

# Study on Teaching Strategies of *bǎ*-Sentence Structure\*

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“把” (*bǎ*)-Sentence is an important part of Chinese teaching. Taking *bǎ*-Sentence in the HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus as the object of study, the writer summarizes the errors that foreign students make when they learn and use the *bǎ*-Sentence, explores the causes of these errors under the guidance of the theories of the inter-language and error analysis, and gives corresponding teaching suggestions in this study.

*Keywords:* *bǎ*-Sentence, errors, teaching suggestions

## Introduction

The *bǎ*-Sentence refers to an active sentence which uses the preposition “把” to shift the object (the receiver of an action and the object for disposal) to before the predicate verb. Therefore, the *bǎ*-Sentence structure is also called a disposal structure. Its semantic characteristics develop from the preverbal object theory and disposal theory to a broad disposal theory including the causation theory. With the deepening of research, scholars and experts have come up with more detailed and exact definitions. Currently, it is generally agreed that the *bǎ*-Sentence structure is a disposal structure, which indicates that an action represented by the predicate verb is applied to the object introduced by the preposition “把” so that the object produces a certain result, undergoes a certain change, or remains in a certain state. Firstly, the predicate verbs, especially monosyllabic verbs, in the *bǎ*-Sentence structure cannot appear alone generally, which are usually accompanied by complements, indirect objects, dynamic auxiliaries (generally indicating the completion of the action), or the same verbs as the predicate verbs (verb reduplication). Secondly, the object (the direct object) in the *bǎ*-Sentence structure is generally somebody or something that is definite, known, and often preceded by a modifier, such as “this” and “that”. Thirdly, the predicate verb in the *bǎ*-Sentence structure is generally a transitive verb that exerts influence on the object. Therefore, intransitive verbs, judgment verbs, directional verbs, mental verbs, etc., cannot be used as predicate verbs.

## Analysis of Errors Made by Foreign Students

The language materials of this article come from the “HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus” of Beijing Language and Culture University. During the *bǎ*-Sentence retrieval among wrong sentences, a total of 585 *bǎ*-Sentences with errors are found, among which random samples of 200 sentences are taken for study. It is

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\* **Acknowledgements:** This paper is supported by Beijing Municipal Education Committee research Foundation SM201610009004; the Belt and Road National Talent training base project of NCUT; the outstanding Young Innovative Talents Program of NCUT (2017); Youth research and Innovation Fund of NCUT (1743025).

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found that errors of foreign students in using the *bǎ*-Sentence structure can be classified into five groups, namely, avoidance, generalization, misuse, omission, and disorder. The statistics of the error rate and such error analysis show the major errors made by foreign students clearly.

### Error Types

**Avoidance.** Avoidance refers to the error made without using the *bǎ*-Sentence structure when requirements for the *bǎ*-Sentence structure are met in terms of the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. According to statistics, there are 76 cases of this type of error, accounting for 38% among the entire error types. For example:

- (1) 他对我要求特别高, 因为我是独生子, 所以他的全部希望寄托在我身上。

*He expects too much of me because I am the only child. So all his hopes rest on me.*

- (2) 我想这个庙搬到山下怎么样?

*How about my idea of moving this temple to the foot of the mountain?*

This kind of sentence conforms to the semantic requirements of the *bǎ*-Sentence structure. They will be correct *bǎ*-Sentence as long as “*bǎ*” is added with slight adjustment of the sentence. Avoidance of “*bǎ*” is the main type of error made by foreign students, which reflects their inaccurate grasp of the *bǎ*-Sentence structure. Due to their vague conception of the *bǎ*-Sentence structure, they adopt the strategy of avoidance.

**Generalization.** In contrast to avoidance, generalization refers to the error made by using the *bǎ*-Sentence structure when such sentence structure is not needed in terms of the syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. There are 38 cases of this type of error, accounting for 28.5% among the entire error types. For example:

- (3) 但是经过自己独立地反复地思考, 把我慢慢地变成了一个能够独立判断的人。

*But after thinking independently and deeply, I slowly became a person who could judge independently.*

- (4) 故事中把三个和尚之间发生的问题和那个结果给我们表示的意思是这样的。

*This is what we got from the problems that occurred among the three monks in the story and the result.*

- (5) 把舌头太卷的话, 没有声音, 反倒把舌头卷松一些的话, 像哑巴想尿的声音似的, 怎么办?

*If the tongue is rolled up, there is no sound, but if the tongue is rolled loosely, the sound is like a dumb man wants to pee, what is to be done?*

These three sentences will become correct when the character “*bǎ*” is removed.

**Misuse.** Misuse refers to the error of wrong collocation in constructing the *bǎ*-Sentence structure when the *bǎ*-Sentence structure is required in terms of the semantics and pragmatics. This type of error includes the misuse of predicate verbs, objects, and complements. There are a total of 44 cases of this type of error, accounting for 22% among the entire error types.

- (6) 一般的年轻人如果在家里发生这样的问题, 有可能把这样的问题在外面泄气, 这样的话, 他跟他的父母之间的代沟永远不可解决。

*If such a problem occurs at home, a young man may generally seek an outlet outside. In this case, the generation gap between him and his parents will never be solved.*

- (7) 我认为尤其是来华留学生比别的情况的人把这个“滋味”了解得更深一些, 我也是来华留学生, 曾经尝过好几次这种“滋味”, 也几乎每日都尝。

*I think that foreign students who come to China in particular understand this “taste” more deeply than others do. I am also a foreign student and have tasted this “taste” several times, and still taste it almost every day so far.*

(8) 我会思考犯的过错, 不会是唉声叹气, 不会变得一蹶不振, 而是要加倍的努力, 把以往丰收的经验思考, 从零开始。

*I will think about the mistakes ever made. I will not sigh or complain. I will not become depressed. Instead, I must double my efforts and think about the past harvest experience and start from scratch.*

The three sentences are misuses of the predicate verbs. Among the error of misuse, there are 31 cases of the misuse of predicate verbs, which occupy a very high proportion. It also shows that foreign students have insufficient grasp of predicate verbs when learning the *bǎ*-Sentence structure. Among the three sentences, “泄气 (xiè qì)” (discouraged) in the Sentence (6) is an adjective, which cannot be used as a predicate in the *bǎ*-Sentence and should be changed to “发泄 (fā xiè)” (vent). “了解 (liǎo jiě)” (understand) in the Sentence (7) is a mental verb for the expression of cognitive state, which cannot be used as a predicate verb in the *bǎ*-Sentence. In the Sentence (8), the characters “思考 (sī kǎo)” (think) and “经验 (jīng yàn)” (experience) are not properly collocated. “思考 (sī kǎo)” (think) should be changed to “总结 (zǒng jié)” (summarize).

(9) 他决心把我们的语文能力提高。

*He is determined to improve our Chinese abilities.*

(10) 如果我奶奶来荷兰, 她总是把几本汉语课本给我带来。那个时候学习写汉字不过是一个爱好, 所以我并不努力。

*If my grandma came to the Netherlands, she always brought me a few Chinese textbooks. Learning to write Chinese characters at that time was just a hobby, so I did not work hard.*

The two sentences are misuses of the objects. There are a total of three cases of this type of error. In the Sentence (9), “能力 (néng lì)” (ability) cannot be combined with the verb “提高 (tí gāo)” (improve) and should be changed to “水平 (shuǐ píng)” (level). In the Sentence (10), the object “几本汉语课本” (a few Chinese textbooks) is not something definite and known, so the modifier “这” (these) or “那” (those) should be added.

(11) 他把行李掏了半天。

*He took things out of his luggage for a long time.*

(12) 我把我的声调怎么改也改不了了。

*I can't change my tone.*

These two sentences are misuses of the complements. There are a total of 10 cases of this type of error. In the Sentence (11), “半天 (bàn tiān)” (half day/a long time)” indicates the extension of time instead of a kind of state. Therefore, “半天” cannot be used as complement in the *bǎ*-Sentence in terms of semantics. In the Sentence (12), “改也改不了了” acts as a complement for possibility, indicating the result and trend of the action may not be realized. There is no meaning of disposition, so the *bǎ*-sentence structure cannot be used here.

**Missing.** Missing refers to the error caused by the lack of a sentence component, mainly the predict verb or the component after the predicate verb, in the sentence. There are a total of 28 cases of this type of error, accounting for 14% among the entire error types.

(13) 为了方便, 他们商量怎么样能把这些工作更轻松一些。

*For the sake of convenience, they discuss how they can make this work easier.*

(14) 我决定了, 一定要考上大学, 为了报答他的关心, 也为了我的未来, 那天开始我把书朋友, 很拼命地学习。

*I decided that I must go to college. In order to repay him for his care about me, and also for my future, since that day I began to regard books as friends and studied hard.*

The missing of the predicate verbs is mainly caused by the foreign students' poor understanding of the structure of the *bǎ*-Sentence, that is, "S + *bǎ* + N + V + others". These sentences meet the requirements for the use of the *bǎ*-Sentence. They will become correct sentences so long as the appropriate predicate verbs are added. There are eight cases of this type of error.

(15) 他们开玩笑地把火柴吹, 不让新娘顺利地地点烟。

*They jokingly blow the matches to keep the bride from lighting the cigarette.*

(16) 他也来不及和老师的弟弟自我介绍等, 先用英语、汉语把病情介绍, 转达意思。

*He did not have time to introduce himself to the younger brother of the teacher, either. He first introduced the illness in English and Chinese and conveyed the meaning.*

Errors of the two sentences are caused by missing of components after the predicate verbs. The error cause is that they do not conform to the semantic requirements of the *bǎ*-Sentence. The predicate verbs in the *bǎ*-Sentence cannot stand alone, especially monosyllabic verbs. Usually the predicate verbs need to be followed by complements, objects, dynamic auxiliaries, or the same verbs as the predicate verbs (verb reduplication). This type of errors occurs relatively more. There are 20 cases in total.

**Disorder.** Disorder refers to the error of word order caused by the misplacement of sentence components in the *bǎ*-Sentence structure. There are a total of 13 cases of this type of error, accounting for 6.5% among the entire error types.

(17) 但是要生活下去的话把应该做的事情自己做完全。

*But to live, we should complete what should be done.*

(18) 别的和尚问他“秘诀是什么”, 他把这个和尚告诉了以前的事。

*Other monks asked him for "the secret". He told the monk the previous things.*

This type of error includes the wrong order between the predicate verb and the noun and the wrong order between the direct object and the indirect object. As long as the corresponding sentence components are rearranged, the sentences will be correct.

### Summary

From the above error types, it can be seen that avoidance accounts for the largest proportion, followed by generalization. The former is when the *bǎ*-Sentence should be used but not used and the latter is when the *bǎ*-Sentence should not be used but used. It also shows that foreign students are ambiguous about the concept of the *bǎ*-Sentence when learning and using the *bǎ*-Sentence. They do not grasp the disposition meaning of the *bǎ*-Sentence and have misunderstanding of its structure of "S + *bǎ* + N + V + others". So it is difficult for them to determine whether to use the *bǎ*-Sentence or not.

### Causes of Errors

Causes of these errors fall into two categories: objective and subjective causes. The former is mainly caused by differences in language systems and cultural backgrounds, including the influence of the learner's mother

tongue, the influence of the target language, and cultural differences. The latter includes the length of time for foreign students to learn Chinese, their learning methods and strategies, and the teaching of Chinese teachers. They all have an impact on the use of Chinese by foreign students.

### **Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue**

In the process of learning a foreign language, the use of mother tongue by a learner can affect his/her learning of a foreign language. The fact that some components of the mother tongue are different from those of a foreign language results in a negative influence on the command of the foreign language. The most common is the negative transfer of morphology and syntax. Although the negative transfer of mother tongue may have some impact on learners' learning of a foreign language, it is also a method to help learners quickly understand the target language at the early stage of learning a foreign language. As long as they are guided during the learning process, they can also turn the negative transfer of mother tongue into positive transfer.

### **Influence of Target Language**

Due to the inadequate grasp of the target language, students make errors when they mechanically apply the insufficient and limited target language knowledge that they have learned to the new language phenomenon. This type of error is called "over-generalization" in psychology. Among the errors of the *bǎ*-Sentence, avoidance is just the error made by foreign students when they do not know whether they should use the *bǎ*-Sentence and then fail to use it due to their insufficient grasp of the *bǎ*-Sentence.

(18) 长辈们有这种想法是因为他们用他们的生活态度以及价值观强加于晚辈的身上, 他们常常用一句老话去教那些年轻人: “我走的桥比你们走的路还多”。

*The elders have this idea because they impose their attitudes and values on the younger generation.*

*They often use the old saying to teach young people: the bridges I once crossed are more than the roads you have walked.*

This sentence is wrong because it does not use the required preposition of “把 (*bǎ*)” but misuses the preposition “用 (*yòng*)” (use). Although “用 (*yòng*)” (use) as a preposition can mean “take, use”, and it is plausible in meaning, yet “用 (*yòng*)” (use) has no disposition meaning and is not an action verb, so it cannot be collocated with the verb of “强加于” (impose) behind. The error is made because the foreign students use other words or sentences they are familiar with to replace the *bǎ*-Sentence under the influence of the target language when they have not had a good command of the *bǎ*-Sentence and cannot use the correct sentence pattern.

### **Cultural Differences**

Different countries have their own cultural customs and language habits, which leads to different expressions and interpretations of the same image in different countries. As a result, language learners will make errors on the expression of images when they learn and use foreign languages. For example, the vocabulary words of China and South Korea differ in the expression of meanings. These vocabulary differences directly lead to the inaccurate expression of foreign students in the use of Chinese, resulting in semantic ambiguity and errors of missing and misuse.

### **Insufficient Learning Time**

The level of Chinese language depends largely on the length of time students spend in learning Chinese. In terms of the errors caused by foreign students at different levels, those at the advanced level make fewer errors in

the use of Chinese, and the types of errors are also few. In the process of using the *bǎ*-Sentence, the errors made by foreign students at the advanced level (Level A) are mainly avoidance and misuse. Foreign students at the intermediate level (Level B) also make errors of avoidance and misuse mainly, but they also make errors of missing and generalization. Foreign students at the elementary level (Level C) mainly make errors of avoidance, generalization, and missing. They also make errors of misuse and disorder. This also reflects the gradual progress from the simple to the complex and from morphology to syntax in the process of the foreign students' learning the *bǎ*-Sentence.

### Learning Methods and Strategies

Every language has certain learning methods, know-how, and the sequence of learning. Once you have mastered the correct method of learning, the process of learning a foreign language will become simple and smooth. For example, if you want to learn Chinese, you must learn Pinyin first, then match Pinyin and Chinese characters, then understand the meaning of Chinese characters, and finally learn grammar. Similarly, to learn English, you must first learn phonetic symbols, then learn to spell and understand the meaning of words, and finally make sentences according to grammar. This is the basic process of learning a foreign language, but each person has a different learning strategy, which will have different effects on the acquisition.

### Teaching Suggestions

(1) For the foreign students' ambiguous understanding of the semantics of the *bǎ*-Sentence, teachers can teach step by step with detailed presentation. The disposition meaning of the *bǎ*-Sentence can be explained as a whole from the macro level and in the following order: An action represented by the predicate verb is applied to the object introduced by the preposition “*bǎ*” so that the object produces a certain result, undergoes a certain change, or remains in a certain state. This can make foreign students have a general definition of the *bǎ*-Sentence. Then make lexical explanation of the *bǎ*-Sentence. Firstly, the predicate verbs, especially monosyllabic verbs, in the *bǎ*-Sentence structure cannot appear alone generally, which are usually accompanied by complements, indirect objects and dynamic auxiliaries, or the same verbs as the predicate verbs (verb reduplication); secondly, the object (the direct object) in the *bǎ*-Sentence structure is generally somebody or something that is definite, known, and often preceded by a modifier such as “this” and “that”. This explanation can greatly reduce the errors of missing made by foreign students when using the *bǎ*-Sentence.

(2) For the foreign students' weak command of the *bǎ*-Sentence structure, teachers may adopt a step-by-step teaching strategy and follow the principles of from easy to difficult, simple to complex, and concrete to abstract. Teaching of the *bǎ*-Sentence structure can start from the simplest and most basic *bǎ*-Sentence, from simple to complex, and from easy to difficult, which is conducive to students' understanding.

(3) For different errors made by foreign students at different levels, teachers can use the method of stratified teaching to teach the *bǎ*-Sentence. The so-called stratified teaching is group teaching based on the difference of students' existing knowledge and ability and teaching different knowledge to students at different levels at each stage. It is teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. As shown in the comparison of the errors made by foreign students at different levels above, students at different levels make different errors. Teaching can be improved according to main errors of different foreign students. For foreign students at the elementary level (Level C) with less Chinese knowledge and a low level of Chinese, they can be taught from simple *bǎ*-Sentences

with explanation of words and phrases to help them lay a solid foundation and reduce the errors of missing; foreign students at the intermediate level (Level B) have mastered a certain amount of Chinese vocabulary and sentence patterns. Therefore, starting from the structure of the *bǎ*-Sentence, teachers can analyze the semantics and pragmatics of the *bǎ*-Sentence in detail and correct their errors of misuse and generalization; foreign students at the advanced level (Level A) have a relatively high level of Chinese. Therefore, teachers can start comparative teaching of vocabulary and sentence patterns to help them distinguish between similar words and occasions of different sentence patterns so as to effectively reduce their errors of avoidance and misuses.

### Conclusion

By analyzing the language materials in the “HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus”, we can see that in the process of using the *bǎ*-Sentence, the errors that foreign students make are mainly avoidance and generalization. The root causes of the errors are the foreign students’ ambiguous understanding of the semantics of the *bǎ*-Sentence and weak command of the *bǎ*-Sentence structure.

Pay attention to practice and strengthen context teaching. Simulation of context can create a good language environment for foreign students to communicate. While explaining the semantics and pragmatics of the *bǎ*-Sentence, teachers should also provide students with drills of the *bǎ*-Sentence to combine theory with practice. Sentences are isolated units. Only when individual sentence is connected can a complete discourse be formed. Therefore, for the teaching of the *bǎ*-Sentence, teachers should set up different contexts and teach in specific contexts, such as verbal context and written context, to strengthen the foreign students’ understanding and feelings of the disposition meanings of the *bǎ*-Sentence and help them have a macro-command of the *bǎ*-Sentence.

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