ABSTRACT: In the last few decades, the field of Chinese as a second language (L2) has witnessed some significant advancement in the study of pedagogy of Chinese as L2, most noticeably in the areas of teaching Chinese sound system, Chinese characters, and Chinese grammar. However, there has been a general lack of research on acquisition and pedagogy of discourse grammar, such as the process of effective learning and using various grammatical elements and constructions in discourse. Consequently, most curricular of Chinese as L2 pay little or no attention to discourse grammar and students receive little or no training for discourse proficiency, especially in composition. For example, students of intermediate Chinese often choose not to use or avoid using Chinese grammatical patterns (e.g. the bā/bèi construction and the topic-comment construction) in discourse or communication even though they have officially learned them.

This study aims to explore issues related to the acquisition and pedagogy of Chinese discourse grammar of word order as L2. Using theoretical frameworks, such as Interactionist Approach (e.g. Mackey et al 2013; Gass & Mackey 2007), Contrastive Analysis Approach (e.g. Xing 2011), and Interlanguage Theory (e.g. Selinker 1992), developed in the field, this study analyzes word order errors in over 500 essays (approximately 20,000 Chinese characters) written as required course assignments by US college students. Focus of this study will be on three types of errors: 1) lack of coherence among different sentence patterns, 2) misuse of the bā/bèi construction, and 3) misuse of sentential word order. Based on quantitative analysis, this study will show that the three types of word order errors in the students’ essays are directly related to pedagogical and acquisition content and procedures, in addition to cross-linguistic interference. The result of this study suggests that word order variations (e.g., when to use the Topic-Comment construction, the bā/bèi construction rather than the Subject+Verb+Object construction) have to be taught and learned in context, and that typological differences between Chinese discourse structure and that of students’ native language (i.e. English) must be implemented into the curriculum of Chinese as L2. Without these measures, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for students to acquire Chinese discourse grammar of word order as L2.

KEY WORDS: word order, discourse grammar, error analysis, Chinese acquisition as L2