

# *The Error Analysis and Teaching Research of Chinese Special Sentence Pattern*

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**Abstract:** The Ba construction is a special sentence pattern in Chinese with specific features. There is no corresponding sentence pattern in Spanish. The Ba construction runs through every stage of teaching Chinese as a foreign language because it is difficult for learners whose native language is Spanish to master. Supported by error analysis theory, this paper, based on a current corpus and the daily homework of Chinese learners whose native language is Spanish regarding the use of the character Ba, carries out a quantitative analysis of biased errors in the use of Ba. Using the "surface strategy classification" approach, the biased errors are placed into five categories: ellipsis, annexation, analogy, wrong order and other. This paper analyses the causes of the biased errors from the perspectives of "interlingual bias" and "intra-lingual bias" and proposes feasible suggestions for the teaching of the Ba construction in Chinese as a foreign language with a focus on teachers, teaching activities and teaching materials.

## 1. Introduction

The study of the Ba construction in traditional grammar was initiated by Li Jinxi (1924), who put forward the "object being taken away" concept. Wang li (1985) pointed out that the manner of "disposal" is to use the auxiliary verb "Ba" to put the target word before the narrative word, an idea with important reference value for later scholars. Cui Xiliang (1995) studied the use of the Ba construction and the typical format of the Ba construction, respectively. Fan Xiao (2001) and Lu Bizong (2010) also carried out research in this field. For nearly 10 years, traditional grammar research targeted the Ba construction in a detailed manner, and scholars conducted various studies. This construction has unique characteristics from many perspectives, such as the mode of syntax, language typology, natural language processing, phonology, grammar, and the theory of interface. Study of the Ba construction has been advanced with the gradual introduction of Western linguistic theory.

In the research on teaching Chinese as a foreign language in different countries, most of the studies on errors are conducted with native English speakers or learners from Asian countries such as Japan and Korea as the research objects. There is no research on the Ba construction in Chinese learners

whose native language is Spanish. The research on language acquisition errors in learners whose native language is Spanish focuses mainly on word order and phonetics.

The Ba construction has always been one of the most important parts of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, as it is frequently used in Chinese and involves rules pertaining to verbs, the conditions of the components appearing before and after verbs, and the semantic meaning of sentences. The predicate of the Ba construction cannot be a verbal component connoting thought, feeling, existence or possession, and the predicate should not be simply formed. The object of the Ba construction must be qualitative. Regarding the disposal characteristics of the verb in the Ba construction and the qualitative features of the object, the "Grammar Outline of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language " provides a detailed explanation of the matters that require close attention in the use of the Ba construction. The "Accreditation of Standards on Chinese Level and Grammar Outline" divides grammar knowledge of the Ba construction into four levels, namely, A, B, C and D, and offers an introduction. Level A is the most important knowledge and the knowledge that Chinese learners should master first. Grammatical knowledge of the Ba construction is distributed across Levels A, B, C and D, with a greater concentration at Levels C and D.

The grammatical functions of the Ba construction are similar to those of prepositions. Although Spanish is rich in prepositions, there is no word corresponding to the Chinese word Ba in grammatical function, nor are there "disposal"-category sentences in Spanish. Therefore, there is no construction in Spanish that corresponds to the Ba construction in Chinese semantically or syntactically. Therefore, it is impossible to conduct comparative analysis of this construction between the two languages, and Spanish-speaking students may make many types of grammatical and semantic errors when acquiring the Ba construction. Chinese is a unique language that lacks morphological alternation; it relies on word order and function words to express the meaning of sentences. In terms of external structure, the difference between the Ba construction and ordinary subject-predicate sentences is the word order. The preposition "Ba" enables the object to appear before the predicate verb. The main differences between Chinese and Spanish lie in word order. Spanish is an inflected language that mainly indicates grammatical relations through word forms. There are a variety of complex forms of inflection, and there is little flexibility in the word order in sentences. Spanish uses complements called situation complements to indicate time, place and manner, and these can move freely and without changing the meaning of a sentence and can be placed before or after the predicate verb; they can also be placed at the beginning or end of a sentence. Therefore, it is likely difficult for Spanish students to master the word order of the fixed structure that characterized the Ba construction. Corder's (1981) definition of errors, error analysis theory and the interlanguage hypothesis offer insight into the errors made by Spanish learners in learning the Ba construction, and the influence of the difference between Spanish and Chinese on students learning the grammar of the Ba construction is analysed in accordance with the general hypothesis put forward by Ellis (1985).

## **2. Error Analysis of the Ba Construction in Spanish Students**

We retrieved 44 Ba constructions from a Spanish student corpus and a corpus of written language produced by overseas students in the College of Chinese Language and Culture, Jinan University. Of the examples, 34 were correct sentences and 10 had errors, for an error rate of 22.7%. By collecting the daily homework of 89 Chinese learners at the Macma teaching institute in Madrid, Spain, 165 cases with Ba construction errors were obtained, for a total of 175 sentences with errors. In the process of error analysis, we described and classified the errors according to the learners' errors and used the "surface strategy classification" method to classify the Ba construction errors into the omission,

annexation, analogy, wrong order and other categories. There are no expressions corresponding to the Ba construction in Spanish, so students can change the surface structure of a sentence in adopting the Ba construction; as a result, the word Ba may be omitted from a sentence or may be generalized with mistakes in word order.

The types of Ba construction errors made by Spanish students were primarily related to ellipsis and mistakes in word order. There are strict rules governing the predicate verb and the object of the Ba construction, which leads to the commission of errors, among which the predicate verb ellipsis and ellipsis of the Ba phrase are the most common. Regarding order errors, the incorrect positioning of adverbial clauses and incorrect placement of objects are most frequently seen. There are no disposal verbs in annexation, and errors involving the adding of Ba after or before emotion or sensory verbs account for a relatively large proportion of the mistakes made. In addition, the phenomenon of the generalization of the word Ba and the Ba construction is also frequently seen. The other types of mistakes made mainly appear when the reference is uncertain, which leads to errors.

### 3. An Analysis of the Reasons for Errors in the Ba Construction

Corder (1981) described "errors" as a series of grammatical errors caused by learners' lack of sufficient knowledge of the target language that learners cannot correct themselves. Error analysis is the systematic analysis of the errors made by learners in the process of second language acquisition and how these emerge to understand the laws of second language acquisition. The theory of error analysis in Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language (TCFL) is based on the interlanguage hypothesis, which holds that the main factors leading to learners' errors are negative transfer of the mother tongue, the generalization of target language rules, learning strategies and communicative strategies. These errors can be divided into "intralingual errors" and "interlingual errors". Interlingual errors are caused by the interference of the learner's mother tongue with the target language, while intralingual errors are caused by incomplete or inductive errors in the mastery of the rules of the target language. Spanish and Chinese are syntactically different, and the impact of the negative transfer of the native language on students' acquisition of the Chinese Ba construction leads to interlingual errors. Students apply the grammatical rules of the Ba construction taught by their teachers to other sentences, and these analogies are made based on the external syntactical form, which leads to overgeneralization of grammatical rules and hence to intralingual errors. This paper explains the specific errors based on the two categories of "interlingual errors" and "intralingual errors" and analyses the reasons for the Ba construction errors made by Spanish students using the following three categories: negative transfer of the mother tongue, overgeneralization of knowledge of the target language, and teaching and textbook development.

#### 3.1. Subject Ellipsis Caused by Negative Transfer of the Native Language

In the error corpus, of the 175 Ba constructions containing errors, 9 have errors involving the omission of the subject. The reason for this omission is that in Spanish, the position of the verb changes according to the subject. The inflected form of the verb directly indicates the subject condition of the sentence. When the subject is a personal pronoun, the subject is often omitted in Spanish and expressed directly through the conjugation of the verb. Taking the most basic verb in Spanish, "ser (to be)", as an example, the six morphological changes in the verb to express first, second, and third person and the singular and plural are shown:

*Table 1: Personal pronouns in Spanish*

The base form of the verb ser	The first person (I/We)	The second person (You)	The third person (You, He, She/They)
Singular	soy	eres	es
Plural	somos	sois	son

The conjugation of the verb changes based on the subject, indicating whether the subject is I, you, he, we, or they. Therefore, the nominative personal pronoun can often be omitted in sentences, and sentences that omit the subject are very common. Consider these examples: \*Ba haixian huifan gaosu dajia zenme zuo. (\*Tell everyone what to do with the seafood risotto)\*Bu neng ba diandong feiji huan gei ni hen kuai. (\*I can't give you the electric plane back soon). As these two sentences are expressed in Spanish, the subject can be expressed through the conjugation of the prototype verbs "decir" and "no poder" to "digo" and "no puedo". There is no need to add the subject before the verb, so the subject is omitted due to the influence of the native language when the students express their thoughts in Chinese.

### 3.2. Incorrect Placement of Objects and Adverbial Clauses Due to Negative Transfer of the Native Language

In the 175 sentences with Ba constructions, there are 43 sentences in which the object or an adverbial clause is placed in the wrong position. Changes in word order in Spanish have little effect on sentence meaning, while in Chinese, word order is very important, and adjectives must be placed before the nouns they modify, as in “new book” and “red cup”. Adjectives in Spanish are usually postpositional, being placed after the nouns they modify, as in “un libro nuevo (a book new)” and “una copa roja (a cup red)”. The use of the wrong order in the Ba construction by Spanish-speaking students is influenced by the grammatical rules of their native language. The following is an example: \*Laoshi ba zhongguo jie women zuo de na dao yiqi. (\* the teacher put the Chinese knot we do together.)

The word order flexibility in Spanish is also reflected in the fact that the position of a situation complement can be moved at will. In Spanish, the situation complement is usually used to indicate time and place, functioning similarly to adverbial clauses in Chinese, and the position of such complements in a sentence is not fixed. When students study the Ba construction, they mistakenly put adverbial clauses of time and place at the end of the sentence. In Spanish, for example, "it is customary to open a gift in front of a friend". The incorrect placement of negative adverbs is also due to the fact that there is no equivalent of the Ba construction in Spanish, and the negative form of the verb in Spanish is achieved by adding the negative word "no" before the verb, as in "drink: beber, not drink: no beber". Therefore, influenced by their native language, students tend to forget to place the negative word before the Ba. An example is “I can't speak Chinese very well\*”.

### 3.3. Avoiding Ellipsis and Using the Ba Construction

Of the 175 sentences with Ba construction errors, there are 20 sentences in which the word Ba has been replaced by other words or expressions. These sentences should use the word Ba considering the semantic and pragmatic context, but the students chose to use other expressions instead of the word Ba or the Ba construction. Examples include \*Luyisi, fang ni de dongxi zai pangbian na ge yizi shang, ranhou zuo zhe. \*Na zhi baise de gangbi shi wo de, ni keyi na gei wo ta me? (\* Louis, put your things on the next chair and sit here. \* the white pen is mine. Can you give it to me?). There is no need to use special sentence patterns in Spanish, and there is no Spanish expression corresponding to the Ba construction, so students translate sentences into Chinese word for word.

Deja tus cosas en la silla de al lado y siéntate.  
Fangxia nide dongxi zai yizi pangbian de he nizuoxia  
The same can be seen in an interrogative sentence:  
Esa pluma blanco es mía, Puedes pasármela?  
Zhezhi gangbi baisede shi wode, nineng digeiwota

In pasármela, "me" is the dative pronoun, which refers to the indirect object of the verb, "me", and "la" is the object pronoun; "pluma (pen)" is the direct object of the verb. The phrase thus means "Pass me it (the pen)". The word Ba is needed in the corresponding Chinese phrase. In Spanish, the verb is closely related to the direct object and indirect object, which are all expressed in a single word, so students often translate from Spanish directly and omit the Ba construction.

### 3.4. Annexation Caused by the Over-Generalization of Target Language Knowledge

According to the statistics, of the 175 sentences with Ba construction errors, 26 showed evidence of annexation. Most of these involved the mis-adding of the word Ba to expressions of sense, mentality or perception. In S-V-O sentences, and from the grammatical point of view, most verbs can be used as predicates of a sentence, including relational verbs and psychological and perceptive verbs. Since these verbs can be used as predicates, some students form sentences such as "Wo ba keben you" ("I have my textbook"). This is because Spanish-speaking students do not fully understand the rules regarding verbs expressing relationship and psychological perception in the acquisition of the Ba construction, as such verbs cannot be used as predicates in Ba phrases. Students mistakenly think that the preposition Ba is used to advance the elements to be highlighted in the sentence irrespective of semantic meaning, and they mechanically place the predicate verb in the sentence accordingly. They also ignore the "dispose" meaning of the Ba construction. Some intransitive psychosensory verbs are mistakenly used in this structure by Spanish students in daily expression, causing additional errors. The following are examples: \*Wo zai caochang da lanqiu, ta hen yuan jiu ba wo kanjian. \*Wo he wo de pengyou ba huoguo feichang de xiguan. (When I was playing basketball on the playground, he saw me from a distance.\* My friends and I like hot pot very much.)

### 3.5. Analogy Caused by the Over-Generalization of Target Language Knowledge

Of the 175 Ba sentences with errors, there were 24 sentences with generalized analogy errors. After learning the Ba construction, students have a preliminary understanding of it, but they still do not grasp the inherent semantic characteristics and fail to properly consider the context of the Ba expression, which leads to excessive generalization and analogy errors in practical application, such as \*Wo jintian yao hen zao huijia, jiudian ba shuijiao. \*Wo de zuihao de yige pengyou xiage xingqi yao ba jiehun la! (\* today I will go home early and go to bed at nine o' clock.\* One of my best friends is getting married next week!). Semantically, the verbs "sleep" and "get married" have no disposal meaning in themselves, as they do not entail any definite change or result to something. "Wo jiudian shuijiao" ("I go to bed at nine o' clock") and "Wo pengyou jiehun" ("my friend is getting married") are complete subject-verb structures; as a result, the Ba construction is not suitable here. Cui Xiliang (2005) carried out research on European and American students to study the characteristics of their preposition acquisition and their typical errors and found that Chinese learners whose native language is most likely to use prepositions among European and American students, which is related to the fact that Spanish has abundant prepositions. Students often misuse prepositions when they are not familiar with them, for example, \*Ta ba shouji da dianhua gei wo (He called me

on his mobile phone). Instead of using the preposition "with", the student used Ba. The word "phone" is the subject; "he" is not the disposal object.

### 3.6. The Omission of Sentence Components Due to the Over-Generalization of Target Language Knowledge

Of the 175 sentences with errors, 44 sentences exhibit the omission of sentence components and 9 exhibit subject omission caused by interlingual errors, and 35 exhibit the omission of predicate verbs, objects and complements due to over-generalization of targeted language knowledge. An example is \*Duibuqi wo ba ni de yifu zang le. (I'm sorry I made your clothes dirty). The predicate in the Ba construction must contain an action verb with the meaning of "dispose", which can be replaced by an adjective. Here, "dirty" can only be used as a complement, indicating the state of the object "clothes" after the transformation caused by the action, and there is no predicate verb. Consider another example: \*Zheli ge ni yaoshi, yong zhege dade keyi ba jiaoshi de men kai. (You can use this big one to open the door of the classroom). "Open" is an independent verb that does not connote disposal. It cannot indicate a result, change or state with respect to the object after the execution of an action. Therefore, the result complement must be added after the verb.

The object of most Ba constructions is the known information mentioned previously, and the object of the action should be clearly indicated when the action's disposal of the object causes a certain change or result. To avoid repetition, a pronoun can be used for replacement, but omission is not allowed. Sometimes, students will omit the object part of the Ba construction because it has been mentioned already. Consider the following example: \*Zhe jiju hua ruguo yao dengdao yihou shuo wo pa laibuji, suoyi xianzai jiu ba shuo chulai. (\*I am afraid it is too late to say these words later, so I will say them now). There are also complement omission errors such as \*To translate the text into Chinese. "With the action verb "translate", the object "this text" after the word "Ba" is changed into another thing that has an equivalent relationship, so it is necessary to add a complement after the verb to indicate such a relationship.

### 3.7. Other Errors Caused by the Over-Generalization of Target Language Knowledge

Of the 175 Ba construction sentences with errors, 11 have other types of errors. Students' deficient mastery of the rules pertaining to the object and the predicate verb in the Ba construction lead to improper use of predicate verbs and errors related to the uncertainty of the object, such as \*Women jintian tong guo le yixie jihui ba yixie mengxiang cheng zhen. (\* we today through some opportunities to make some dreams come true). "Come true" is an intransitive verb that cannot be used as a predicate verb in the Ba construction; rather, it should be changed to a transitive verb to express the meaning of "come true". Since the transitive verb must be followed by other components, the tense auxiliary "le" can be added to indicate that the action has been completed. Another example is \*Xiwang ni hui guo hou xiang shenme jiu ba shenme de dao. (\*I hope you can get whatever you want when you come back to the country). Semantically, the Ba construction should enable the occurrence of certain changes and results through the action of "disposal". Therefore, the object of disposal of the action should be clear and is not meant to illustrate a habit or a reason. Uncertainties regarding the object of the Ba construction can be categorized under the condition of the absence of a finite reference, which is not necessarily expressed with the Ba construction.

*Table 2: The error types and the reason analysis.*

Error Types	Specific Circumstance	Immanent causes (From the Spanish language point of view)	Quantity	Percent
Interlingual Errors	Subject Ellipsis	Verb conjugation	9	41.1%
	Incorrect placement of object or adverbial modifier	Flexibility and arbitrariness of word order	43	
	Ellipsis	No corresponding sentence pattern by literal translation	20	
Intralingual Errors	Annexation	The rules governing predicate verbs are not well understood	26	54.9%
	Analogy	Inability to judge semantic context	24	
	Ellipsis of sentence components	Insufficient understanding of the content of the sentence	35	
	Other	Unfamiliar with the rules governing predicate verbs and objects	11	

#### 4. Recommendations for Teaching the Ba Construction

The Ba construction is a sentence pattern unique to Chinese and does not appear in Spanish, so how to teach it to Chinese learners whose native language is Spanish has become a core problem. Based on the analysis of the errors and their causes in the two sentence patterns acquired by Spanish native speakers, this paper provides several suggestions for the teaching of the Ba construction in TCFL related to teachers themselves, teaching methods and textbook development.

##### 4.1. Recommendations for Chinese Teachers' Self-Improvement

Chinese teachers should have a certain understanding of the native language of Chinese learners so that they can help students learn Chinese faster and more effectively by comparing the features of expression between the two languages. At present, Spanish is not widely taught in China, and there are very few people who know Spanish, especially among professionals teaching Chinese to Spanish students, so it is difficult to help students learn grammar knowledge through comparison between Chinese and Spanish. Taking the Macma teaching institute in Madrid, Spain, the source of the error corpus in this paper, as an example, most of the Chinese teachers in this institute do not have professional Spanish learning experience and mainly use Chinese in the daily teaching process. From the perspective of TCFL teachers themselves, instructors should have in-depth mastery of Chinese grammar and constantly learn more about the basic grammar of students' mother tongue so that they can not only carry out more targeted teaching based on comparison between the two languages but also help students analyse the causes of their errors more accurately and effectively.

##### 4.2. Recommendations on Teaching Methods

In the actual teaching process, and in accordance with the different stages of students' learning, instruction on the Ba construction should progress from the simple to the complex and from general knowledge to difficult knowledge in terms of structure and meaning. For example, when Spanish students first learn the Ba construction, they will omit the subject of the sentence, so they should pay attention to the integrity of the sentence structure in the initial stage. In the process of teaching, Chinese teachers should focus on semantics and context and fully combine the three aspects of grammar, semantics and pragmatics. In addition to the structure of the Ba construction, they should explain the special semantics and pragmatic functions is has with specific examples. For example,

when explaining the S+V+in/to+place structure of the Ba construction, emphasis can be placed on the semantic meaning of the sentence to highlight the change in the position of something (O) caused by a certain action.

In addition, if teachers place too much emphasis on the Ba construction and induce students to select special sentences to express in class, this may lead students to think that the Ba construction is more widely applicable, and they are more likely to use Ba constructions in writing and speaking. Once the expression is used inappropriately, generalization occurs, as in \*Chunjie de shihou, quanjia ren yao ba fan chi zai yiqi tuanju. (\*During the Spring Festival, the whole family to eat meal together reunion).

#### 4.3. Recommendations on the Presentation of the Ba Construction in Textbooks

In addition to the introduction of sentence structure and example sentences, more attention should be paid to the explanation of points on which Chinese learners are prone to make errors. For example, more content and example sentences should be added to explain the restrictions on predicate verbs in Ba constructions to reduce similar errors in the acquisition of the two sentence patterns by foreign students. In the existing teaching materials, the exercises relevant to the Ba construction are isolated and should be combined with specific context in the design of the textbook, with specific dialogues or a clear semantic background so that the students can both master the grammar of the Ba construction and accurately understand in what circumstances the Ba construction should or should not be used. Existing textbooks also focus too much on the presentation of knowledge. The Ba construction is generally taught intensively in the primary stage of TCFL, and some more complicated structures are introduced in the intermediate stage. In the advanced stage, the relevant knowledge is seldom reviewed or consolidated. As such, students lack corresponding practice and consolidation after initial exposure to the Ba construction. Therefore, textbooks can be supplemented with more relevant knowledge according to the difficulty level, and the content and knowledge can be taught across different textbooks in a step-by-step manner.

#### 5. Conclusion

In this paper, comparative analysis between Spanish and Chinese was conducted by reviewing the existing Chinese textbooks and explanations of the Ba construction in the curriculum. There are no expressions corresponding to the Ba construction in Spanish. There are differences in grammar rules between Chinese and Spanish, and these lead to different types of errors in the acquisition of the Chinese Ba construction by Spanish native speakers. One hundred seventy-five Ba sentences with errors were identified in an integrated analysis of a corpus and the daily homework of Spanish students. According to the surface strategy classification approach, the Ba construction error types were divided into ellipsis, annexation, analogy, wrong order and other categories. Each category was specifically and thoroughly analysed to determine the causes of the errors based on the concepts of interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Finally, through the analysis of students' errors and the causes of these errors, this paper puts forward teaching suggestions focusing on teachers themselves, teaching methods and textbook development to help Chinese learners whose native language is Spanish master the Ba construction.

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