

# A Comparative Study of Chinese Degree Adverb “tai” by Zimbabwean Students

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**Abstract** The Comparative study of Chinese Adverbs of Degree has always been a missing task by Zimbabwean students learning or studying Chinese language as a Second Language. This has therefore brought the misunderstanding and misuse and incorrect use of many Chinese Degree Adverbs by Zimbabwean students. The use of Chinese Degree Adverb “tai” has been in the main centre of debate by Zimbabwean students learning Chinese language at the Confucius Institute of Zimbabwe during their Chinese classes due to its ambiguous use in Zimbabwean Shona and English speakers. Due to a great extent of how Shona language has been influenced by English language this article aims to identify and show the errors and causes of the errors faced by Zimbabwean students when learning Chinese Degree Adverb “tai”.

**Keywords** Comparative Study, Degree Adverb, Shona, Chinese, Zimbabwean students, Errors

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, China's economic strength has continuously improved. Learning Chinese and Chinese culture will help pave the way for further business transactions and international communication. For most Zimbabwean students learning Chinese and Chinese culture is without no benefits. There is a profound friendship between China and Zimbabwe since the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe, with the number of people learning Chinese increasing. Although many achievements have been made in Second language Acquisition such as English, the acquisition of Chinese language and especially Chinese Degree Adverbs appears to be making no easy headway. The challenges faced by Zimbabwean students learning Chinese at the University of Zimbabwe dealing with Chinese degree adverb “tai” have resulted in the appearance of many grammatical errors. The errors have also been attributed to local causes emanating from the local mother tongue influence. However, it is precisely because of this imperfection that I participated in the relevant research of second language more meaningful. What is the relationship between mother tongue and target language in the field of second language learning? As a linguist, Stephen D. Krashen has a high position in the field of language research. His research works have attracted the attention of scholars. This paper also refers to his research achievements in second language. Before starting a research,

every scholar often has determined the object and direction of his research. The key point that Mr. Krashen just mentioned in his second language acquisition research is the difference between “acquisition” and “learning”. The difference between the two is the main problem of the study, in which there are other subtle knowledge points, such as the role of the two in the process of learning a second language. “Learning” and “acquisition” cannot be confused. They have essential differences and cannot be transformed or adapted to each other. “Learning” in learning a second language cannot be changed into “acquisition”. In a sentence, using adverbs of different degrees will make the sentence have different meanings, so it is very important to choose the right adverbs. The reason for the analysis of the errors of degree adverbs is that for most Zimbabwean students, Chinese degree adverb “tai” is easy to be ignored. The general idea is that this part of knowledge is simple, but in fact, many people can't even identify the sentences with degree adverbs errors. In addition, compared with other Chinese grammatical errors, the error rate of degree adverbs is also higher. A good research result is conducive to reducing the error rate of the acquisition of degree adverbs and improving the correct rate of use. More and more attention has been paid to the error of degree adverbs in modern Chinese. In recent years, scholars have made substantial achievements in either ontology research or in combination with teaching Chinese as a foreign language. As we all know, Chinese is a complex language, so the need for a deep research in grammar to help learners understand and master the correct usage of degree adverbs and avoid misuse particularly Chinese degree adverb “tai” which has been the centre of this research. Chinese degree adverb “tai” is the equivalent of English degree adverb “too” and the equivalence of Shona degree

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adverb “Zvakapfuurikidza”.

## 2. Study Background

The influence of Shona language on the second language is very significant in all aspects of communication. When used with a second language, the grammatical pattern, structure, expression and meaning of Shona language are usually contrary to its expected meaning. It is impossible to deal with Chinese degree adverb “tai”. Degree adverb “tai” in Shona language usually express opposite meanings, different meanings, exaggerated meanings caused by different reasons described in this paper, resulting in a number of errors. The shortage of qualified local Chinese trained teachers is mainly manifested in the lack of local teachers. Combined with the basic information statistics of this questionnaire, the mother tongue students who receive the questions learn Chinese in the classroom, and the teachers are all Chinese teachers. Chinese teachers have obvious advantages. They have a deep understanding of Chinese culture. Some Chinese teachers may use English as an interlanguage for teaching when they encounter some complex problems that cannot be explained clearly in Chinese. This is because when the interpretation of Chinese cannot be understood by students, they naturally think of using other languages instead, and English is the most widely used language, Most teachers themselves don’t know Shona very well; This leads to the whole teaching process of Chinese and English. After the degree adverb “tai” is translated into Shona, the meaning and rules of use will change, but this change is not very obvious, so it has been ignored by teachers. The differences in translation are easy to ignore, but it must be admitted that this difference can become the “culprit” of errors. The structural defects of Zimbabwean Chinese textbooks are a major problem and challenge faced by Zimbabwean Chinese students. Zimbabwe also lacks auxiliary learning reference books corresponding to textbooks. From the time of publication of the dictionary, intermediate textbooks play a transitional role. These defects are reflected in the examples of “accuracy” and “practicalities”. Synonyms will be widely used in the notes of the vocabulary part of textbooks. Chinese culture, Chinese proverbs, some sentences are explained clearly, but some do not explain the context of use, which makes students mix up, indicating that the use of textbooks is not strong. In addition to the main textbooks, other bibliographies only appeared in recent years, relatively late, lagging behind Chinese and English. Because I have a clear understanding of the situation in our country, I choose Zimbabwean Chinese textbooks for discussion. The contents of Chinese textbooks at different stages are very different, the elementary, intermediate and advanced textbooks are difficult, and the elementary textbooks are simple in content. This inaccurate annotation is easy to lead to students’ understanding deviation. Once the wrong understanding of vocabulary is formed, it is difficult to change, and

grammatical deviation will also occur in the use process. There is still a lot of room for the development of Chinese Shona dictionaries. The lack of textbooks will increase the difficulty of students’ learning Chinese, and it is not conducive to the correct use of Chinese grammar without independently improving the conditions for learning Chinese especially pertaining to the acquisition of Chinese degree adverb “tai” by Zimbabwean students learning Chinese language. Tapera Anyway in his 2017 graduation thesis mentioned how Zimbabwean students learning Chinese language face difficulties in using Chinese degree adverbs due to reasons dealing with the influence of mother tongue. Mushangwe and Musona in their 2014 journal also pointed out how Zimbabwean students commit grammatical errors when speaking or writing Chinese language. due to how Shona language is structured that finds it very difficult even for students dealing with Chinese degree adverbs such as “tai”. According to Bai Xiao Hong 2007 a Chinese degree adverb is usually placed before an adjective or before a verb. In Shona this rule is different in the sense that Shona degree adverbs are usually placed after an adjective or after a verb. The relevance of Chinese degree adverb “tai” by Zimbabwean students is very crucial and therefore requires more attention.

## 3. Methodologies

The Researcher used a large number of sources to collect data or samples in this research survey. First, the researcher created a relevant literature library to look for similar situations in Chinese and journals. The author drafted a set of questions, asked students to answer questions about age, gender, learning level and so on, and compiled research forms. Most students participated through chat videos, while others participated through telephone contact. If it weren't for the pandemic, the author would have actually made an appointment to meet with other students to really tell their experience in Chinese classes. The research methods used in this paper mainly include:

- (1) Questionnaire method:
- (2) Interview method

I couldn’t analyze the errors of all students whose mother tongue is Shona in learning common degree adverb “tai”. Therefore, in considering the distribution of students whose mother tongue is Shona, the main reason was that most of the students were undergraduate and master's students from all regions of Zimbabwe where Shona may not be their mother tongue. I also selected the students whose mother tongue is Shona in University of Zimbabwe in the past one year to sort out the degree adverbs used by these students in their homework and communication, and make a detailed analysis of the biased sentences when using degree adverb “tai”.

### 3.1. Research Questions

- What types of Errors do Zimbabwean students make

when using Chinese Degree Adverb “tai”?

- What are the main causes of the Errors?
- How can Zimbabwean Students remedy their Errors?

### 3.2. Tools of Study

Due to limited articles written or published around the area of Chinese Degree Adverb “tai” in comparison to its equivalent Shona Degree Adverb. This research has used various tools in order to get sufficient data and evidence before analysis such as students’ homework, interviews and questionnaires. In this regard the research can stand and prove beyond doubt that Zimbabwean students face many challenges dealing with Chinese Degree Adverb “tai”.

### 3.3. Analysis of Data

The sample was made up of students’ homework, questionnaire that was distributed to the students, and interviews carried on phone and on whats-app platform. This research took a thorough 1 year of gathering data and that is from early 2021 up to this year.

## 4. Data Analysis

This study was not conducted overnight, but through long-term data collection, observation and testing, and then came to the final conclusion. The conclusion shows that because learners have differences in presenting their learning characteristics and behaviors, a large number of collected materials were helpful to observe more learners. Generally speaking, learners were affected by various conditional factors, such as; The differences in textbooks used, teachers’ dialects, academic ability background, students’ proficiency level, learning environment and so on, all affected the characteristics and behavior of a student. Therefore, the behavior and characteristics of a student may not represent a group or the whole students. I am happy to say that the data of this paper can be traced back to 2021, the third year of my PhD degree in Hebei University. It is a challenge for Zimbabwean students to master the Chinese degree adverb “tai” when learning Chinese. It has been found long ago that although Chinese is used by many people, it is one of the most difficult languages. The Researcher has captured the challenges faced by Chinese international students from some academic publications and found that many challenges come from the use of Chinese degree adverbs. Zimbabwean students have always known the difficulty of dealing with Chinese degree adverb “tai”. When seeking more information about how to use Chinese degree adverb “tai”, the author increasingly felt that it was crucial to master Chinese adverbs. Therefore, a large number of surveys were carried out to acquire knowledge of Chinese degree adverbs for Zimbabwean students by using various resources. However, there are too many degree adverbs in Chinese. A considerable number of Zimbabwean students, no matter what their HSK level, still made mistakes when facing the challenge of the second language. During the period, some of

the survey results had special reference value. It was worth mentioning that through the way students answered the questionnaire to understand their behavior, it can be analyzed how this affected the daily dialogue of Zimbabwean students, and then help them stand out in the field of Chinese characters and culture. I believe that Zimbabwean students who participated in this survey could find that this research was of great benefit to their Chinese class learning when dealing with Chinese degree adverb “tai”.

**Table 4.1.** Errors made by HSK 1-5 Students

HSK1	HSK2	HSK3	HSK4	HSK5
20 Total	20 Total	20 Total	25Total	15 Total
15 G	10 G	15 G	20 G	10 G
5 B	10 B	5 B	5 B	5 B

The survey was carried out to a total of 100 students at the University of Zimbabwe Confucius Institute. A total of 70 girls and 30 boys participated in the survey. Students of HSK level 1 included 15 girls and 5 boys both had Chinese classes for a period of 6 months. Students of HSK level 2 included 10 girls and 10 boys both spent 1 year learning Chinese. HSK level 3 students included 15 girls and 5 boys who spent 1 and a half year learning Chinese while HSK level 4 students included 20 girls and 5 boys who did spend 2 years of learning Chinese. The students of HSK level 5 had 10 girls and 5 boys having spent 3 years of learning Chinese.

**Table 4.2.** “too/tai” rate of Errors

Adverb	Omission	Mixed	Misorder	Redundant
“ta”				
	6%	13%	6%	15%

The total errors committed by students reveals that redundant errors had the highest rate followed by mixed errors. The following table shows errors committed by each HSK level group during their attempt of the questionnaire.

**Table 4.3.** Students errors per level

HSK1	HSK2	HSK3	HSK4	HSK5
15%	10%	6%	2%	1%

The table above is a report on how each HSK level group students committed the errors dealing with the use of Chinese degree adverb “tai”.

**Table 4.4.** Types of errors by students’ level

Error	HSK1	HSK2	HSK3	HSK4	HSK5
Omission	3%	2%	1%	N/A	N/A
Mixed	7%	4%	1%	1%	N/A
Misorder	3%	2%	1%	N/A	N/A
Redundant	7%	4%	2%	1%	1%

Ma Zhen (2016-2017), “Tai” and “Ji” are two degree adverbs with similar meanings. They both belong to the degree adverbs indicating deep degree. They can't be used

for comparison, let alone for comparison, but there is a difference. The degree of "Ji" seems to be deeper, and the more important difference is in style, color and emotional color. From the perspective of style and color, that is, "Ji" is mostly used in writing, but generally not in spoken language, such as;

1. That thing is too funny, so it can't be said to be fun, "too", which is commonly used in both spoken and written languages. "Too big" or "too wide" only objectively indicates that the beauty of things has reached the peak. It is too beautiful. "Too big" or "too wide" not only indicates that the degree of beauty is very high, but also has a strong emotional color of the speaker. Therefore, in most cases, "too" and "extremely" cannot be interchanged. "Too", accompanied by emotional color, there are two kinds, one is admiration, such as; "Too beautiful, too good, too precious".

## 5. Types and Causes of Errors

### 5.1. Omission Error

The purpose of this study is to find out the errors of Zimbabwean students in using Chinese degree adverb "tai". The causes of deviations and errors are also discussed in detail in this chapter, so I just want to refer to other parts of deviations and errors used in this article for a little analysis. I will use a few sentences from the research corpus. By the way, the students made some mistakes and deviations in the trial questionnaire survey such as omission of degree adverb "tai". When making these mistakes, students never thought that they made these mistakes because of different factors. The author makes an in-depth analysis of the biases and errors in this study, which can help many Zimbabwean students learn Chinese. Many scholars have also made a detailed analysis of the errors of Chinese degree adverbs from various angles. In these studies, the problem of omission bias is analyzed without exception. For students whose mother tongue is Shona, there are many omissions and errors of degree adverbs in their questionnaire answers, which can be regarded as a common type of errors. Shona language also has degree adverbs, but the number is not large. When used, the grammatical sequence principle and usage are not exactly the same as Chinese degree adverbs. In Chinese, the degree adverb can be used as an adjective, but in Shona, this usage does not conform to grammatical rules. Some of the examples of the students making omission errors are as follows;

- (他们目前麻烦) (They have been of late troublesome)  
This sentence should be corrected as follows;
- (他们目前太麻烦) The omission of (too/tai) makes this sentence have no adequate implication and lacks correct expression on the use of the Chinese Degree Adverb in question.

### 5.2. Redundant Error

From the research results, redundant errors and biases are

the overuse of degree adverbs, which is not necessary. When students make mistakes or mistakes in this survey, they never really thought they have made mistakes or prejudices. This research has opened the eyes of many Zimbabwean students learning Chinese. Considering the grammatical structure of Chinese and the grammatical structure of Shona, these findings should not shock readers. No matter whether the below example sentences show more mixed use and miss order errors, this chapter has solved and analyzed all the error types found in this study, without any bias. From the perspective of the structural characteristics of biased sentences, redundant errors often refer to the use of adverbs of degree in sentences that have been used in expression and writing, or when there is no need to add adverbs of degree. The error sentence is classified: a concept of comparison, without comparison, it is impossible to judge the level of degree. The following is an example of a redundant error used by the Zimbabwean students.

- 今天特别太热。(Today is extremely too hot)

This sentence according to Shona students it has no error but according to Chinese grammar there is an unnecessary use and overuse of a degree adverb. The sentence must be corrected and appear as;

- 今天太热/今天特别热。(Today is too hot/Today is extremely hot).

### 5.3. Word order Error

The improper use of a word is called disorder, and its influence is called disorder error. When using Chinese degree adverb "tai", we must ensure that the degree adverb is in the correct position in order to give the correct meaning or expression. Adverbs, adjectives or verbs, so if degree adverb "tai" is expressed not in an orderly way, the meaning will be incorrect. For example;

- (好了太。)(good too) In English this expression of "too" works as an auxiliary not as an adverb.

In English and in Chinese this does not mean anything but In Shona language this sentence means (Kunaka zvakananyanya) (too good). In Shona language most degree adverbs are placed after an adjective or after a verb. This sentence therefore has a word order error and must be corrected in Chinese as follows; (太好了) meaning (too good).

### 5.4. Mixed Error

There are many concepts used to analyze bias and errors in grammar, but the author chose the concept of mixed bias, which is considered easy to understand. The research produced four kinds of biased sentences, and some biases are a little complex to determine sentence errors. We will discuss the four errors found in the survey. Redundancy bias, omission bias, mixed bias and error bias. The higher the level of beginners, the greater the bias of Chinese grammar. The author found that most commonly used degree adverb "tai" appear at the hsk1-3 level. It is observed that long sentences are more biased than short sentences, especially for hsk1-3

students in hsk4-5. Due to their learning level, there is little bias. In one of my previous Chinese class, I found that one of our lecturers from southern China was difficult to understand. Compared with the standard northern dialect, it was difficult to understand his lecturer. This is another problem that leads to some biased errors. Chinese degree adverb “tai” is part of difficult Chinese grammar. Chinese grammar is difficult to understand, and many errors are even made by Chinese students when using degree adverb “tai”. The following are some of the examples from the answers found from the questionnaire granted to the students;

- (太有你的) In Shona this means (You are really something). However this sentence in Chinese has a mixed error. The use of “tai” was not suppose to be used.

It must be corrected and written as follows as Chinese correct grammar;

(真有你的) In English it means (You are really something.)

### 5.5. Causes of Errors

- ♦ Influence of Mother Tongue
- ♦ Lack of teaching emphasis of “tai”
- ♦ Deficiency of Teaching materials

## 6. Teaching Strategy

### 6.1. Improvement of Teaching Viewpoint

Learning a second language requires a similar flow of teachers and students, so that students will not lose confidence in themselves and teachers. Teachers and students should be encouraged and advised to relax and teach a second language. Chinese degree adverbs teaching needs a systematic method to reduce the pressure on teachers and students that learning a new language is one of the most difficult thing in life. I should reiterate that for students learning a second language, falling in love with learning a foreign language is crucial and important; Love that person's culture and the way they do business, eat, believe and so on. A language is not just a language without culture. The author suggests using a "fleeting" teaching type, because it has the flexibility of use especially in the areas of degree adverbs acquisition.

### 6.2. Targeted Teaching Strategy

Targeted teaching should be a skill that every language teacher should have in order to be aware of the language found in various biases and errors. Chinese degree adverbs is a special grammatical category, which must be considered. There must always be an analysis to get the expected results in teaching foreign Chinese degree adverb “tai”. Determine and consider the age of students in order to give priority to appropriate teaching content. In a community where interested people introduce foreign languages, there is usually prejudice against students of different ages,

especially those who do not like one-on-one lessons. This class leads to biased analysis of language acquisition. Only until there are many second language teachers, teachers should create classes according to different target groups. Effective methods should try to make students better understand teachers and be able to show their abilities. Teachers should adopt some concepts to allow students to freely give their opinions on language acquisition ability. Chinese degree adverbs are such complex grammatical categories, because they usually use one action or adjective every time one wants to express, so they need to be interesting. No matter the target group, every Chinese teacher should master the skill of targeted teaching. About the targeted teaching of Chinese degree adverbs, one needs to consider three aspects: Teaching for the specific situation of the errors of degree adverbs, teaching for the interests of different learners at different ages, and teaching for the ontological characteristics of Chinese degree adverbs. The reason why one need to consider the pertinence of the types of errors of Chinese degree adverbs is that many errors cannot be avoided in second language learning, because there will be more or less errors in the learning of each language.

### 6.3. Improvement of Teaching Materials

Over the years, with the rapid development of Confucius Institutes around the world, many students who want to learn Chinese have sprung up sharply. The challenge of textbooks is one of the most challenging factors that affect the smooth operation of any Chinese courses. The textbooks used by Confucius Institutes are a little difficult for most Zimbabweans because they are written and published in Chinese. The type of content in the books are usually the Chinese background suitable for learning in China. Textbooks suitable for Chinese speaking students may be helpful. The standard Chinese dictionary is the current answer. Therefore, due to the influence of English, great language confusion has been caused. Improving the Chinese textbooks currently used by Zimbabwean students should be a priority. Some Zimbabwean linguists have always suggested translating the existing Zimbabwean language textbooks into Chinese. Together with the Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe, the author began to compile dictionaries of Chinese and Shona at all levels.

## 7. Conclusions

For everyone, learning a second language has always been a difficult task, especially if there is no geographical relationship between the second language and the learner's mother tongue. Learning a second language not only includes how to speak, read or write, but also includes appreciating the culture, religion, society, politics, lifestyle, business, economic structure and everything enjoyed in daily life of the second language speaker. The comparative study of Chinese degree adverb “tai” and its equivalent Shona

degree adverb lead students to encounter many errors in this study. The difference between Chinese degree adverb “tai” and its equivalent Shona degree adverb is huge. Some common mistakes faced by Zimbabwean students are; Omission error, redundancy error, wrong sequence error and mixed error. The reasons for these errors are; Insufficient attention in teaching, errors in teaching materials, difficulties and challenges in Chinese. The Researcher continues to recommend some possible solutions to Zimbabwean students to reduce the reasons for errors in acquiring Chinese degree adverb “tai”. Some suggestions include; Improvement of teaching ideas, targeted teaching, comparative teaching, The author solemnly promises to ensure that whether the teaching perspective is in line with Zimbabwean Chinese students also directly affects the results of Chinese teaching. At present, there is also a great debate about the best choice of teaching views. Every Chinese teacher, should master targeted teaching skills and also need to consider the types of bias of Chinese degree adverbs, because bias is inevitable in second language learning. As mentioned above, each language learning will be more or less biased. There are various types of bias and reasons. I feel that this paper will give many Zimbabweans a chance to improve their acquisition of Chinese degree adverbs.

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