



Investigating MAKE Patterns in Learner English Writing: What can Frequency Tell?

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This paper presents the uses of MAKE patterns in writing of Chinese English learners of different proficiency levels. MAKE patterns, such as “make decisions”, “make them have” or “make me happy”, are frequently used in EFL learners’ writing. Previous studies have examined MAKE patterns used by EFL learners, but it is still unclear what the differences are on the uses of MAKE patterns among learners at different proficiency levels. Thus, the present study investigated the different uses of MAKE patterns from a frequency perspective. The study compared MAKE patterns in writings of Chinese English learners at intermediate and upper intermediate levels. Corpus data were extracted from the Language teaching and Testing Center (LTTTC) English Learner Corpus. Findings indicate that learners at the intermediate level use MAKE-VP/ADJ more frequently, while those at the upper intermediate level, use the causative function frequently and the support verb function of MAKE. The choice of verbs in the MAKE-VP structure reflects the learners’ lexical and grammatical control while writing. This study promotes the understanding of MAKE patterns used by different English proficiency level learners, which shed light on the developmental process of general-purpose verbs and other lexicons.

Keywords: MAKE patterns, EFL writing, frequency, proficiency levels

Introduction

In the current study, MAKE patterns refer to the formulaic structures of MAKE, for example, “make decisions”, “make me do something” or “make life colorful”. Formulaic MAKE patterns are the sequence of continuous or discontinuous words with MAKE, which are stored and retrieved as a whole from memory at the time of use. As a general-purpose verb, MAKE occurs early in English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners’ English curriculum, and it is assumed that MAKE should be acquired early in EFL learners’ acquisition process (Hugon, 2008). The frequent occurrence of MAKE often leads to the neglect of instruction in the teaching and learning context. Subsequently, learners only master the superficial or core meanings of MAKE (Gilquin, 2007). Thus, frequently used verbs such as MAKE remain a learning block for many learners (Altenberg & Granger, 2001; Nesselhauf, 2005). Moreover, some MAKE patterns are overused or only used by EFL learners. Like formulas, these MAKE patterns are used as a strategy which the EFL learners can adopt to fill their lexical gaps while writing (Hasselgren, 1994). This can be seen in the following example:

- (1) The warm weather *blooms* the flower.
- (2) The warm weather *makes the flower open*.



If EFL learners have not mastered the lexical verb “bloom” in example (1) or the learners use “makes the flower open” in example (2) to fill the lexical gap. For the MAKE pattern in the example (2), MAKE is used as a causal verb to express the causative function, which is “to make something happen”. Causative use is a major function of MAKE, which is one of the factors that leads to the high frequency of MAKE patterns in EFL learners’ writing, however, this function also increases the learning difficulties of MAKE (Family & Allen, 2015). In other words, it is difficult for EFL learners to map the structure of MAKE patterns with their causative meanings (Bowerman & Croft, 2008).

MAKE and its patterns are also frequently used by Chinese English learners (Zhang & Liu, 2005). Yet, the uses of MAKE patterns in Chinese English writing across different English proficiency levels has been under investigated. Against this background, the present study sets to explore the uses of MAKE patterns in Chinese English learners’ writing at different proficiency levels, with special attention to different functions of MAKE patterns. This study aims to find out the uses of MAKE in Chinese English learners’ writing at intermediate and upper intermediate proficiency levels, respectively, and then to explore how MAKE patterns are used to fill the learners’ lexical gap.

Literature Review

MAKE is a general-purpose verb, which has a variety of meanings and can be used for different functions. EFL learners tend to acquire MAKE at an early stage of the English learning process (Brown, 1973; Pinker, 2009; Wunderlich, 1997) and frequently use it in their writing (Altenberg & Granger, 2001; Svartvik & Ekedahl, 1995). Moreover, EFL learners typically hold the view that it is safe to use MAKE patterns to replace words they have not learned (Hasselgren, 1994; Zhang & Liu, 2005). For example, when EFL learners have not acquired lexical verbs such as “guarantee” or “validate”, they might rely on the formulaic MAKE expression “make sure”. As such, EFL learners tend to adopt MAKE patterns as a circumlocution strategy in their writing since they are confident with the early acquired verb MAKE (Khoram & Mirsalari, 2020). EFL learners produce patterns such as “make the nation safer” instead of “guarantee national security” to describe or exemplify the target object when they do not know the exact expression (Hua et al., 2012; Viberg, 1996). The above uses of MAKE are examples of the causative function of the verb, which is productive in EFL learners’ writing since numerous verbs and adjectives can fill the formulaic structure. EFL learners tend to use periphrastic causative MAKE patterns to express causative meanings rather than use lexical causatives directly, for example, “John made Kevin believe the mistake” is more often used than “John convinced Kevin of his mistake” (Zhang & Liu, 2005).

Since MAKE patterns have formulaic syntactic structures, EFL learners can quickly memorize the structures and active them at the time of use (Schmitt & Carter, 2004; Shin et al., 2019). Thus, MAKE patterns are overused by many EFL learners (Ansarin et al., 2021; Oyama, 2020). Altenberg and Granger (2001) conducted a study with eight uses of MAKE being considered, which are “produce something”, a result of creation, “delexical use”, “causative use”, “earn money”, “link verb use”, “make it”, phrasal/prepositional uses and other conventional uses. They found that the causative uses and the delexical uses of MAKE are the two most overused types. The other uses of MAKE only occupy a small proportion. Meanwhile, some studies indicate that for low-proficiency level learners, the “production uses” are the most used meanings of MAKE since it is easy for the learners to connect the structure of the pattern with its meaning (Crossley & Skalicky, 2019). For example, in the pattern of *make a cake*, the object of MAKE is a concrete entity. Thus, English learners’ proficiency level should be considered while discussing MAKE used by EFL learners (Issa et al., 2020).

Another aspect worth considering is that the classification framework of MAKE patterns affect the accuracy of results. In Altenberg and Granger’s (2001) study, some ambiguity existed in the classification of the MAKE patterns; namely, some uses of MAKE share the same syntactic structure. For example, the syntactic structure of “Produce something”, “Delexical uses” and “Link verbs” can be written as MAKE+NP. Although the above three meanings can be interpreted as “to produce something”, there are

some differences. For instance, “make a cake” indicates the production of a concrete entity; “make a law” indicates the creation of something that is abstract; and “make a good teacher” is interpreted as the creation of a good teacher out a person. In Gilquin and Viberg’s (2009) study, the above ambiguity is clarified since they considered both the syntactic structure and the meanings of MAKE. Gilquin and Viberg (2009) explained the differences between the function of “Support verb” and “Production” from the perspective of the object in the syntactic structure of MAKE. The object of “Support verb” functions as being abstract, and the object of “Produce sth.” functions as being concrete. For the function of “Transformation”, Gilquin and Viberg (2009, p. 70) argue that “it is related to the sense of production but is more abstract since it normally does not describe the coming into existence of a new entity, but rather a change with respect to the nature of an entity, the way it is categorized or characterized”. Moreover, Gilquin and Viberg (2009) classified the causative uses of MAKE into two categories, causative-VP and causative-ADJ. They found that causative MAKE-VP is used more than causative MAKE-ADJ by EFL learners. Gilquin (2010, 2016) takes a further step on the causative MAKE-VP structure with the analysis of ‘X MAKE Y V_{inf}’, ‘X be made V_{to-inf}’ and ‘X MAKE Y V_{pp}’. Gilquin found that X MAKE Y V_{inf} is the most used structure by EFL learners.

A final consideration is that the frequency of MAKE influences how learners use it. Frequency is a crucial factor which drives the acquisition of MAKE since the more time the learners experience MAKE patterns, the stronger their memory of it is, and the more fluently the MAKE patterns are accessed (Ellis, 2012; Wei, 2020). There are two kinds of frequency effects: token frequency and type frequency. They play different roles in the language acquisition process. Token frequency accounts for the number of linguistic patterns appearing in the running text. Type frequency counts the number of distinct lexical items that can be substituted into a given slot in a pattern (Bybee, 2013; Ellis, 2017). However, there is a paucity of studies on MAKE patterns from token and type frequency perspectives.

Against this background, the current study explores the uses of MAKE patterns in Chinese English learners’ writing, with special attention to the different functions of MAKE patterns. The study aims to find out the uses of MAKE patterns by learners of different English proficiency levels, with the token and type frequency of the patterns as the focus of concern. Moreover, this study also aims to explore whether MAKE patterns are used to fill the learners’ lexical gaps. To achieve the research aims, the following research questions are proposed:

- (1) What are the differences of MAKE patterns used by intermediate and upper-intermediate proficiency level learners?
- (2) Are MAKE patterns used to fill Chinese English learners’ lexical gaps? If yes, in what ways?

Method

The current study adopted a corpus-based method to explore the uses of MAKE patterns in Chinese English learners’ writing. In the following section, the corpora adopted in the study are introduced and the classification framework of MAKE patterns is clarified.

Corpus Adopted in This Study

The Language teaching and Testing Center (LTTC) English Learner Corpus (ELC) was adopted in current study (Cheung, et al., 2011, LTTC-ELC¹, <http://www.lttecl.org.tw/>). LTTC-ELC is a learner corpus that consists of writing samples by Chinese learners of English who have sat for the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), a language proficiency examination administered by the LTTC. For the

¹ The LTTC English Learner Corpus (LTTC-ELC) is jointly developed by The Language Training & Testing Center (LTTC) and the Graduate Institute of Linguistics at National Taiwan University (GIL, NTU).

intermediate learners, they can use basic English to communicate about topics in daily life and the upper intermediate learners have a generally effective command of English and can handle a broader range of topics. According to the GEPT, the intermediate level of LTTC-ELC is aligned with the B1 level (threshold) of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the upper intermediate level is aligned with the B2 level (vantage) of the CEFR (Brunfaut et al., 2014; Knoch, et al., 2016; Green et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the B1 and B2 level in CEFR correspond to the fourth and sixth level of the China's Standards of English language Ability (CSE) (Council of Europe 2001; National Education Examinations Authority, 2018; Liu, 2019). Thus, the intermediate level of GEPT is aligned with the fourth level of the fourth and sixth level of CSE respectively. The learners' proficiency level in current study is summarized in TABLE 1:

TABLE 1
The Learners' Proficiency Level in Current Study

Learners' level	CEFR	CSE
Intermediate	B1	Fourth level
Upper intermediate	B2	Sixth level

Data Collection Framework

Based on the studies conducted by Altenberg and Granger (2001), Gilquin and Viberg (2009) and Gilquin (2010, 2016), the current study adopted and modified Gilquin and Viberg's (2009) classification framework, as shown in TABLE 2:

TABLE 2
Classification Framework of MAKE Patterns in Current Study

Functions	Syntactic Structure	Examples
Support verb	MAKE+n. abstract	He can <i>make decisions</i> with the help of the computer.
Production	MAKE+n. concrete	I can also <i>make such a delicious pizza</i> by myself.
Transformation	MAKE+n. nature	Most importantly, they don't <i>make bad idols</i> for the society.
Causative-VP	MAKE+pron.+v.	I like him because he <i>made me laugh</i> .
	MAKE+poss.+n.+v.	People can <i>make their dream come true</i> by entering universities.
	MAKE+(art./adj.)+n.+v	This kind of educational system <i>make the poor students bear</i> a lot of pressure.
Causative-ADJ	MAKE+pron.+adj.	Students should work hard to <i>make themselves more competitive</i> in the society.
	MAKE+poss.+n.+adj.	Elites will <i>make our world more prosperous</i> .
	MAKE+(art.)+n.+adj.	It will also <i>make the education in universities more useful</i> .

As shown in TABLE 2, the functions of MAKE in L2 writing are classified into five categories: support verb, production, transformation, causative-VP and causative-ADJ. For the first three functions, they have the same syntactic structure, which is 'MAKE+NP'. This syntactic structure is further divided into three types: the first type is MAKE + n. abstract' in which MAKE is delexically used, as shown in the example "make decisions"; the second type is MAKE+ n. concrete, in which MAKE is used as "produce something" and a new entity will be created, as shown in the example "make a delicious pizza"; and the last type is MAKE + n. nature, in which MAKE is used to produce some force that can change an entity's nature, but no new entity will be created, as shown in the example "make bad idols". With the reference to Gilquin and Viberg's (2009) study, the present research investigated the three functions separately instead of taking them as one kind. The syntactic structure under the causative function is also further examined with the actual data being taken into consideration. The MAKE+NP constructions are further classified into MAKE+ pronoun, MAKE+ possessive pronoun and MAKE+ article+ noun. It mainly concerns the first following word of MAKE on the right side, whether it is a noun or pronoun since Chinese English learners tend to prefer to use MAKE + pronoun/possessive pronoun + verb/adjective (see TABLE 2).

Results and Discussion

This study analyzed the token and type frequency of MAKE patterns, respectively. The token frequencies can reflect which kind of MAKE patterns are preferred by Chinese English learners, and the type frequencies can reflect the productivity of the patterns.

MAKE Patterns Used by Intermediate and Upper-intermediate Learners

Token frequency of MAKE patterns

The Chinese English learners' uses of MAKE were collected from writings by intermediate and upper intermediate levels in the LTTC ELC². All the MAKE patterns are classified according to the classification framework in TABLE 2. The token frequency of MAKE patterns is shown in TABLE 3:

TABLE 3
Token Frequency of MAKE Patterns in L2 Learners' Writing

MAKE Function	Syntactic Structure	Intermediate		Upper Intermediate	
		Token Freq.	%	Token Freq.	%
Support verb	MAKE+n._abstract	51	9.8	124	24.1
Production	MAKE+n._concrete	46	8.8	14	2.7
Transformation	MAKE+n._nature	15	2.9	69	13.4
Causative-VP	MAKE+pron.+v.	136	26.1	54	10.5
	MAKE+poss.+n.+v.	31	5.9	17	3.3
	MAKE+(art./adj.)+n.+v.	19	3.6	44	8.5
Causative-ADJ	MAKE+pron.+adj.	47	9.0	47	9.1
	MAKE+poss.+n.+adj.	47	9.0	35	6.8
	MAKE+(art.)+n.+adj.	18	3.4	37	7.2
Error		37	7.1	15	2.9
Other		74	14.2	59	11.5
Total		521	100	515	100

As mentioned above, the MAKE patterns in Chinese English learners' writings were collected from 1000 sentences that contained the verb MAKE from the online LTTC-ELC. Therefore, the percentage of each function was calculated instead of the normalized token frequency. As shown in TABLE 3, for intermediate learners, the causative uses dominate all the uses of MAKE, with the percentage being 57%. Furthermore, causative-VP is the most used function, with the percentage being 35.6%, followed by the function of causative-ADJ (21.4%). For upper intermediate learners, the functions of Support, causative-VP, and causative-ADJ dominate the uses of MAKE, with the percentage being more than 69%. Moreover, these three functions are relatively evenly distributed in upper intermediate learners' writing, with the Support function being a little higher (24.1%) than other functions. From intermediate to upper intermediate levels, there were obvious increases in the uses of Support, transformation and causative-ADJ functions, while the uses of Production and causative-VP functions decreased. This indicates that the learners' ability to use abstract nouns increased with the development of proficiency. The learners reduced their use of the general verb MAKE + concrete nouns. This indirectly reflects that the learners' cognitive ability to process abstract patterns increased from the intermediate to the upper intermediate level.

When taking the syntactic structure of MAKE patterns into consideration, the intermediate learners use MAKE + pron. + v. most frequently while the upper intermediate learners use MAKE + n._abstract more frequently. The intermediate learners fill the slot of MAKE patterns with a pronoun and a verb, and

² 500 sentences that contain *make* are collected for intermediate and upper intermediate learners respectively.

furthermore, the number of pronouns is limited, so the learners just need to fill the pattern with a verb to complete the expression. For upper intermediate learners, they do not heavily rely on one certain use of MAKE, and with their enlarged vocabulary size, they produce more causative-ADJ patterns and use noun phrases over verb phrases more frequently than intermediate learners.

Type frequency of MAKE Patterns

Token frequency of MAKE patterns alone cannot reflect the full picture of MAKE since the learners might be repeatedly using certain patterns. The productivity of MAKE patterns also requires information about type frequency. TABLE 4 displays the type frequency of MAKE patterns in Chinese English learners' writings.

TABLE 4
Type Frequency of MAKE Patterns

MAKE functions	Syntactic structure	Intermediate	Upper Intermediate		
Support verb	MAKE + n. _{abstract}	28	49		
Production	MAKE + n. _{concrete}	20	3		
Transformation	MAKE + n. _{nature}	7	17		
	MAKE + pron. + v.	39	31		
Causative-VP	MAKE + poss. + n. + v.	17	52	11	56
	MAKE+(art./adj.)+n.+v.	14		29	
	MAKE+pron.+adj.	26		38	
Causative-ADJ	MAKE+poss.+n.+adj.	19	44	15	65
	MAKE+(art.)+n.+adj.	12		21	
Error		36		15	
Other		28		22	
Total		215		227	

As shown in TABLE 4, for both intermediate and upper intermediate level Chinese English learners, the type frequencies of causative uses of MAKE rank in the first place. Thus, causative uses are the most productive type among all the uses of MAKE, especially for the causative MAKE-ADJ function. The type frequency of the Support function ranks second in both levels' writing, and there is an obvious increase from intermediate to upper intermediate level. The same trend was also observed in the uses of the Transformation function. Yet, there was an obvious decrease in the Production function from the intermediate to upper intermediate level. When taking the syntactic structures into consideration, the type frequency of the structure MAKE+pron.+v. is the highest in intermediate level writing, followed by MAKE+n.-abstract and MAKE+pron.+adj., while for upper intermediate level writings, the type frequency of MAKE+n.-abstract is the highest, followed by MAKE+pron.+v. and MAKE+pron.+adj.

MAKE Patterns in “Other” and “Error” categories

A certain number of MAKE patterns are classified into “Other” and “Error” categories, which refer to the MAKE patterns that cannot be classified into the main categories directly due to the learners' misuse or use of “Chinglish”. The errors the Chinese English learners made are as the follow:

- 1) MAKE-noun.
make wrongs/make a wrong; make a money
- 2) MAKE-VP:
 - a. ... the phenomenon does make more students to receive higher education.
 - b. ...some way below that can make you not getting nearsightedness so easily.

- c. ...this makes the house looks like a cage
d. ...it made us had a happy night.
- 3) MAKE-ADJ
... it's make process is convenient.
- 4) MAKE-PREP
make ups

These are the errors produced by Chinese English learners that, cannot directly be classified into the framework. The author classified these sentences by revising the error, as if they were used correctly, and reclassifying them by which type of pattern they should be. Taking the MAKE-VP type as an example, "make more students to receive higher education" should be "...make more students receive higher education" with no "to" in front of verb "receive". According to TABLE 2, the correct pattern should be in "MAKE+(art./adj.)+n.+v." type. The other types of errors are processed in the same way.

These data are important data to reflect the differences of MAKE used by different proficiency level learners. The errors and other MAKE patterns indicate that their development is still in progress. Therefore, the MAKE patterns in the two categories were reclassified to the nearest category of the current study's classification framework, as shown in TABLE 5:

TABLE 5
Classification of "Other" and "Errors" of MAKE Patterns in Chinese Learners' Writing

<i>Syntactic Frame</i>	<i>Other</i>		<i>Error</i>	
	Intermediate	Upper Intermediate	Intermediate	Upper Intermediate
MAKE + n. _{abstract}	9	8	1	1
MAKE + n. _{concrete}	37	1	2	0
MAKE + n. _{nature}	1	1	3	0
MAKE + pron./n. +v.	0	0	26	13
MAKE + pron./n.+ adj.	0	1	3	1
MAKE + prep.	15	10	2	0
MAKE + adv.	1	4	0	0
Phrasal uses	8	22	0	0
Idiom	3	12	0	0
Total	74	59	37	15

TABLE 5 shows the frequency of reclassified MAKE patterns in the "Other" and "Error" categories in Chinese English learners' writing. We can see that, in total, for intermediate learners, there are 74 MAKE patterns in the "Other" category and MAKE+ n. _{concrete} patterns account for almost half, with the frequency being 37. For upper intermediate learners, the total reclassified "Other" category is 59, and phrasal use accounts for a major part, with the frequency being 22. For reclassified errors, the errors about the MAKE+pron./n.+v. constructions account for most in both the intermediate and upper intermediate learners' writing, with the frequency of 26 and 13 respectively. Therefore, MAKE-VP constructions can mostly reflect L2 learners' development on MAKE uses.

With the reclassified MAKE patterns in both "Other" and "Error" categories, all the uses of MAKE in Chinese English learners' writings can be summarized. All the uses of MAKE patterns with the added token and type frequency information of the "Error" and "Other" categories are shown in TABLE 6 and TABLE 7, respectively.

TABLE 6
The Token Frequency of MAKE Patterns with Added Patterns from the Other and Error Categories

Function	Syntactic Frame	Intermediate		Upper Intermediate					
		Token Freq.	percentage	Token Freq.	percentage				
Support verb	MAKE + n. _{abstract}	61	11.7	133	25.6				
Production	MAKE + n. _{concrete}	85	16.3	15	2.9				
Transformation	MAKE + n. _{nature}	19	3.6	70	13.6				
Causative-VP	MAKE + pron. + v.	140	212	26.9	40.8	58	128	11.3	22.3
	MAKE + poss. + n. + v.	31		6		17		3.3	
	MAKE+ (art./adj.) + n. + v.	41		7.9		53		10.5	
Causative-ADJ	MAKE + pron. + adj.	49	115	9.4	21.4	48	121	9.3	23.1
	MAKE + poss. + n. + adj.	47		9.0		35		6.8	
	MAKE+ (art.) + n.+ adj.	19		3.6		38		7.4	
	MAKE + prep.	17		3.3		10		1.9	
	MAKE + adv.	1		0.2		4		0.8	
Phrasal uses	/	8		1.5		22		4.3	
Idiom	/	3		0.6		12		2.3	
Total	/	521		100		515		100	

TABLE 6 shows the token frequency of MAKE patterns in Chinese English learners' writing by adding the patterns from the "Other" and "Error" categories. The rank orders of MAKE functions are not the same for intermediate and upper intermediate learners. For intermediate Chinese English learners, the rank order of MAKE is as below:

Causative-VP > Causative-ADJ > Production > Support verb > Transformation > Phrase use

For upper intermediate learners, the rank order of MAKE uses is as follows:

Support verb > Causative-ADJ > Causative-VP > Transformation > Phrase use > Production

We can see that the "Production" function is more preferred by the intermediate learners. The upper intermediate learners use the "Support verb" function more than the intermediate learners do. The difference between the two functions is that the objects of MAKE in the "Production" function are concrete entities, such as "make a cake or make meals" while the objects of MAKE in "Support verb" function are abstract entities, such as "make a decision" or "make a suggestion". Moreover, the uses of the "Transformation" function of MAKE also increased from intermediate level to upper intermediate level writing. Thus, with the development of learners' English proficiency level, the learners used more abstract objects in MAKE patterns. Specifically, the structure of MAKE+ n._{abstract} is mostly used by upper intermediate learners, while it is the fourth used MAKE structure for intermediate learners.

The next section is the type frequency information of MAKE patterns used by Chinese English learners by adding the MAKE patterns from the other and error categories.

TABLE 7

The Type Frequency of MAKE Patterns with Added Patterns from the Other and Error Category

<i>MAKE Functions</i>	<i>Syntactic Frame</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>		<i>Upper Intermediate</i>	
Support verb	MAKE + n. _{abstract}	37		55	
Production	MAKE + n. _{concrete}	32		4	
Transformation	MAKE + n. _{nature}	11		18	
Causative-VP	MAKE + pron. + v.	43	77	44	70
	MAKE + poss. + n. + v.	17		11	
	MAKE+(art./adj.)+n.+v.	35		29	
Causative-ADJ	MAKE + pron. + adj.	28	47	40	67
	MAKE+poss.+n. +adj.	19		15	
	MAKE+(art.)+n.+adj.	13		21	
	MAKE + prep.	8		5	
	MAKE + adv.	1		4	
phrasal use		1		2	
Idiom		1		2	
Total		215		227	

As shown in TABLE 7, there is not much difference in the type frequency of MAKE patterns for both intermediate and upper intermediate learners. The order of MAKE functions in terms of type frequency is as below:

Causative-VP > Causative-ADJ > Support verb > Production /Transformation > Phrase use

For intermediate learners, the *Production* function of MAKE is more frequently used, followed by the *Transformation* function of MAKE. For upper intermediate learners, the order of the two functions is reversed. The concrete or abstract object in MAKE patterns differentiates the Chinese learners' English proficiency level. This phenomenon indicates that discussion on the uses of MAKE should take the learners' proficiency level into consideration.

Summary

Differences exist in the uses of MAKE patterns by learners of different English proficiency levels. The token and type frequency of MAKE patterns of different functions not only show the preferred uses of MAKE by the learners but reflect the productivity of different MAKE functions. In this section, the differences of MAKE patterns used by intermediate and upper intermediate level Chinese English learners are summarized.

Chinese English learners at intermediate and upper intermediate levels use MAKE patterns differently. From the token frequency perspective, the intermediate learners prefer to use the causative function of MAKE more than the other functions, especially the causative MAKE with verb phrases. The upper intermediate learners mostly used, the "Support verb" function, followed by the causative function. This finding is slightly different from Altenberg and Granger's (2001) study since they concluded that the causative and delexical use of MAKE are the dominated uses. Moreover, the findings from the current study also indicate that the learners' proficiency levels should be considered (Crossley & Skalicky, 2019). As for type frequency, the order of the MAKE functions used by the intermediate learners is the same as the order from the token frequency perspective. As for upper intermediate learners, the type frequency of causative MAKE patterns is higher than that of the Support verb function. This phenomenon indicates that the Chinese English learners overuse some MAKE patterns in the Support function category and the causative uses are more productive than the delexical uses of MAKE. When taking the syntactic structures of MAKE patterns into consideration, the structure of MAKE + pron.+ v. is mostly used from both token and type frequency perspectives in intermediate learners' writings. It indicates that MAKE-VP is the prototype of all the uses of MAKE patterns among intermediate learners and it is easy and safe for

them to fill the prototypical structure with a pronoun. While, for upper intermediate learners, the MAKE+n_ abstract is the prototypical use of MAKE patterns. These findings are in accordance with Sinclair's (1991) claim that the learners avoid common formulaic patterns as much as possible as their proficiency develops. They attempt to produce abstract or rarely used patterns with MAKE to make their writing appear more advanced. Thus, the discussion on MAKE patterns used by different proficiency level learners needs the information of token and type frequency at the same time (Ellis, 2012; Wei, 2020).

With the patterns in "Error" and "Other" categories being considered, the MAKE-VP patterns are mostly misused by Chinese English learners at intermediate and upper intermediate levels, which not only verifies the productivity of MAKE-VP but signals that the verbs in this structure require further investigation. The next section reports on the verbs in MAKE-VP, to examine whether the MAKE patterns are used to fill the learners' lexical gaps.

MAKE Patterns and Lexical Gap

As illustrated in the sections above, the uses of MAKE-VP patterns are distinct in Chinese English learners' writing. The high frequency of MAKE-VP patterns in EFL learners' writing might be caused by following reasons. For some MAKE-VP patterns, the verbs in these patterns can replace the whole patterns since the verbs can directly express causation. For example, the pattern "the picture made me remind of my childhood" can be replaced by the pattern "the picture reminds me of my childhood" directly. Most of the alternations of the patterns occur within patterns with a transitive verb. Therefore, the transitivity of the verbs in the MAKE patterns matter. The current study analyzed all the verbs in MAKE-VP patterns in Chinese English learners' writings and the statistic information of the transitivity of verbs is in TABLE 8:

TABLE 8

Type Frequency of the Transitivity of Verbs in MAKE-VP Constructions

Transitivity	Intermediate		Upper Intermediate	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Transitive	22	52.4	26	54.2
Intransitive	20	47.6	22	45.8
Total	42	100	48	100

The transitivity of the verbs in MAKE-VP refers to the verbs used as transitive or intransitive verbs in MAKE-VP in learners' writing. As shown in TABLE 8, the percentages of transitive and intransitive verbs in MAKE-VP used by intermediate and upper intermediate Chinese English learners are almost the same. For intermediate learners, 52.4% of verbs used transitively and 47.6% of the verbs are used intransitively. These verbs are shown below:

Transitive verbs used by intermediate learners:

admire, **arouse**, control, enjoy, **image**, lead, like, lose, love, **relieve**, **remind**, **surprise**, take, taste, want, forget, live, read, spend, understand, watch, beat

Intransitive verbs used by intermediate learners:

burn, **disappear**, fall, happen, look, avoid, have, keep, laugh, **watering**, eat, give, highlighted, hurt, open, play, relax, think, turn, win

For upper intermediate learners, 54.2% of verbs are used transitively and 45.8% of them are used intransitively. These verbs are shown below:

Transitive verbs used by upper intermediate learners:

bear, believe, hold, ignore, lead, lose, **neglect**, obey, question, receive, **replace**, rethink, send, set, consider, enter, finish, forget, know, learn, realize, share, start, tend, think, worry

Intransitive verbs used by upper intermediate learners:

chat, disappear, fall, progress, rely, stay, **avoid**, **harm**, have, laugh, like, embarrass, crash, develop, fail, hurt, improve, increase, pay, study, understand, work

The above verbs used in MAKE-VP by intermediate and upper intermediate learners indicate that learners at both proficiency levels use transitive and intransitive verbs in causative MAKE-VP patterns. Moreover, the proportion of the two kinds of verbs are almost the same. The overlap and non-overlap of the verbs used in VP of MAKE-VP constructions were analyzed, and the statistic information is shown in TABLE 9:

TABLE 9
The Overlap and Non-overlap Verbs in MAKE-VP Pattern

	<i>Intermediate (1) Upper Intermediate (0)</i>	<i>Intermediate (0) Upper Intermediate (1)</i>	<i>Intermediate (1) Upper Intermediate (1)</i>
Transitive	17	14	3
Intransitive	13	22	9
Total	30	36	12

Note. Intermediate(1)Upper Intermediate(0), the verbs only used by intermediate learners;
Intermediate(0)Upper Intermediate(1), the verbs only used by upper intermediate learners;
Intermediate(1)Upper Intermediate(1), the verbs used by both intermediate and upper intermediate levels learners.

As shown in TABLE 9, there are 30 verbs only used by intermediate learners, 36 verbs only used by upper intermediate learners and 12 verbs used by both two proficiency level learners. A close inspection of the verbs only used by intermediate learners indicates that those intermediate learners used the verbs in MAKE-VP while the upper intermediate learners lexically causatively use them, as shown in the following example:

- (3) It always makes me *remind* a warm story. (Intermediate learners)
(4) We should *remind* ourselves that chatting with the real person is what always need. (Upper intermediate learners)

The above two sentences indicate that the intermediate learners have not mastered the causative uses of *remind*, and they rely on the MAKE-remind to express the causative event. While for upper intermediate learners, they can directly use the lexical causative function of *remind* and reduce the reliance on MAKE-VP.

For the verbs only used by upper intermediate learners, they used the verbs both in MAKE-VP constructions and the lexical causative function, as shown in the following sentences:

- (5) You can make people *realize* what you really feel by those amazing faces.
(6) ...but only because he didn't have enough grades, he cannot *realize* his dreams.

The uses of "realize" reflect that the learners attempt to use this verb in both causative MAKE patterns and the lexical causative patterns. Thus, the development of the alternation between the two types of causative expressions is still under development at the upper intermediate level.

According to Pinker (2009), some transitive verbs have the causative function and can be used directly to express the causative event, while the intransitive verbs used in causative structures cannot be alternated into the lexical causatives. The frequently used transitive verbs in MAKE-VP indicate that the Chinese English learners of the two proficiency levels in current study have not mastered the causative use of some transitive verbs; thus, they rely on the MAKE-VP constructions to express the causative constructions, or MAKE-VP is used as a strategy to fill their lexical causative gap, as shown in the following sentences:

- (7) A degree cannot *make people believe* that I'm in the highest position of education. (Upper intermediate learners)

(8) Pessimistic Martin *convinced* them that their lives are more bearable. (native speakers)

The two sentences above indicate that the upper intermediate learners have not mastered the lexical causative *convince* and they use *make-believe* to express the causative event.

As shown above, the MAKE-VP patterns are more frequently used by Chinese English learners. However, whether the Chinese English learners use MAKE-VP patterns to fill their lexical gap cannot be verified with the current data. Thus, the study takes a general corpus of native English, Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), as a reference, to see whether these verbs are only used by Chinese English learners.

The verbs of TABLE 9 were examined in COCA to see whether these verbs are also used by native speakers within the MAKE-VP patterns. The findings indicate that there are eight verbs being used by non-native intermediate learners, which are “**arouse, avoid, image, relieve, remind, surprise and watering**”; and five verbs being non-native used by upper intermediate learners, which are “**chat, avoid, harm, neglect and replace**”. The Chinese English learners tend to use the above-identified verbs in MAKE-VP patterns, which they think is a safe way to express causation, or they use MAKE-VP patterns to fill their lexical gaps.

In addition to the above-mentioned transitive and intransitive verbs used in MAKE-VP constructions, there are some linking verbs frequently used by both intermediate and upper intermediate learners, such as “feel” or “become”. Yet, the high frequency of the MAKE patterns with different linking verbs are used for different purposes. The linking verb of “feel” is frequently used by both Chinese and native speakers, as shown with the pattern below:

MAKE NP feel *enjoyable, relax, better, full, good, calm, warm, happy...* (intermediate learners)

MAKE NP feel *comfortable, sleepy, isolated, tired, exhausted...* (upper intermediate learners)

MAKE NP feel *guilty, good, despair...* (native speakers)

“Feel” is used as a linking verb in [MAKE NP feel + ADJ] and the increased size of adjectives can promote the uses of this structure. The Chinese English learners and the native speakers behave the same on the uses of this pattern.

For the linking verb “become”, the Chinese English learners tend to use [MAKE NP become + ADJ] as a strategy to fill the lexical gap, while native speakers do not use “become” in the structure of [MAKE NP become + ADJ] as the examples shown below:

MAKE NP become *fierce, fat, strong, educated, rich...* (Chinese English learners)

His temperament and talent *enhance* his marketability. (COCA)

Public library will *enrich* children of every economic level. (COCA)

Vegetables may *fatten* the pig at home. (COCA)

As the patterns show above, the native speakers do not use “become” in periphrastic causative MAKE constructions. Instead, they tend to use the lexical causative expressions directly. For example, the native speakers use “enhance” instead of “MAKE NP become strong”, “enrich” instead of “MAKE NP become rich” and “fatten” instead of “MAKE NP become fat”.

Conclusion

This study has presented a corpus-based investigation on the MAKE pattern used in Chinese English learners’ writing. It was motivated by the high occurrence of MAKE in EFL learners’ writing that remains, a learning obstacle for these learners. The token frequency information indicates that the intermediate learners prefer to use the causative function of MAKE, especially causative MAKE-VP

constructions, while for the upper intermediate learners, besides the causative function of MAKE, the support verb function is also frequently used. This indicates that with the development of language proficiency, the learners used more abstract objects in MAKE constructions. Moreover, the Chinese English learners have a smaller vocabulary size regarding nouns; thus, they prefer to use the limited number of pronouns in MAKE patterns. This phenomenon indicates the learners' reliance on the MAKE patterns if they do not have a large enough vocabulary size. The type frequency of MAKE patterns reflects that the causative function is the most productive function in both intermediate and upper intermediate level learner' writing. Furthermore, the productivity of support verb and transformation functions increase in Chinese learners' writings alongside the development of learners' English proficiency level. Therefore, the change of MAKE patterns is still in progress from the intermediate and upper intermediate proficiency level. Moreover, the abstract or concrete use of the object in MAKE patterns and the causative uses of MAKE are breakpoints.

The analysis of the token and type frequency information of MAKE patterns used by Chinese English learners reveals that these learners have a reliance on a specific function of MAKE patterns. The productivity of the MAKE functions also indicates that the learners may feel that it is safe to use MAKE patterns. The further examination of the verbs used in MAKE-VP constructions also supports this statement.

The results have pedagogical implications. The uses of MAKE patterns identified from learners' writings depict the picture of high-frequency verbs such as MAKE. If the teachers have a comprehensive understanding of different functions of general-purpose verbs, and then, the teachers can identify the learners' learning difficulties and provide appropriate support according to the learners' proficiency level. This study also has implications for researchers. The breakthrough points identified in high-frequency verbs used by EFL learners across proficiency levels can enlighten the second language acquisition research. Further studies can be conducted on the development process of these high-frequency verbs and the specific factors that drive this development.

The study also has limitations. The small scale of learner data is one of them. Nevertheless, we hope the present study could shed some light on the study of high frequency-verbs in EFL writing. As a result, learners' development of some linguistic features in L2 writing can be considered.

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