

Language Guide to Transfer Errors

[Excerpted from the online resource for *Keys for Writers* by Ann Raimes](#)

Sometimes errors in writing a new language can occur when you are grappling with new subject matter and difficult topics. You concentrate on ideas and clarity-- and because no writer can do everything at once, you fail to concentrate on editing.

The following language guide sets out several problem areas for multilingual/ESL writers. It shows grammatical features (column 1) of specific languages (column 2) that when transferred to English lead to an error (column 3). The guide covers neither all linguistic problem areas nor all languages; that would take volumes. Rather, it lists a selection, with the aim of being useful and practical. Use the guide to raise your awareness about your own and other languages.

| LANGUAGE FEATURES | LANGUAGE | SAMPLE TRANSFER ERROR IN ENGLISH |
|---|--|---|
| ARTICLES | | |
| No Articles | Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Farsi, Urdu, Swahili | Sun is hot. I bought book. Computer has changed our lives. |
| VERBS AND VERBALS | | |
| <i>Be</i> can be omitted | Russian, Arabic, Haitian Creole, Chinese | India more than religious than Britain. She working now. He always cheerful. |
| No tense inflections | Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese | He have a good time yesterday. When I was little, I always walk to school. |
| No inflection for person or number | Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Thai | The singer have big band. |
| Different tense boundaries from English | Arabic, Farsi, Chinese, Haitian Creole, French | I study here for a year. He has left yesterday. |
| No <i>-ing</i> (gerund)/infinitive distinction | Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Spanish, Greek, Vietnamese, Portuguese | She avoids to go. I enjoy to play tennis. |
| WORD ORDER AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE | | |
| Relative clause or restrictive phrase precedes noun it modifies | Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian | The enrolled in community college student... A nine-meter high impressive monument to Lenin... He gave a too difficult for me book. |
| Inversion of subject and verb rare | Chinese | She is leaving and so am I. |
| Conjunctions occur in pairs | Chinese, Farsi, Vietnamese | Although, she is rich but she wears simple clothes. Even if I had money, I would also not buy that car. |
| Subject can be omitted (especially pronoun) | Chinese, Spanish, Thai, Japanese | Is raining. |
| NOUNS, PRONOUNS, ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS | | |
| No distinction between subject and object forms of pronouns | Chinese, Spanish, Thai, Korean, Gujarti | I gave the forms to she. |
| Nouns and adjectives have same form | Chinese, Japanese | She is very beauty woman. They felt very safety on the train. |
| No plural form after a number | Farsi, Chinese, Korean | Four new lamp... |
| No plural (or optional) forms of nouns | Japanese, Thai, Chinese, Korean | Several good book... |