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A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW: INFLUENCE OF INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES ON LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND WRITING COMPETENCE

Abstract. This article reviews existing literature on cross-linguistic influence (CLI) in additional language acquisition, focusing on how learners' awareness of differences between their primary and target languages impacts their writing competence. The study has its special focus on intermediate-level language differences, specifically expression patterns and usage preferences, and their influence on Chinese English learners' writing. A systematic search of recent studies (last 15 years) was conducted using Google Scholar and CNKI with keywords such as "cross-linguistic knowledge," "negative transfer," and "writing competence." The findings highlight significant CLI at the intermediate level, particularly in areas such as conjunction use, sentence structure complexity, avoidance of passive voice, and word repetition. These challenges stem primarily from differences in expression patterns between Chinese and English. Contrastive Analysis (CA) emerges as an effective tool for predicting errors, tailoring teaching materials, and explaining linguistic phenomena. However, research remains limited on how to enhance cross-linguistic awareness, especially in relation to intermediate-level features such as hypotactic and paratactic structures. The study underscores the need for more quantitative and empirical research to develop cross-linguistic competence and refine pedagogical strategies. Further exploration is essential to better understand how language differences influence writing performance and to create effective instructional approaches that address intermediate-level CLI.

Keywords: cross-linguistic influence; multilingualism; intermediate-level language difference; teaching strategy; writing.

Introduction

Language acquisition is influenced by various factors that shape learners' linguistic development and communicative abilities. Among these factors, the interplay between the learner's primary language and the new language plays a key role. Known as cross-linguistic influence (CLI), this interplay can either aid or hinder additional language acquisition (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; McManus, 2021).

Writing competence in an Lx (any language beyond the first (L1)) is not limited to mastering grammar or vocabulary. It also involves conveying meaning according to the structural and rhetorical conventions of the target language. In this context, cross-linguistic knowledge—awareness of the differences between primary language and subsequent language—can guide learners in making informed linguistic choices. With greater cross-linguistic awareness, learners may better understand how to avoid negative transfer and leverage positive transfer, thereby improving their writing performance (McManus, 2021; Van Dijk, Van Wonderen, et al., 2022).

However, much of the existing research focuses on CLI caused by surface-level or deep-level language differences, while less attention has been paid to the "intermediate-level" differences that lie between these two extremes (Lian, 2010; Liu, 1991). Differences at this level include the patterns of expression and structural preferences that influence how meaning is realized in writing, yet they are not fully explained by simple grammatical rules or broad cultural factors (Liu, 1991). Recent studies suggest that such intermediate-level differences can significantly affect how learners produce coherent, context-appropriate text (Peng, 2023). Understanding these mid-level contrasts may offer fresh insights into improving writing instruction and enhancing learners' performance in multilingual contexts.

This article seeks to address the current research gap by systematically reviewing literature related to intermediate-level language differences and their influence on target language writing competence. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Clarify the Role of Intermediate-Level Differences: Investigate how nuanced, mid-level linguistic contrasts—beyond surface-level grammar

and deep cultural factors—shape learners' writing performance in a second or additional language.

2. Analyze Teaching Pedagogy: Investigate how enhanced awareness of cross-linguistic differences between a learner's primary language and the target language can improve writing competence and identify teaching strategies that leverage this awareness to support effective language instruction.

In the following sections, the article outlines the research methods and criteria used for systematic review. It then presents key findings, identifies limitations in current research, and discusses implications for language pedagogy and future studies. By clarifying the role of intermediate-level language differences, this review aims to contribute to more effective teaching strategies, thereby supporting the development of learners' writing competence in a multilingual world. In doing so, it informs multilingual development by offering insights into how educators can foster learners' ability to navigate multiple languages over the long term, ensuring that multilingual competencies are maintained and reinforced rather than eroded as learners advance in their studies.

Research Methods

To systematically map and explore the relationship between cross-linguistic knowledge and writing competence, a scoping review method was employed, drawing on established frameworks for mapping research evidence across complex and heterogeneous fields. This approach has been widely used in language education and applied linguistics to identify research trends, gaps, and methodological practices (Amini Farsani et al., 2021).

The review began with an extensive keyword search on Google Scholar and CNKI using terms of "intermediate-level language difference," "preference, "cross-linguistic knowledge," and "writing competence." Owing to the limited research in this area, Lian's (2010) framework of 10 intermediate-level language differences between Chinese and English, as listed in Table 1, was employed to generate key search terms. These terms were combined with

others, such as "hypotactic vs. paratactic" and "writing", or "personal vs. impersonal" and "writing". This approach greatly enriched the body of literature reviewed in this study. Focusing on publications from the last 15 years ensured that the findings would reflect current trends in research on multilingualism development. Rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria were then applied, excluding studies featuring participants who were simultaneous bilinguals, or research that did not directly address cross-linguistic knowledge in relation to writing competence. Articles meeting these criteria underwent an in-depth, full-text review to confirm their alignment with the research objectives and ensure that they offered insights relevant to both theory and practice in multilingual development.

Table 1

Intermediate-Level Language Difference Between Chinese and English

English	Chinese
Synthetic	Analytic
Rigid	Supple
Hypotactic	Paratactic
Complex	Simplex
Impersonal	Personal
Passive voice	Active voice
Static	Dynamic
Abstract	Concrete
Indirect	Direct
Substitutive	Repetitive

By following established scoping review protocols and integrating best practices from systematic reviews in the language education field, this study seeks not only to identify key themes and conceptual gaps but also to provide a solid foundation for understanding how cross-linguistic knowledge informs writing competence. This approach, shaped by prior methodological guidance, underscores the potential for future targeted research, improved pedagogical strategies, and refined theoretical frameworks in this critical area of multilingualism.

Research Background in Contrastive Linguistics

Contrastive linguistics is a field dedicated to the systematic comparison of two or more languages, examining both their structural features and cultural contexts (Gast, 2012; Ke, 2019). As a branch of comparative linguistics, it not only focuses on identifying differences and similarities between languages at a given point in time (synchronic comparison) but also explores how these findings can inform broader linguistic theories and practical language-related endeavours. By situating language study within a comparative framework, contrastive linguistics provides insights that can be particularly relevant in contexts where multiple languages coexist, thus supporting sustainable multilingualism.

Within this discipline, researchers distinguish between theoretical contrastive linguistics (TCL) and applied contrastive linguistics (ACL) (Gast, 2012; Mair, 2018). TCL, as a subfield of theoretical linguistics, concentrates on identifying universal categories and features across languages. It seeks to clarify what is comparable, and how, by establishing concepts such as congruence, similarity, and equivalence (Gast, 2012; Ke, 2019). These theoretical foundations help scholars understand language systems at a more abstract level, ultimately enabling them to explain why certain linguistic phenomena occur across diverse linguistic landscapes.

ACL, on the other hand, operationalizes these theoretical insights for practical applications, including language teaching and learning, translation, lexicography, and language policy (Mair, 2018). By drawing on TCL's foundational frameworks, ACL informs instructional strategies that guide learners in navigating cross-linguistic similarities and differences. This guidance becomes increasingly important as learners move beyond simple vocabulary and grammar, confronting subtler "intermediate-level" distinctions—patterns of language use and expression that are neither purely structural nor entirely cultural. Such insights can be essential for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers working in multilingual settings, where awareness of these mid-level differences can support more effective and context-sensitive teaching practices (Woll & Paquet, 2021).

Figure 1 is a conceptual illustration of how TCL establishes universal features (e.g., A, B, C, D) and provides a model for comparison, while ACL applies these insights to specific languages (e.g., AL1, AL2 for Feature A in L1 and L2, and BL1, BL2 for Feature B in L1 and L2). This figure demonstrates how theoretical principles guide practical analysis, paving the way for improved language teaching and learning in multilingual contexts.

Figure 1

Relationship Between TCL and ACL
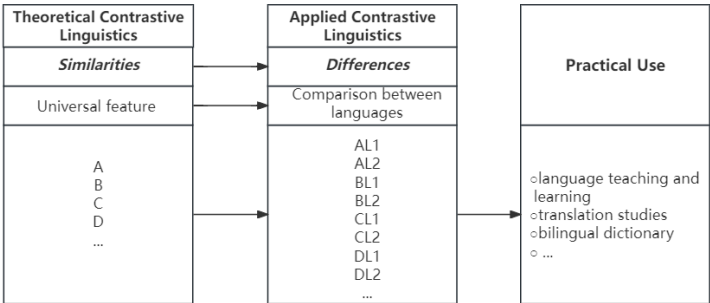
By integrating TCL's theoretical frameworks and ACL's practical orientation, contrastive linguistics helps researchers, educators, and learners better understand language interplay. This understanding extends beyond bilingual scenarios, informing sustainable multilingual education and fostering a richer comprehension of how learners from various linguistic backgrounds may experience and navigate language differences. As a result, contrastive linguistics serves as an essential tool for building knowledge that can improve educational outcomes in increasingly diverse linguistic environments.

Insufficiency of Language Comparison at Surface and Deep Level

Just as descriptive and historical linguistics rely on theoretical underpinnings, contrastive linguistics is rooted in theoretical linguistics. Without a foundational theoretical framework offering key concepts, hypotheses, and overarching theories, any in-depth exploration of linguistic facts would be imprecise and unreliable. Such a foundation aids researchers in

accurately documenting pertinent details and in deriving meaningful generalizations from them (Krzeszowski, 2011)

As previously noted, theoretical contrastive linguistics primarily focuses on two main areas: (1) the model of comparison, which involves determining what and how elements can be compared, and (2) a comprehensive description of the differences between languages and cultures. The subsequent sections will delve into the elements that can be compared, and the scope of comparison. On the other hand, the detailed exploration of the distinctions between languages and cultures will be elaborated in 3.3, with a focus on comparing Chinese and English.

Language Comparison at Surface Level

Traditionally linguists typically compare languages based on their structures, such as phonetic/phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic aspects, mirroring the terms used in mainstream linguistic studies. However, a notable drawback of this typology is its failure to perceive language as a multifunctional system. This approach essentially leaves an analytical gap, resulting in a lack of insights into the language's role and operation within extralinguistic environments or settings that extend beyond purely linguistic contexts.

Further, some linguists voice criticisms, arguing that this method of categorization significantly undermines the vital communication function that language inherently serves (Kostova, 2022). This oversight, they contend, seriously limits the practical relevance and applicability of such comparative linguistic studies, thus calling into question the comprehensive validity of this traditional approach (Gast, 2012). Moreover, critics argue that this methodology neglects the essential communicative function of language, substantially compromising the practical applicability of such studies (Krzeszowski, 2011).

Language Comparison at Deep Level

Noticing the limitations of surface-level language comparisons, some researchers have endeavoured to provide a more comprehensive perspective

by delving into comparisons at a deeper linguistic level (Gast, 2012; Kostova, 2022). The discipline of contrastive linguistics is intimately tied to the socio-cultural connections inherent between the languages being studied (Gast, 2012; Kostova, 2022). Gast (2012) elucidates the interplay between the analysis of language and its practical applications.

This stage of study focuses on "macro-linguistics", which has a broader perspective of linguistic analysis, including contrastive sociolinguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics, and contrastive rhetoric. These studies probe into intercultural misunderstandings or errors based on a comparison between cultures.

The sociocultural perspective offers insights into the foundational aspects of thought processes for speakers of different languages, yet the influence of such thinking on language seems less pronounced. Apart from idioms and some culturally loaded words, the impact of sociocultural factors on language proficiency appears somewhat limited. This is exemplified by the fact that while many acknowledge that enhancing learners' understanding of target language culture and cultural differences could improve their language skills, teaching methods built explicitly upon this foundation remain rare. As highlighted by Peng (2023), it is only when students possess a substantial grasp of culture that they can perceive linguistic similarities and differences, potentially reducing errors. However, no one has explicitly outlined how cross-cultural competence enhances language proficiency, and few studies provide empirical evidence to indicate a direct impact of enhanced cross-cultural skills on language capabilities.

A New Perspective: Language Comparison at Intermediate Level

While previous research often focuses on either the surface-level structures of language (e.g., phonology, morphology, syntax) or deep-level sociocultural and conceptual factors, some scholars have started to acknowledge an intermediate layer of differences that do not neatly fit into these two extremes (Liu, 1991). This intermediate level encompasses those patterned ways of expressing thought that are not merely formal grammatical

structures, nor purely cultural concepts, but rather reflect distinct "expression modes" that guide how meaning is organized and conveyed (Lian, 2010; Liu, 1991). For example, studies on cross-linguistic rhetorical strategies and discourse organization, often referred to in the field of contrastive rhetoric (Fei, 2023; Peng, 2023), have highlighted differences in the preferred use of cohesive devices, sentence complexity, and rhetorical conventions—differences that fall between the surface structure and deep conceptual frameworks.

Traces of the recognition of intermediate-level differences can be found as early as in the Chinese Qin Dynasty (221–207 B.C.), when the Buddhist monk Daoan identified five types of adjustments—sentence order, language style, repetition, notes, and connections—that were necessary when translating texts between foreign and Chinese languages. These historical observations suggest that such differences, although not formally categorized at the time, have long been part of linguistic inquiry.

Table 2

Description of Comparison Levels (Liu, 1991)

Level	Description
surface level	the formal structure layer, which includes basic and syntactic means of expression
intermediate level	system of expression, the patterned means of expression when thought is transformed into language
deep level	thought patterns, the foundational structure layer, which is the philosophical mechanism of language

Liu (1991) formalized this perspective by introducing a three-level model (surface, intermediate, deep) for contrastive linguistics as in Table 2. According to Liu, language is governed by thought, and thought must engage with the heterogeneity of different languages. At the intermediate level, this manifests in patterned "expression rules" that transform abstract thought into concrete linguistic forms. Such rules govern elements like the use of hypotactic versus paratactic constructions, preferences for active or passive voice, and tendencies in cohesive device deployment. Although many of these differences have been studied under labels such as "contrastive rhetoric" or "discourse-level comparisons" as deep level of language Liu's model provides a systematic framework for recognizing them as an integral, intermediate layer of linguistic comparison.

By highlighting these intermediate-level differences, researchers can move beyond focusing solely on discrete syntactic or lexical items and instead consider how languages guide speakers and writers in structuring and conveying meaning. This perspective encourages a more comprehensive approach to understanding cross-linguistic influence, one that acknowledges that not all difficulties or divergences are purely grammatical or deeply cultural. Rather, some lie in the realm of expression modes, where subtle patterns—once identified and understood—can significantly shape target language writing performance and overall communicative competence.

Figure 2

Example of Language Levels
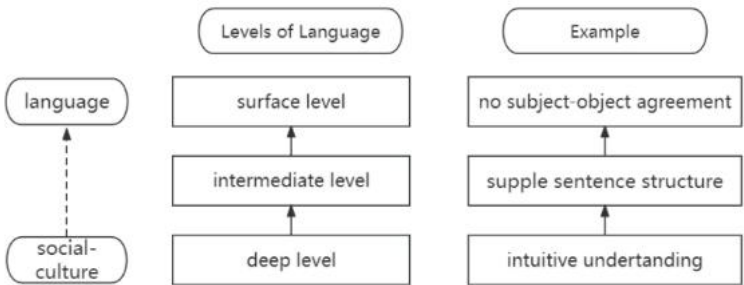
For example, as it is shown in Figure 2, Chinese classical philosophy emphasizes the intuitive understanding of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, focusing on the intuitive grasp of content (Lian, 2010). This cultural aspect is reflected in the language as an emphasis on semantics and a relative disregard for linguistic structure (Lian, 2010). As a result, Chinese is less bound by formal structures, has a higher degree of ambiguity, and exhibits more instances of polysemy; the same semantic structure can be expressed through various syntactic structures, and different semantic structures can be manifested in the same syntactic structure (Lian, 2010).

Numerous comparisons have been made at this level to discern differences in the preferred patterns of expression across languages. Researchers delve into disparities in the usage of noun phrases, active and passive sentence constructions, impersonal subjects and habits in using cohesive devices, among other aspects.

However, when it comes to comparing the preferences and conventions of speakers from various linguistic backgrounds concerning specific language structures, there has been a noticeable scarcity of systematic studies aimed at making such comparisons. This gap in research highlights the need for a more comprehensive exploration of language preferences and conventions across different languages.

Application of Contrastive Linguistics in Multilingual Acquisition

Research on cross-linguistic influence (CLI) in Lx acquisition has provided valuable insights into how prior language knowledge and experience can shape and impact the process of learning a new language (McManus, 2021). In their meta-analysis, Van Dijk et al. (2022) found that the average effect size for CLI is small to moderate, indicating that this influence plays a crucial role in SLA.

The process of acquiring a new language is fundamentally grounded in a learner's pre-existing experiences, with the learner's previous language repertoire playing a pivotal role (McManus, 2021). Unlike the acquisition of one's L1, which typically occurs naturally in infancy, the journey to L2 or Lx proficiency often begins later in life, at a stage when the language system is already firmly established in the learner's cognitive framework (McManus, 2021). Studies have shown that when bilinguals process spoken language tasks, both language systems may be simultaneously activated, affecting their language processing both in speaking and writing. This proves that L1 plays a significant role in Lx production.

Cross-linguistic influence refers to the process of establishing connections and relationships between different languages during the learning process (McManus, 2021). Learners, by comparing and analyzing aspects such as grammar and vocabulary across different languages, can identify commonalities and similarities between them, thereby enhancing their understanding and proficiency in language usage (Woll & Paquet, 2021).

McManus (2021) explains that CLI can manifest in both positive and negative ways during language learning. Bell et al. (2020) pointed out that

when the patterns between a learner's primary language and new language are similar, the influence tends to be positive, facilitating the acquisition of the new language, while when the two languages exhibit distinct differences in linguistic patterns, such as in syntax, phonology, or word order, CLI can become negative. In these cases, learners may struggle due to interference from their L1, which complicates the process of acquiring the correct structures or usage patterns in the Lx (Bell et al., 2020).

When individuals learn a new language, they often draw upon the language knowledge and skills they have already acquired in previously learnt language. Thierry and Wu (2007) drew from their experiment that during Lx comprehension, primary language knowledge is activated to facilitate the process. The language cognition and learning strategies developed previously can positively impact the learning of Lx, leading to the formation of cross-linguistic connections. These connections enable learners to transfer their knowledge and experiences from primary language to Lx, facilitating a faster understanding and acquisition of the new language.

However, cross-linguistic connections can also present challenges, particularly when there are significant differences between the new language and the language they already acquire. For example, research finds that Chinese EFL learners experience lexical, discourse, and syntactic interferences, encountering challenges in comprehending the different semantic systems of Chinese and English (Krish & May, 2020).

By recognizing these similarities and differences, learners can better understand and overcome these challenges, ultimately enhancing learning efficiency and accuracy. Bell et al. (2020) have found that when participants use cross-linguistic connections, they are more accurate, especially when they use a CLC with a verbalized rule and an explicit reference to L1.

Understanding cross-linguistic connections is crucial in language teaching and learning. Educators can utilize learners' previous language knowledge to aid their comprehension of new language rules and structures. Likewise, learners can leverage the connections between languages to enhance their understanding and application of new language knowledge, thereby accelerating their language proficiency. However, while the impact CLI is broadly recognized, the investigation in this domain remains insufficient and

inconsistent. Meta-analyses (Van Dijk, Van Wonderen, et al., 2022) suggest a notable absence of a cohesive theoretical framework in this field. There is a compelling need for a more standardized methodology when examining CLI.

Another notable deficiency in this area is that the bulk of CLI research concentrates on the existence of CLI (Van Dijk, Van Wonderen, et al., 2022), along with its cognitive impact on the acquisition of an additional language (Lx) on different language levels such as phonetics, lexis, syntax, grammar. However, until now, there have been scant studies dedicated to the development and evaluation of teaching strategies grounded in CLI. This constitutes a significant gap in the research landscape that requires more comprehensive investigation, ultimately enriching the pedagogical approaches to language teaching and learning.

Besides, research has been conducted to discuss the CLI caused by the subcategory of intermediate level, such as passive vs. active, rigid vs. supple, etc, that is the pattern of expression. Additionally, research in intermediate level of language difference is not yet discussed as an integrated system that influences learners' performance.

Figure 3

Focus of This Research
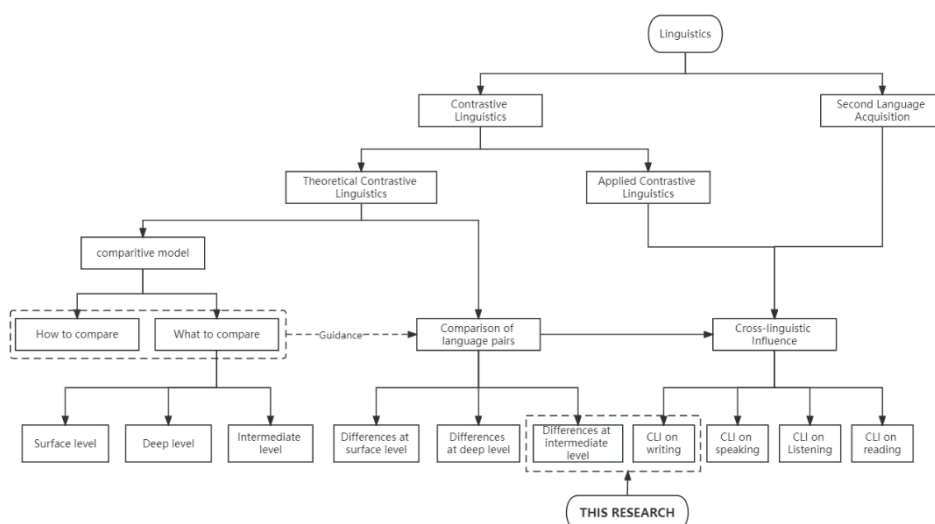
Building upon the previously established context, this study takes learners with L1 Chinese and English as their Lx as an example to examine in detail CLI on writing competence arising from intermediate-level language differences. Figure 3 shows the area that this paper focuses on.

Differences Between English and Chinese Languages

English and Chinese originate from distinct language families, each with a rich linguistic history. Specifically, English is rooted in the Indo-European language family and belongs to the Germanic branch. In contrast, Chinese finds its place within the Sino-Tibetan language family. As a result, these two languages exhibit profound differences.

Numerous research endeavors have delved into the contrasts between English and Chinese on a surface level. These studies primarily center on comparing the two languages in terms of phonetics, morpheme, lexicon and syntax.

Some scholars have adopted a socio-cultural perspective in the comparative analysis of English and Chinese (Dai, 2024). With the development of fields like cultural anthropology, pragmatics, and sociocultural linguistics, research has increasingly focused on how language is used in different social and cultural contexts and how it reflects unique social dynamics and cultural characteristics, such as comparison in cross-cultural rhetorics, discourse (Dai, 2024).

At the intermediate level, much research has identified differences in patterns of expression and usage preference (Kaimana et al., 2021). Among these studies, Lian (2010) focused on the intermediate-level comparisons and outlined ten major differences between English and Chinese in his book, as shown in Table 1.

Lian's analysis of Chinese and English language differences on intermediate level is considered an important work in the field of contrastive linguistics in China. Since its publication in 2010, it has consistently received a high number of citations in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, with a growing trend each year.

However, an analysis of the distribution of literature that cites Lian's work reveals that most references focus on topics such as corpus linguistics and translation. The literature related to English learning based on Lian's theory is limited to specific grammatical features, such as the use of the passive voice or auxiliary verbs. What is neglected is that the teaching principles and strategies derived from these differences can also be beneficial for EFL learners.

Findings

The following sections summarize the various manifestations and underlying causes of writing problems experienced by intermediate-level Chinese EFL learners due to mother tongue influence, as identified in existing studies. In addition, a comprehensive overview of related teaching methods and approaches will be provided.

CLI Caused by Chinese and English Differences at Intermediate Level

The exploration of CLI at an intermediate level is a valuable area of study. This is exemplified by the studies outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

Studies on Writing Problems of Chinese EFL Learners Caused by CLI at Intermediate Level

Language differences	Problems observed	Research method
Rigid vs. Supple	Errors in subject-predicate agreement	Error analysis
Hypotactic vs. Paratactic	Misuse and inappropriate choices of conjunctions	Literature review
	Ignoring the use of conjunctions	Corpus-based research
	Using commas instead of proper conjunctions	Literature review
	Neglecting conjunctions	Error analysis
	Underuse of compound and complex sentences; overuse of simple sentences	Literature review
Complex vs. Simplex	Underuse of compound and complex sentences; overuse of simple sentences	Literature review
Impersonal vs.	Underuse of the "There be" sentence	Corpus-based

Language differences	Problems observed	Research method
Personal	pattern	research
Passive vs. Active	Underuse of passive voice	Literature review/ Comparative study
Static vs. Dynamic	-	-
Abstract vs. Concrete	Underuse of abstract language	Comparative study
Indirect vs. Direct	-	-
Substitutive vs. Repetitive	Overuse of repeated words	Literature review

It can be concluded that Chinese learners' English writing is significantly influenced by the differences between English and Chinese at intermediate level, leading to various writing issues, as proved by previous studies. These issues are specifically manifested in the misuse or omission of conjunctions, insufficient complexity in sentence structures, underuse of passive voice, neglect of specific sentence patterns, inadequate use of abstract language, and overuse of repetitive words.

These findings indicate that CLI plays a significant role in multilingual acquisition, posing new demands on Lx teaching strategies and methods. But it is also obvious that certain CLI at this level is not studied, including CLI caused by static vs. dynamic and indirect vs direct. Besides, these findings indicate a clear need for instructional adjustments to help learners recognize and address these mid-level linguistic differences. A deeper, more systematic investigation of these areas could further enhance the practical implications for language instruction, equipping teachers with a fuller range of CLI-related strategies.

Approaches Mitigating Negative CLI

Learners, by comparing and analyzing aspects such as grammar and vocabulary across different languages, can identify commonalities and similarities between them, thereby enhancing their understanding and proficiency in language usage (Woll & Paquet, 2021). Saliyevic (2023) argues that to overcome the negative influence of primary languages, the learners should have a thorough understanding of all the aspects through comparison between the two or more languages.

One of the major tools used to mitigate negative CLI is comparative analysis (CA). It focuses on differences and similarities in linguistic structures and has been a crucial tool in Lx acquisition to help learners understand how the previous language interferes with or facilitates Lx acquisition, including syntactic, phonetic, and morphemic elements. By integrating CA-based exercises into writing tasks—such as parallel text analysis and targeted error-correction drills—teachers can systematically direct students' attention to specific structural contrasts and thereby reduce negative transfer. Table 4 are some usages of CA in mitigating negative CLI:

Table 4

CA in Mitigating Negative CLI

Aim	Process
Identification and Prediction of Errors	Teachers use the CA to analyze the structural differences between a learner's L1 and L2, predicting possible errors that learners may make in phonetics, grammar, vocabulary, or syntax.
Correction and Prevention of Errors	Teachers can use CA to identify typical errors students make in speaking or writing and provide targeted exercises to correct and prevent these errors.
Customization of Teaching Materials	Drawing on the findings of CA, educators can develop teaching materials and activities that focus on key linguistic areas where notable differences exist between L1 and L2.
Explanation of Linguistic Phenomena	When students encounter difficulties in the learning process, teachers can use CA to explain why certain language structures, usages, or pronunciations are different in the target language compared to the students' native language.
Enhancing Language Awareness	By conducting CA, students can become more aware of the differences between different languages. This can contribute to enhancing their awareness and understanding of the language learning process.

Contrastive Analysis (CA) plays a significant role in multilingual acquisition through its various applications. It helps in identifying and predicting potential errors by analysing structural differences between learners' primary language and target language, particularly in areas such as phonetics, grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. CA also facilitates the correction and prevention of errors by enabling teachers to pinpoint common issues in students' speaking or writing and design targeted exercises to address them. Moreover, educators can use findings from CA to customize teaching materials and activities that focus on critical linguistic differences between languages

(Wardhaugh, 1970). Additionally, CA serves as a tool for explaining linguistic phenomena, helping teachers clarify structural, usage, or pronunciation differences that learners may find challenging (Zhang, 2023). Finally, CA enhances students' language awareness by increasing their understanding of linguistic differences and the overall language learning process (Ruzhekova-Rogozherova & Kableshkov, 2014). These applications underscore the theoretical and practical importance of CA as an efficient tool in multilingual development. In practical classroom settings, designing lessons around these CA principles can provide a clear path toward minimizing negative CLI and enhancing learners' overall writing fluency and accuracy.

Prior Knowledge and CLI

Research on CLI has provided valuable insights into how previous language knowledge and experience can shape the process of learning a new language (McManus, 2021). When learning a new language, most adults already possess a solid framework of linguistic knowledge (McManus, 2021). The accumulated exposure to and use of their precious languages can greatly affect their ability to acquire a new language, with both facilitating and inhibiting effects (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). This is how CLI mechanizes: learners consult their knowledge and experience from primary languages and their learning strategies to facilitate their new language learning (McManus, 2021).

But what researchers neglect is the fact that learners, besides consulting primary knowledge and learning strategies, tend to compare different language systems in the process of acquiring a new language. One study found that higher proficiency learners are more adept at metacognitively overseeing and managing the transfer of rhetorical structures from their primary to new language. This advanced level of metacognitive control is characterized by their ability to compare and evaluate rhetorical conventions across languages. This shows correlation between learner's comparative awareness and their English proficiency, indicating that comparative awareness facilitates the development of a multilingual repertoire. Consequently, pedagogical interventions aimed at sharpening this comparative awareness—

through explicit mini-lectures or guided discussions on interlinguistic contrasts—can empower students to self-monitor and refine their writing choices.

CLI Among Chinese EFL Learners

Research has shown that Chinese EFL learners tend to rely on their Chinese language in the process of learning English (as L2 or Lx), regardless of their English proficiency. This reliance on the native language serves as a common compensatory strategy when learners face difficulties in producing unfamiliar Lx structures (Zhu, 2014). Even advanced learners often construct sentences that closely mirror the syntactic patterns of Chinese (Zhu, 2014).

CLI at surface language level is widely observed among Chinese EFL learners. Ren (2022) concludes CLI that is observed at surface level of language, manifesting at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels. A meta-analysis revealed that CLI among Chinese EFL learners primarily occurs in the areas of phonetics, decoding, vocabulary, and morphological awareness. This often leads to a variety of linguistic challenges such as errors in spelling, semantic and lexical collocation, inappropriate usage of prepositions, errors in word order, incorrect application of tenses and number. These tendencies can greatly affect the clarity, precision, and overall fluency of their English communication.

The limitation of studying CLI at a surface level is obvious. Much of the research on CLI in Chinese EFL learners has focused on specific linguistic elements. Although these areas are crucial, they do not encompass the entirety of language learning. Key linguistic aspects such as pragmatics, the application of language in various social contexts, and complex syntactic structures may not have been adequately examined.

Besides CLI caused by the differences of language forms, other scholars have explored errors caused CLI among Chinese EFL learners at a deep level. This stage of study focuses on "macro-linguistics", which has a broader perspective of linguistic analysis, including contrastive sociolinguistics, cross-cultural pragmatics, and contrastive rhetoric. These studies probe into intercultural misunderstandings or errors based on cross-

cultural comparisons. However, what they often overlook—when viewed through the lens of the 3-level language comparison structure—is the intermediate level of language differences that influence the process and outcomes of SLA. Future classroom-based studies exploring this specific level could lead to more targeted teaching approaches—such as explicit instruction in rhetorical contrasts or structured practice in integrating simple and compound sentence forms—that address learners' needs more holistically.

Limitations in the Study of Language Difference and Writing Competence

Cross-Linguistic Knowledge as Prior Knowledge

While the prevailing body of research primarily centers on investigating how students establish connections across languages during the writing process, a significant gap exists in recognizing the potential significance of language-difference knowledge as prior knowledge.

The recognition of learners' primary language knowledge and their learning experiences as part of their prior knowledge in Lx acquisition has gained widespread acceptance (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Notably, the emphasis often leans towards the positive influences that arise when language patterns bear similarities between the languages (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008; McManus, 2021). However, the impact of differences between different language, and how these differences might pose obstacles to SLA, are often less discussed.

What these studies tend to overlook is a comprehensive examination of how learners' knowledge of language differences affects their writing competence. Fundamental questions remain unanswered: Is there a positive correlation between learners' writing competence and their understanding of language differences? Can their knowledge of language differences predict their writing performance? Moreover, how does the enhancement of learners' knowledge of language differences influence their writing outcomes?

These inquiries hold profound implications for the teaching and learning of a new language, yet empirical research has yet to provide clear answers.

Addressing these questions can potentially offer educators insights into how to harness learners' awareness of language differences to optimize their writing abilities, and consequently enhance the efficacy of language instruction. By delving into the empirical realm, researchers can provide practical guidance for educators and learners navigating the intricacies of CLI on writing competence.

Furthermore, a more precise understanding of how language-difference knowledge functions as prior knowledge is critical for designing pedagogical interventions that support sustainable multilingualism. Learners who effectively leverage cross-linguistic awareness tend to retain stronger, more enduring multilingual abilities, underscoring the need to integrate research findings into long-term educational policies.

Influence of Intermediate-Level Language Differences

Despite the concerted efforts of researchers to delve into the impact of language disparities on writing outcomes, the existing exploration has primarily concentrated on the surface and deep levels of linguistic differences. Yet, a noticeable gap remains in the comprehension of how language distinctions at the intermediate level specifically influence individuals' approaches to their writing tasks. While some scholars have begun to recognize the potential influence of language differences at this intermediate level, the research conducted thus far has been relatively limited in quantity, scope and research methods.

However, a notable limitation inherent in these studies lies in their narrow scope, as they merely address a subset of the ten differences identified within Lian's (2010) framework. For instance, the work of Shi (2015) predominantly centers on the observation that Chinese EFL learners tend to exhibit a preference for theme-structured sentences rather than subject-structured sentences. Similarly, Peng's study (2023) delves into the concept of "parataxis vs. hypotaxis" as a manifestation of distinct thinking patterns, suggesting that this contrast contributes to challenges in writing. Although Shi and Peng's contributions offer valuable insights, they serve as a reminder that a more comprehensive investigation of the full spectrum of cross-linguistic difference is yet to be undertaken. The current research landscape within Lian's

framework (2010) remains largely unexplored beyond these two areas of focus. This gap highlights the need for more extensive empirical studies that encompass the entirety of Lian's proposed differences, aiming to uncover their varied effects on writing competence within the context of SLA.

Furthermore, the research at this level conducted so far tends to be largely observational in nature without much quantitative study to support their views. This lack of empirical rigor represents a shortcoming in scientifically examining the extent to which these language differences truly influence writing competence. The depth of this influence remains uncharted territory, necessitating a comprehensive investigation that not only observes outcomes but employs systematic empirical methods to quantify the impact.

Besides, the current state of research lacks the necessary depth to comprehensively explore the full extent of the impact stemming from these language differences. Notably, studies conducted by scholars like Shi (2015) and Peng (2023) have predominantly aimed at identifying factors that contribute to difficulties in writing, rather than thoroughly examining the scope to which these language disparities exert influence over writing competence. As a result, the existing study has not provided a holistic understanding of the magnitude of these CLI on the development of effective writing skills.

Crucially, filling these gaps can also inform how teachers and policymakers support multilingual learners in a sustainable manner. By detailing the intermediate-level differences more comprehensively and examining their effects quantitatively, future research can offer data-driven guidelines that foster long-term multilingual proficiency, rather than short-term achievement alone.

Insufficiency in Cross-Linguistic Pedagogy Research

Despite the comprehension of CLI on the process of language acquisition, the current body of research concerning effective teaching methods aimed at heightening learners' awareness of language differences remains inadequate. This limitation becomes particularly evident in the absence of robust empirical studies centered around pedagogical approaches for cultivating cross-linguistic competence. One notable instance is when studies

primarily focus on establishing a relationship between language differences and writing competence, relegating discussions on teaching and learning strategies to the concluding remarks or treating them as tangential components within the article. Remarkably, there is a dearth of research specifically designed to create tasks that foster learners' cross-linguistic competence or to evaluate the efficacy of these aforementioned "strategies."

Furthermore, there exists another scenario where the methods aimed at enhancing learners' cross-linguistic knowledge are treated merely as experimental elements within a broader study rather than being the central objective (Woll et al., 2022; Woll & Paquet, 2021). In such cases where pedagogy is not the primary aim of the research, minimal attention is allocated to thoroughly assessing the effectiveness of these pedagogical approaches.

Addressing these gaps is essential to the advancement of the field. By conducting deliberate pedagogical research that systematically examines the impact of various strategies on learners' cross-linguistic competence, educators and researchers can better equip themselves to design more effective and targeted interventions. Ultimately, through a more comprehensive exploration of pedagogical methodologies, we can contribute to enhancing learners' language learning experiences and improving their overall language proficiency.

Additionally, more robust and sustained cross-linguistic pedagogy research can yield concrete classroom strategies that reinforce learners' multilingual identities in the long run. By nurturing cross-linguistic competence, students are more likely to maintain and further develop their diverse language skills, thus directly contributing to sustainable multilingualism.

Conclusion

This review set out to clarify how heightened awareness of intermediate-level cross-linguistic differences—patterns of expression that lie between surface-level forms and deep cultural frameworks—can shape learners' writing competence in additional language acquisition. Throughout the synthesis of recent studies, it became evident that the influence of these mid-level contrasts, such as preferences for hypotactic or paratactic structures

and varying degrees of complexity or abstraction, extends well beyond isolated error patterns. Instead, these differences represent a critical, yet underexplored, dimension of how learners conceptualize and produce written text, affecting their ability to construct coherent, context-appropriate discourse in the target language.

In addressing this gap, the review highlights the limitations of current research, which often concentrates on surface or deep-level discrepancies at the expense of intermediate-level considerations. While scholarship on Chinese-English contrasts has identified recurring issues—like underusing the passive voice, overreliance on simple sentence structures, and inappropriate conjunction use—these insights have yet to be fully integrated into a systematic understanding of how learners can leverage cross-linguistic awareness to enhance writing outcomes. Furthermore, empirical studies dedicated explicitly to developing and assessing pedagogical strategies informed by these intermediate-level insights remain scarce.

Moving forward, the research agenda should broaden in scope and depth. Studies that employ robust quantitative methodologies and large-scale empirical designs are needed to measure the precise impact of intermediate-level differences. Such endeavors should not only confirm the existence of these differences across diverse language pairs but also evaluate instructional approaches that explicitly foster learners' cross-linguistic competence. For instance, teacher-guided contrastive analysis, targeted consciousness-raising tasks, and curriculum designs that integrate explicit comparisons of expression patterns may better equip learners to navigate linguistic complexities.

Ultimately, refining our understanding of intermediate-level language differences and embedding this awareness into pedagogical practice can support sustainable multilingual development. By helping learners move beyond superficial mastery to a more nuanced grasp of language-specific norms, this approach has the potential to enhance writing proficiency, inform more responsive curricular policies, and enrich the theoretical landscape of SLA research. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for more effective, informed, and enduring multilingual education.

Importantly, refining our understanding of intermediate-level language differences and embedding this awareness into pedagogical practice can be

a powerful driver of sustainable multilingual development. By helping learners move beyond superficial mastery to a more nuanced grasp of language-specific norms, this approach supports the maintenance and growth of multilingual competence over time. As language learners become more adept at recognizing and managing cross-linguistic influences, they not only improve their immediate writing skills but also fortify their long-term ability to operate effectively in multiple languages.

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. First, although this review offers a comprehensive examination of intermediate-level language differences and their impact on writing competence, it focuses primarily on one dimension of cross-linguistic influence (CLI), largely overlooking other areas where CLI may also play a significant role. As a result, the study provides a less encompassing perspective on the broader landscape of CLI. Second, the review relies heavily on Liu's language comparison framework, which, while theoretically insightful, may restrict the range of analytical perspectives. Other theoretical models or approaches could illuminate different facets of language contrast that remain unexplored here. This reliance potentially limits the generalizability and applicability of the findings across diverse language contexts and learner populations. Third, the study is based mainly on extant literature rather than large-scale empirical or quantitative data, making it challenging to precisely measure the scope and intensity of CLI on writing development. Fourth, although potential pedagogical implications are identified, specific instructional interventions have not been systematically designed or empirically validated. Lastly, due to constraints in time, scope, and keywords, some relevant studies may not have been identified or included, leaving the review potentially incomplete. Addressing these limitations in future research—by exploring other facets of CLI, applying alternative theoretical frameworks, conducting rigorous empirical investigations, and designing targeted pedagogical interventions—will be essential for achieving a more comprehensive and widely applicable understanding of how cross-linguistic differences shape Lx writing competence.

Addressing these limitations in future research—by exploring other facets of CLI, applying alternative theoretical frameworks, conducting rigorous empirical investigations, and designing targeted pedagogical interventions—

will be essential for achieving a more comprehensive and widely applicable understanding of how cross-linguistic differences shape Lx writing competence. In doing so, researchers and educators will be better positioned to foster durable, sustainable multilingualism, wherein learners preserve and continually refine their ability to communicate effectively across multiple languages.

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系统综述：中层语差异对语言习得与写作能力的影响

摘要：本文综述了现有关于跨语言影响（CLI）在学习者习得附加语言过程中的研究，重点探讨了学习者对母语与目标语言差异的意识如何影响写作能力。本研究尤其关注中级层面上的语言差异，具体而言是表达模式和使用偏好，以及它们对中国英语学习者写作的影响。研究者利用 Google Scholar 和 CNKI 检索了过去十五年间相关文献，关键词包括"跨语言知识""负迁移"和"写作能力"等。研究结果表明，中层语言差异造成显著的跨语言影响，尤其体现在连词使用、句子结构复杂度、对被动语态的回避以及词汇重复等方面。这些写作挑战主要源于汉英在表达模式上的差异。对比分析（Contrastive Analysis, CA）被证明是一种有效的工具，可用于预测错误、调整教学材料并解释语言现象。然而，目前对于增强跨语言意识的研究仍然有限，尤其是在诸如主从结构和并列结构等中级层面特征方面。该研究强调，亟需更多定量和实证研究来培养跨语言能力并优化教学策略。进一步的探索对于深入了解语言差异如何影响写作表现，以及如何针对中级层面的跨语言影响设计有效的教学方法至关重要。

关键词：跨语言影响；多语言；语言中层差异；教学策略；写作。

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SISTEMINĖ APŽVALGA: VIDUTINIO LYGMENS KALBŲ SKIRTUMŲ ĮTAKA KALBOS ĮSISAVINIMUI IR RAŠYMO KOMPETENCIJAI

Anotacija. Šiame straipsnyje apžvelgiami literatūros šaltiniai, kuriuose nagrinėjama tarpkalbinė įtaka (angl. *cross-linguistic influence*, CLI) asmenims mokantis papildomos kalbos. Pagrindinis dėmesys skiriamas tam, kokią įtaką daro pagrindinės ir tikslinės kalbų skirtumų suvokimas besimokančiųjų rašymo kompetencijai. Analizuojami vidutinio lygio kalbų skirtumai, konkrečiai – raiškos modeliai ir jų vartojimo preferencijos bei įtaka kinų anglų kalbos besimokančiųjų rašymo kompetencijai. Sisteminė naujausių (pastarųjų 15 metų) tyrimų paieška atlikta naudojantis *Google Scholar* ir CNKI įrankiais, taikant tokius raktinius žodžius kaip „tarpkalbinės žinios", „neigiamas perkėlimas" ir „rašymo kompetencija". Rezultatai rodo ryškią vidutinio lygmens tarpkalbinę įtaką, ypač tokiose srityse kaip jungtukų vartojimas, sakinio struktūros sudėtingumas, pasyviosios kalbos vengimas ir žodžių kartojimas. Šiuos sunkumus visų pirma lemia kinų ir anglų kalbų raiškos būdų skirtumai. Tyrimai parodė, kad Kontrastinė analizė (KA) yra veiksminga priemonė, taikoma klaidoms numatyti, mokymo medžiagai pritaikyti ir kalbos reiškiniams paaiškinti. Tačiau vis dar nedaug mokslinių tyrimų, susijusių su tarpkalbinio sąmoningumo plėtojimu, ypač vidutinio lygio hipotaktinių ir parataktinių struktūrų atžvilgiu. Tyrime pabrėžiamas poreikis atlikti daugiau kiekybinių ir empirinių tyrimų, siekiant ugdyti tarpkalbinę kompetenciją ir išsamiau apibūdinti pedagogines strategijas. Tolesni tyrimai padėtų geriau suprasti, kokią įtaką kalbų skirtumai turi rašymo rezultatams, ir sukurti efektyvius mokymo metodus, skirtus vidutinio lygmens tarpkalbinės įtakos keliamoms problemoms spręsti.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: tarpkalbinė įtaka; daugiakalbystė; vidutinio lygio kalbų skirtumai; mokymo strategija; rašymas.