found.

Results & Discussion

Of the thirty-two Chinese transitions examined, only eleven were evident in the articles (see Chart 1). When examining the articles for English transitions, eleven were evident (see Chart 2). However, only six of these words were similar in meaning (see Chart 3).



When looking at the Chinese transitions, it is noticeable that none of these words seem more common or dominate in the context. Four of the eleven transitions appear five times within the fifteen Chinese articles. Five of the transition word and phrases focus on cause-and-effect relationships:

因此 (yīncǐ) – consequently

由于 (yóuyú) – due to

因为 (yīnwèi) – because

因而 (yīnér) – thus

所以 (suǒyǐ) – therefore

In addition, three other transitions focus on the inclusion of more detail:

此外 (cǐwài) – furthermore

另外 (lìngwài) – moreover

而且 (érqiě) – in addition

Of particular note is the transition 虽然 (suīrán) which can be translated as *even (+ noun)*, *even though*, and *even if*. In the Chinese, 虽然, is always followed by a clause (see example 1). In some instances the clause will be translated as a whole, but in other instances the clause can be cut down to its most meaningful noun (see example 2). Also note that example 2 uses a different word. This may likely be the cause for Chinese ELL's struggle in properly using even that is often anecdotally noted by ESL instructors.

(1) 虽然 苏丹 是 最 早 承认 南苏丹 的 国家…

Sui-ran su-dan shi zui zao cheng-ren nan-su-dan de guojia…

Even* Sudan *copula* most early acknowledge Southern Sudan AT country…

Even though Sudan was the first to acknowledge Southern Sudan as a country…

[China Daily, 2012]

(2) 即使 我 有 二十 块, 还 不 过。

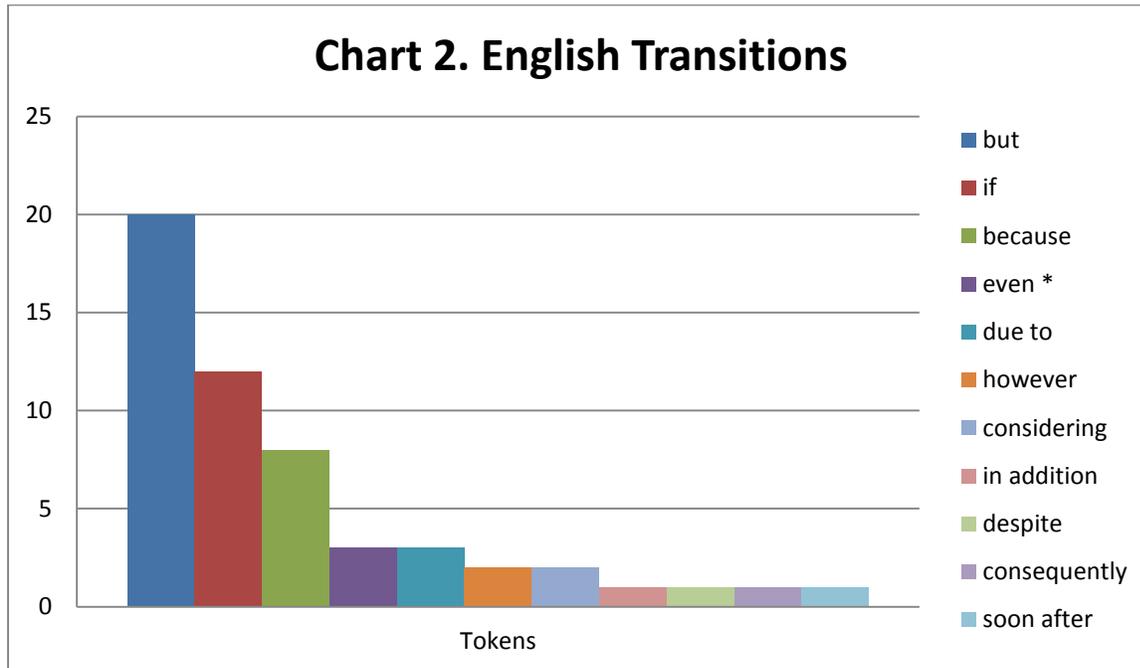
Ji-shi wo you er-shi kuai, hai bu guo.

Even I have 20 piece, still no pass.

Even \$20 is not enough./Even if I have \$20, it will not be enough.

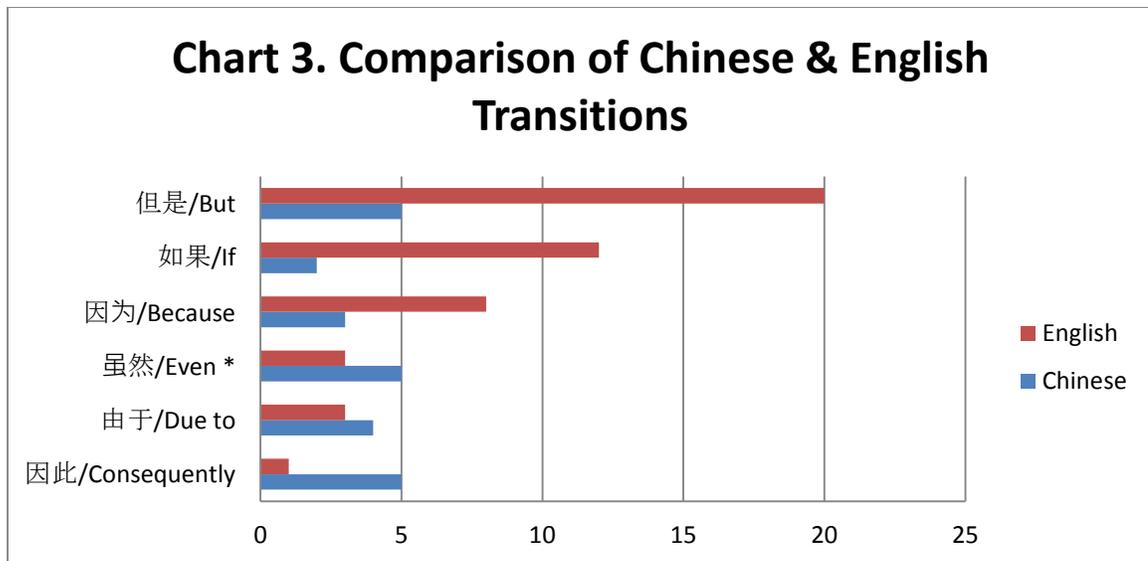
On the other hand, when examining the English transitions, *but* seems to be much more common than most, if not all, of the other words and phrases—appearing in two-thirds of the articles. It is interesting to note that *but* appears ten times more often than its synonym *however*, which is considered the more formal of the two words. *If* is also a fairly common word, appearing in over half of the articles. When examined by the types of transitions, we see that *but* and *however* form the greatest number of instances with a total of twenty-two. The transitions of perspective (*even**, *despite*, *considering*, and *if*) make the second largest category with seventeen

total instances. There are eleven instances for cause-and-effect transitions (*because*, *due to*, and *consequently*). There are only two instances of transition to provide additional information (*in addition* and *soon after*).



When viewed side-by-side, again, it is noticeable that differences emerge between the English and Chinese use of transition words and phrases. The Chinese transitions are all in a range of 2-5 tokens, while the English transitions are in a range of 1-20 tokens.

Three of these similar tokens, *due to*, *because*, and *consequently* demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship. There are twelve tokens evident in the English new articles and fourteen tokens in the Chinese news articles. The medium of news promotes the use of such transitions as this type of information would appeal to the audience—when something happens, the people are curious as to why it happened.



In contrast, the differences between *but* and 但是 seem to demonstrate a difference in how the cultures approach the concept of differences. While English news articles seem to prefer looking at different sides of the story, it may be that the Chinese news articles seek more direct explanation of the event in question. This is further evidenced by the fact that five of the eleven transitions found in the Chinese articles focus on cause-and-effect relationships. Moreover, three of the eleven transitions used in the Chinese articles are for the specific purpose of providing additional details. Yet the majority of transitions discovered in the English articles relate to opposition, contrast, and perspective.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the history of contrastive rhetoric in relation to the English and Chinese language. The proposed hypothesis, debates and research has been discussed and examined. Then, as a potential new avenue for investigation, Chinese and English news articles from three different online news sources (one Chinese, one British, and one American) were

examined to reveal instances of transitional words and phrases for the purpose of examining trends within the usage.

It has been revealed that Chinese news articles tend to feature more transitions to provide information, such as cause-and-effect or extra details. On the other hand, the English articles seemed to include more transitions that are used to provide perspectives of different interested parties involved in the events. Therefore, it seems that even in the realm of news reporting, differences occur in the different language cultures. These results are in line with much of the previous research within the field of contrastive rhetoric.

Although it is mere speculation, it seems that this might be in line with what others have claimed about these particular cultures. The hierarchical structures that have been promoted in Chinese cultural through Confucianism would expect to have a single official perspective on the truth of a particular matter whereas English speaking culture, particularly in America, has promoted pluralism and high regard for the individual self. This theory is in line with Conner's comments that the Chinese tend to "avoid free expression of personal views" (1996, p. 39).

However, this study has been a cursory examination of one particular rhetorical feature as opposed to a full-examination of the particular contexts. In some ways, this study more resembles a corpus linguistics evaluation. However, by focusing on one specific genre and a rhetorically functioning feature, it could be argued that this paper is a synthesis of theories. Moreover, the greatest weakness to this study is the current lack of evidence for statistical significance. While the raw numbers have been provided, a statistical analysis would greatly compliment the results. In addition, future investigations, given adequate time, should take

advantage of the whole spectrum of transitional features as opposed to pinpointing particular words and phrases.

More research in a variety of genres would greatly improve our understanding of the perceived differences between Chinese and English rhetoric. Currently, ELL student produced writing and academic research are the most commonly investigated genres. Fictional dialogues (i.e. TV and film), news media, and online blogs are all excellent avenues to investigate common audience-focused genres in this day and age. With particular attention to audience focus between two varied cultures can provide insight into the possibilities of differences that may exist in cultural rhetoric, especially if the trends seem to appeal to similar rhetorical strategies.

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- (1986). Comments on Bernard A. Mohan & Winnie Au-Yeung Lo's "Academic writing and Chinese students: Transfer and developmental factors." Response to Ricento: On hypotheses for cross-cultural rhetoric research. *TESOL Quarterly* 20 (3): 569-573.
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Appendix A—URLs for selected articles:

China Daily

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/dfpd/shehui/2012-05/01/content_15180177.htm

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/dfpd/shehui/2012-05/01/content_15180300.htm

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzx/2012-05/01/content_15180127.htm

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzx/2012-04/25/content_15141715.htm

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzx/2012-05/01/content_15180050.htm

http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-04/30/content_15176693.htm

http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/us/2012-04/30/content_15177548.htm

http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2012-05/02/content_15182347.htm

http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-05/02/content_15182378.htm

http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-05/02/content_15182330.htm

BBC News

http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/chinese_news/2012/05/120501_ireland_china_hub.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/chinese_news/2012/05/120501_freedom_house_china.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/world/2012/05/120501_obama_afghan.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/chinese_news/2012/05/120501_us_china_chen_guangcheng.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/zhongwen/simp/world/2012/05/120501_skorea_china.shtml

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17908737>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-17917088>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17906203>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-17893456>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-17911888>

MSN

<http://msn.huanqiu.com/world/hot/2012-05/2676945.html>

<http://msn.huanqiu.com/artical/2012-05/2677026.html>

<http://msn.huanqiu.com/china/hot/2012-05/2676931.html>

<http://msn.huanqiu.com/china/hot/2012-05/2676937.html>

<http://msn.huanqiu.com/world/hot/2012-05/2676970.html>

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/47253954/ns/technology_and_science-space/#.T6CELuhJtLd

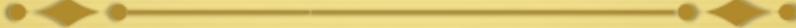
http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/05/01/11486325-student-in-dea-custody-forgotten-without-food-or-water-for-days?lite

http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/05/01/11490257-romney-foreign-policy-spokesman-resigns?lite

http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/05/01/11489306-former-top-ice-official-james-woosley-pleads-guilty-in-600000-scam?lite

http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/05/01/11488273-drunken-grandparents-use-suv-to-tow-girl-in-toy-car-deputies-say?lite

Introduction



✦ Purpose:

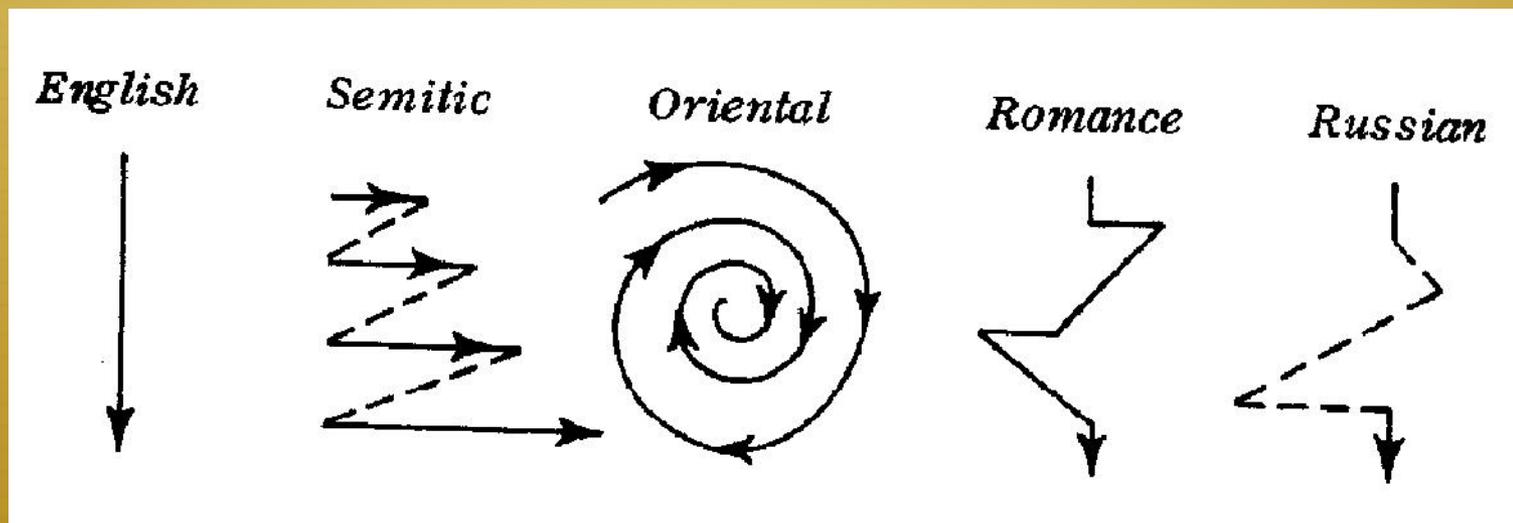
- ✦ To identify possible differences in the preferred organizational styles of different language cultures.

✦ Intra-language examples:

- ✦ Academic Writing (undergraduate, graduate)
- ✦ Business Writing (annual reports, meeting minutes)
- ✦ Genre Writing (S.F., mystery, romance, nonfiction)

Contrastive Rhetoric (CR)

- ✦ Kaplan, 1966—Examined differences in English Language Learners (ELLs) writing in English.



- ✦ (Taken from Kaplan, 1966, p. 21)

Kaplan on “Oriental” Languages

- ✦ On the spiral visualization:
 - ✦ “would strike the English reader as awkward and unnecessarily indirect”(p. 17)
- ✦ Clarification of languages included
 - ✦ “specifically Chinese and Korean but not Japanese”(p. 25)

Mohan & Lo's Challenge



- ✦ Main Claim: “While English-speaking students may be competent speakers of the language, they are not necessarily competent writers” (1985, p. 522)
- ✦ Other oversights:
 - ✦ No error analysis was conducted.
 - ✦ Kaplan's cultural examples came from ancient writers (Confucius, Mencius)
 - ✦ Chinese researchers and educators disagree with how their writing is viewed.

Gregg's Response



- ✦ “[the] authors too readily dismiss traditional conventions of writing in Chinese as a significant source of interference” (1986, p. 354)
- ✦ Chinese students had learned well the Chinese formula for argument instruction which that culture prefers due to its concern for the society as a whole rather than from an individualistic perspective (p. 356).
- ✦ Mohan's rebuttal: Provide evidence.

Ricento's Response



- ✦ “[It] is risky to infer L1 rhetorical patterns from ESL student compositions. But it is equally unsound to claim that a hypothesis (i.e., the purported indirectness of Mandarin prose [see Kaplan, 1966]) has been disproved when the claim is made on the basis of a small corpus of short texts” (p. 565).
- ✦ Ricento provides a counter-example of Confucian writing and also challenges the definition of expository writing itself (p. 566).
- ✦ Mohan's rebuttal: If Mohan & Lo's challenge found the original evidence as unacceptable, then new evidence needs to be provided to support the original position.

Other Comments



- ✦ “...our encounters were being governed by cultural, linguistic, and, yes, rhetorical norms so different from our own that we were driven to search for whatever explanations we could find” (Matalene, 1997, p. 163).
- ✦ Directness was a rhetorical strategy that has been promoted in Chinese writing styles (Liu, 1996).
- ✦ Historical factors related to the differences were less important than “cultural orientations toward self, other, society, and social interaction” (Conner, 1996, p. 41)

Other Comments (cont.)



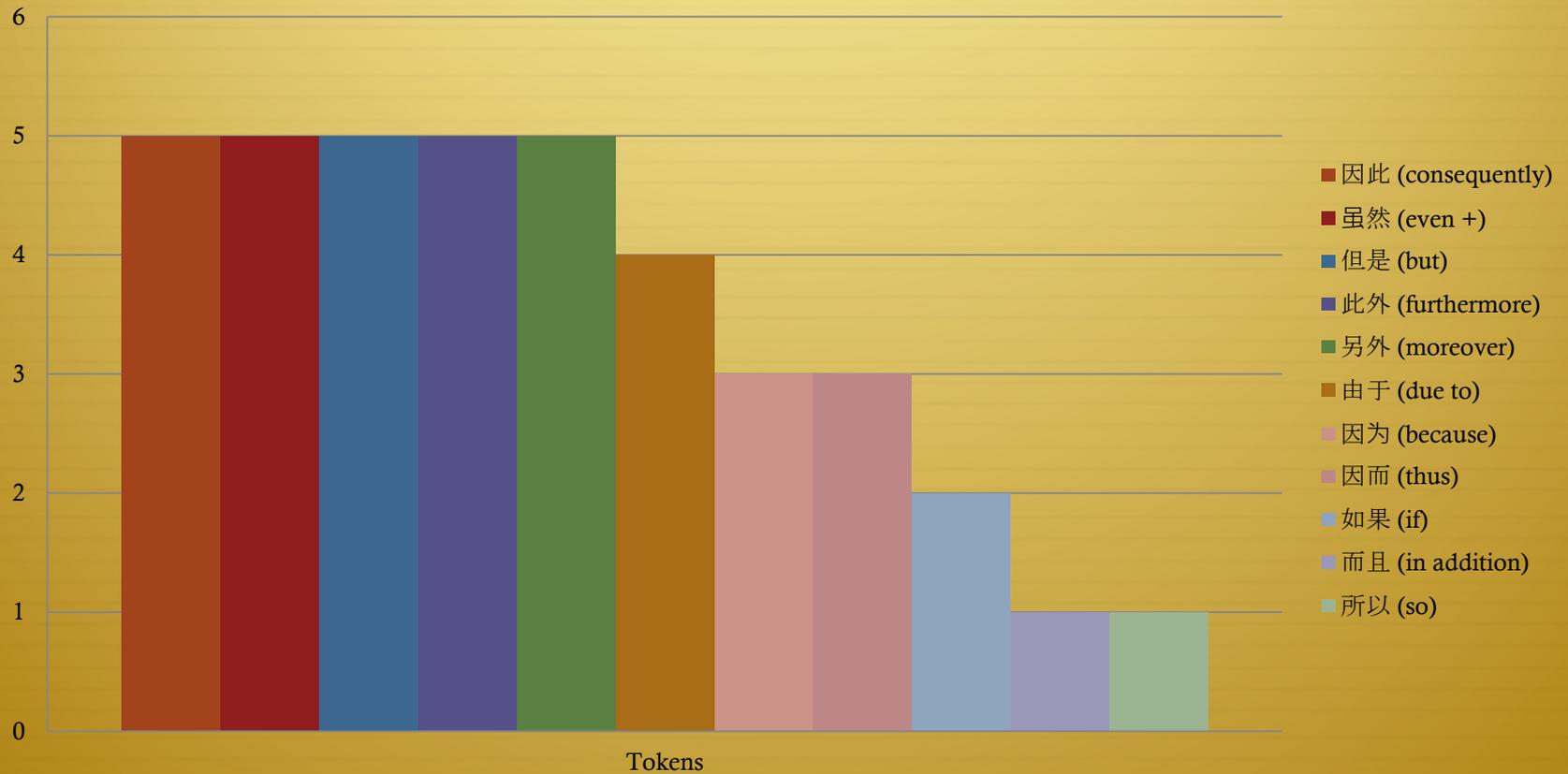
- ✦ The introductions to Chinese articles in educational psychology were less likely to take a critical stance, employ explicitness, or specify the value of the research (Loi & Evans, 2001)
- ✦ It has been concluded that these preferences are possibly subconscious, and need to be better understood (Taft, Kacanas, Huen, & Chan, 2011, p. 514).

Methodology



- ✦ 5 English & 5 Chinese articles were randomly selected from the same 3 online news sources.
 - ✦ China Daily
 - ✦ BBC
 - ✦ The Microsoft Network
- ✦ Most recent articles at the time of research
- ✦ 32 transitions were searched for in the texts

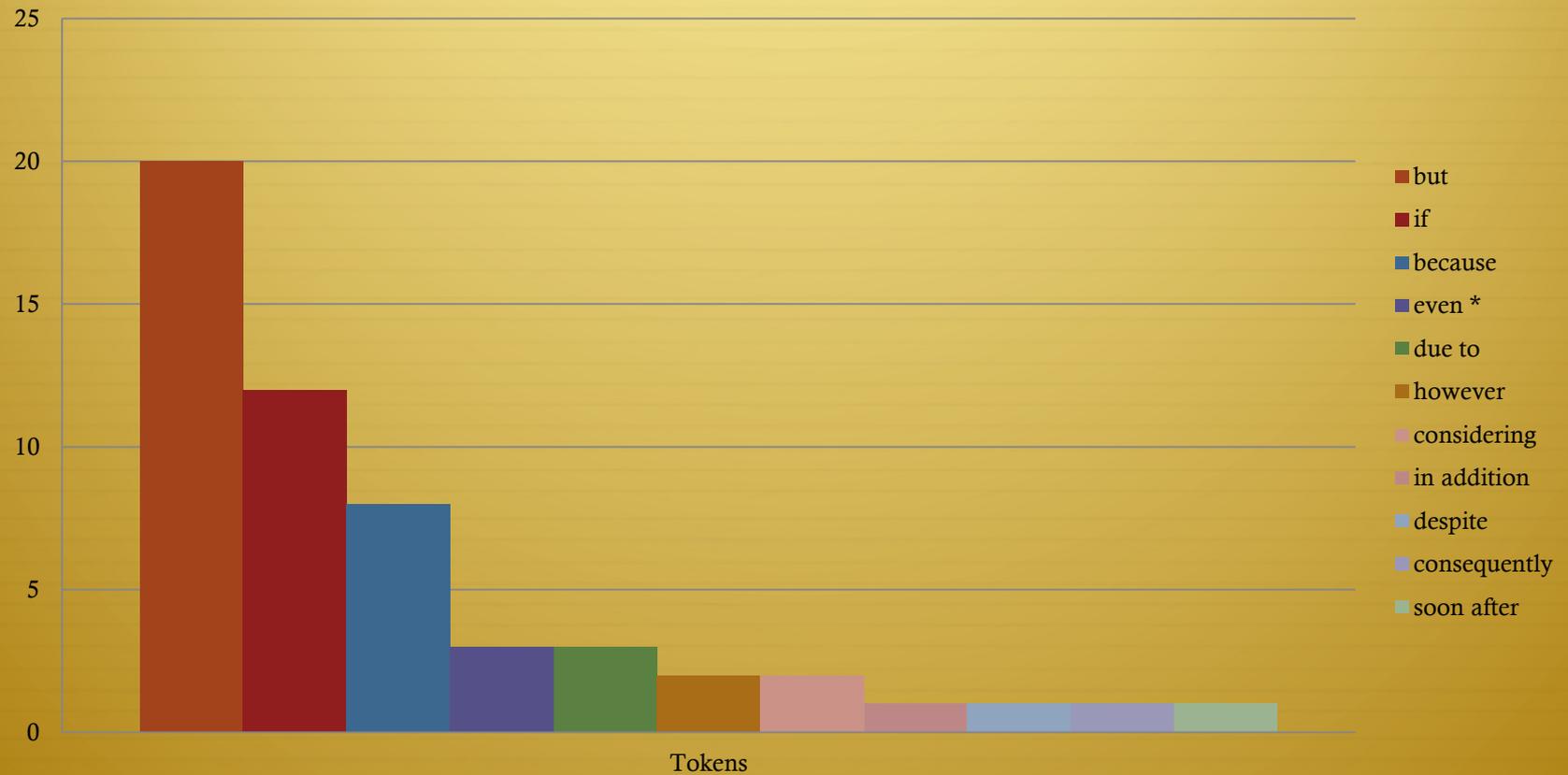
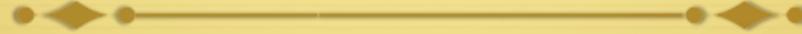
Chinese Transitions



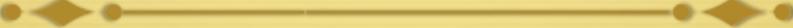
Chinese Examples

- ✦ 因此他们必须在5月5日之前离开。
 - ✦ Yīncǐ tāmen bìxū zài 5 yuè 5 rì zhīqián líkāi.
 - ✦ Consequently, they must leave before May 5th. (China Daily, May 1, 2012).
- ✦ 此外，野田还在会谈中提议创建“日美中三边战略对话机制”。
 - ✦ Cǐwài, yětián hái zài huìtán zhōng tíyì chuàngjiàn “rì měi zhòng sān biān zhànlüè duìhuà jīzhì”.
 - ✦ In addition, [former Japanese Prime Minister] Noda also proposed the creation of the talks as “a Japanese-Sino-American trilateral strategic dialogue mechanism.” (MSN, May 1, 2012)

English Transitions

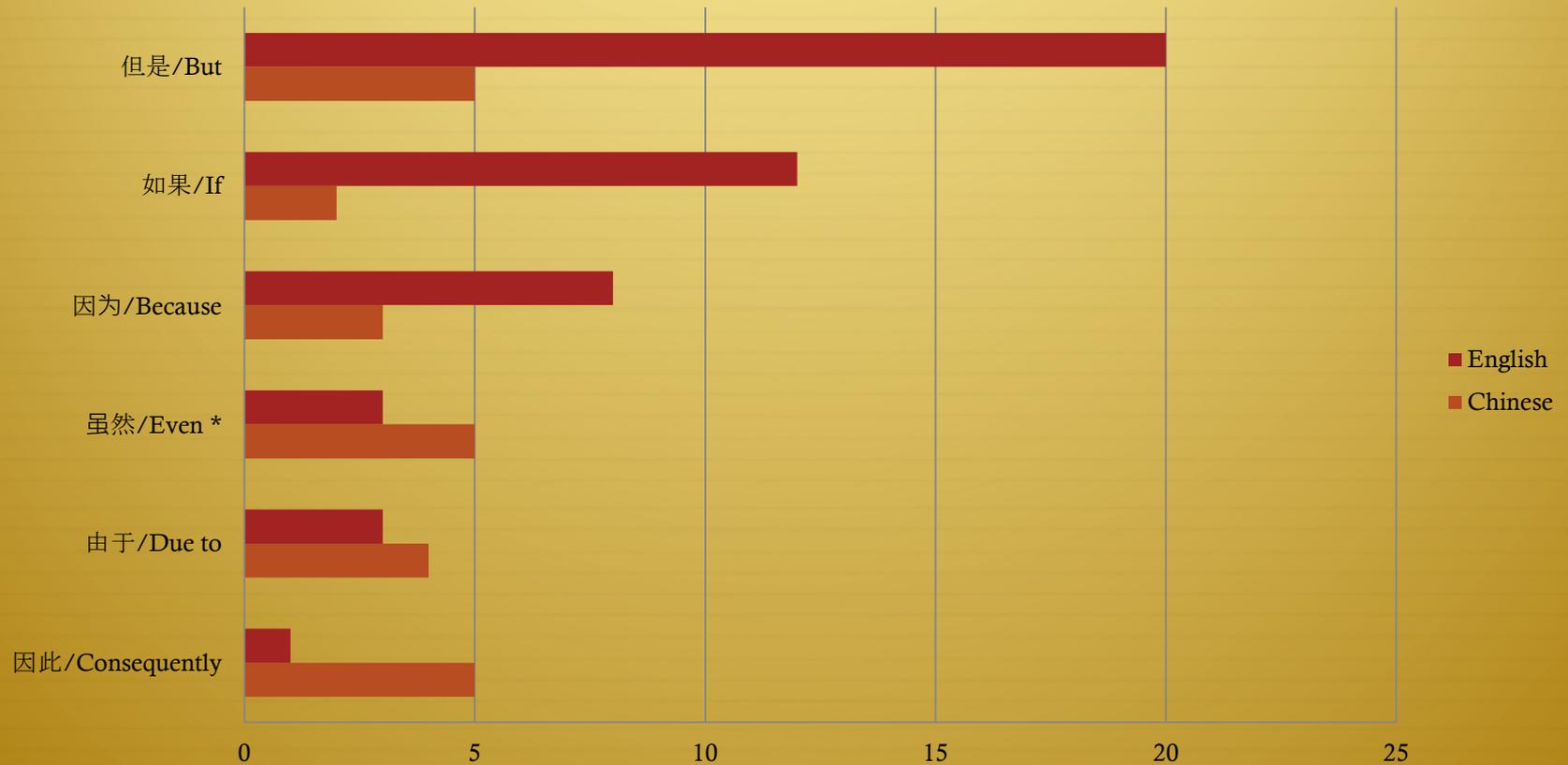


English Examples



- ✦ In exchanges with other countries, China's film industry benefits from Western technology and special-effects experience, she said, but China offers the West technical expertise as well. (China Daily, May 1, 2012)
- ✦ Zazi testified that they targeted New York's subway trains at rush hour because it was "the heart of everything in New York City". (BBC, May 1, 2012)
- ✦ He is also openly gay, and a Washington Post account of Grenell's resignation suggested the campaign might have faced a backlash due to his sexuality. (MSN, May 1, 2012)

Comparison of Transitions



Conclusion

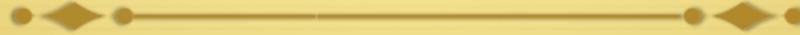


- ✦ Chinese news writing includes more information related transitions
 - ✦ Cause-and-effect
 - ✦ Extra details
- ✦ English news writing includes more perspective related transitions
 - ✦ Conflicting information
 - ✦ Point-of-view

Limitations/Future Research

- ✦ Larger samples needed
- ✦ News genre focused (Sports, Feature, World, etc.)
- ✦ Statistical analysis
- ✦ Transition categorization definitions
- ✦ Wider spectrum of transitions investigated

Thank You!



Questions?

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