

An Empirical Survey of Chinese Learners' Use of Near-Synonymous Verbs:
 “发生”, “产生” and “出现”
 of Thai CFL Learners in Sirithep Foreign Language School, Chiang Mai Province

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Abstract

The Chinese words “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” are commonly used near-synonymous verbs, which often cause confusion for learners of Chinese as a foreign language. This study aims to (1) investigate the overall usage of 发生, 产生, and 出现 by Thai learners of Chinese at Sirithep School in Chiang Mai Province, (2) analyze common error types related to semantic understanding, collocation, and contextual appropriateness, and (3) propose pedagogical suggestions for teaching these verbs. The participants were drawn from a population of 115 Thai secondary-school learners who had received systematic Chinese instruction. Using a simple random sampling method, 20% of the total population (n = 23) were selected as the

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sample. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire consisting of 13 items, including multiple-choice, true-false, and sentence-construction tasks, and analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. The results show that learners confuse these words in actual usage. The main types of errors include inappropriate collocations, unclear semantic understanding, and inappropriate use in pragmatic contexts. These errors are mainly caused by negative transfer from the learners' native language, insufficient distinction of word meanings, and limited explanation of usage in classroom teaching. The findings further suggest that learners' difficulties reflect incomplete form-meaning mapping and underspecified lexical-semantic representations in second language acquisition.

Keywords

fasheng 发生, chansheng 产生, chuxian 出现, Near-synonymous verbs, error analysis, Thai CFL learners.

Introduction

Vocabulary competence is a fundamental component of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) learning, as it directly affects learners' comprehension and production in both spoken and written communication. Compared with grammatical structures, vocabulary usage often presents greater challenges for learners, especially when dealing with words that are semantically similar but differ in collocation, pragmatic function, and contextual constraints. Such difficulties are particularly evident in the acquisition of near-synonymous verbs (Guo, 1988).

In the field of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, the term “near-synonymous verbs” refers to lexical items that share similar core meanings but differ in semantic focus, collocational patterns, syntactic constraints, or pragmatic usage. Unlike absolute synonyms, near-synonymous verbs cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts. Their differences are often subtle and involve distinctions such as causality, event structure, semantic prosody, or perceptual salience. Due to these subtle distinctions, near-synonymous verbs are widely recognized as a major source of lexical difficulty for CFL learners.

The near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” are high-frequency words in modern Chinese and are widely used in daily communication and written discourse. All three verbs denote the coming into existence of an event or phenomenon. However, they differ

systematically in semantic emphasis: “发生” typically focuses on the occurrence of an event, often unexpected or noteworthy; “产生” emphasizes causality and the generation of a result; and “出现” highlights emergence or perceptibility. These distinctions are reflected in their collocational patterns and contextual constraints. (Wu, et al., 2023).

According to the “International Standards for Chinese Proficiency in Chinese Education,” “出现” is a Level 2 vocabulary word, while “产生” and “发生” are Level 3 vocabulary words. Levels 1, 2, and 3 all belong to the “beginner” level, which is crucial for foreign learners to engage in effective social interaction (Alanazi, 2022). Since these verbs are introduced at early stages of instruction, learners may develop incomplete or oversimplified understandings that persist into higher proficiency levels if distinctions are not clearly taught (Yang, M. 2022).

From a cross-linguistic perspective, the influence of learners’ first language may further intensify this difficulty. When lexical distinctions in Chinese correspond to overlapping equivalents in Thai, learners may rely on direct translation strategies rather than semantic differentiation.

After consulting a “Chinese–Thai dictionary”, it was found that “发生” can be translated as “เกิดขึ้น”, “产生” can be translated as “ก่อให้เกิด” or “ทำให้เกิด”, and “出现” can be translated as “เกิดขึ้น” or “ปรากฏ”. Notably, both “发生” and “出现” can correspond to the same Thai word “เกิดขึ้น” in many contexts. This semantic overlap may encourage learners to treat these verbs as interchangeable, thereby leading to negative language transfer and inappropriate substitution in actual language production.

Previous studies on Chinese near-synonymous verbs can be roughly grouped into three categories. First, linguistic studies have examined semantic features, argument structures, and syntactic constraints of verbs such as “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” (Li, 1986; Gao, 2021; SASING, 2025). These studies provide valuable theoretical insights but focus mainly on structural description rather than learner performance.

Second, research from the perspective of second language acquisition has documented learners’ error patterns and identified causes such as negative transfer, insufficient semantic differentiation, and limited instructional input (Zhao & Hong, 2009; Yang, 2004; Wang et al., 2018). However, many of these studies emphasize error classification without systematic pedagogical implications (Li, Y. 2021).

Third, although some research has discussed Thai learners' difficulties with Chinese near-synonymous verbs (Chavanatnusorn, 2019, 1–18, Chen, 2019), empirical investigations specifically targeting “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” among Thai secondary-school learners remain limited.

Through reviewing and synthesizing relevant domestic and international literature, it was found that existing studies mainly focus on Chinese language teaching methods and learning strategies, with most studies taking native speakers as research subjects (Hou, 2023). Previous research on second language acquisition has shown that lexical errors involving near-synonymous are influenced by multiple factors, including negative transfer from the learners' native language, insufficient semantic differentiation, and limited instructional input, (Ma, 2022, 78-84). For Thai learners of Chinese, the problem may be intensified by the fact that corresponding Thai verbs can often be used interchangeably across contexts, which may lead learners to overlook subtle distinctions in Chinese usage. However, despite the pedagogical importance of these verbs, empirical studies focusing specifically on the use of “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” by Thai learners remain relatively scarce, (Zhao, et al., 2024, 49-69).

Therefore, several research gaps can be identified. First, there is a lack of empirical studies focusing on Thai CFL learners at the secondary-school level. Second, few studies integrate semantic analysis, learner error classification, and pedagogical implications within a unified analytical framework. Third, limited attention has been given to how cross-linguistic semantic overlap between Chinese and Thai contributes to learners' confusion.

Objectives

1. To investigate the overall usage of the near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” by Thai CFL learners at Sirithep School, Chiang Mai province.
2. To analyze the main types of errors made by learners in using the near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” including errors in semantic understanding, collocation, and pragmatic context.
3. To propose pedagogical suggestions for teaching the near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” based on the findings of the study.

Review of Literature

1. Definition of the near-synonymous verbs

In the field of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, the term near-synonymous verbs refer to lexical items that share similar core meanings but differ in semantic focus, collocational patterns, syntactic constraints, or pragmatic usage. Unlike absolute synonyms, near-synonymous verbs cannot be used interchangeably in all contexts. (Yang, 2004, 96-104).

It should be noted that previous studies sometimes use the broader term “synonyms” without strictly distinguishing it from “near-synonymous”. In the present study, the term near-synonymous verbs are adopted to emphasize subtle semantic and contextual differences that may cause difficulty for second language learners.

2. Linguistic Studies on Chinese Near-synonymous verbs

Near-synonymous verbs in Chinese have long been recognized as a challenging area in vocabulary acquisition. For native speakers, distinctions among similar words can often be made intuitively; however, such distinctions pose significant challenges for foreign language learners. Scholars have pointed out that errors related to the near-synonymous verbs are not limited to semantic confusion but also involve grammatical and pragmatic dimensions (Zhao & Hong, 2009).

From a linguistic perspective, previous studies have examined the near-synonymous verbs in terms of semantic features, argument structures, and syntactic constraints. For example, Li (1986), Gao (2021) and SASING (2025) conducted structural and semantic analyses of verbs such as “发生,” “产生,” and “出现.” These studies reveal that although such verbs share the general meaning of “coming into being” they differ in semantic focus and usage conditions.

Lin Lixiu (2022) examined the treatment of “出现”-type verbs in learner-oriented Chinese dictionaries and found that existing reference tools often provide insufficient explanations for distinguishing near-synonymous.

While these linguistic studies provide valuable theoretical foundations for distinguishing the near-synonymous verbs, they primarily remain within the internal linguistic system and pay limited attention to second language learners’ actual usage.

3. Learner Error Studies and Thai CFL Context

Research from the perspective of second language acquisition has focused on learner errors involving near-synonymous verbs. Yang (2004) noted that once learners acquire basic grammar and vocabulary, confusion among near-synonymous verbs becomes a prominent difficulty. Zhao and Hong (2009) identified both semantic and grammatical error types, attributing them to factors such as negative transfer, insufficient semantic differentiation, and inadequate instructional explanation.

Pannika Chavanatnusorn (2019, 1–18) specifically examined Thai learners’ errors in Chinese synonymous verbs and found that errors can generally be categorized into semantic errors and grammatical errors. The main causes include mother tongue influence, target language knowledge, teacher instruction, textbooks, and learners’ proficiency levels (Ma, 2022, 78-84).

Although these studies effectively document common error patterns, most remain descriptive in nature and lack an integrated framework that systematically connects semantic distinctions, cross-linguistic influence, and pedagogical application. In addition, empirical research targeting Thai secondary-school learners remains relatively limited.

4. Lexical-semantic Distinctions among “发生,” “产生,” and “出现”

Previous studies have analyzed the semantic distinctions among “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” from lexical and structural perspectives. “Modern Chinese Dictionary” definitions generally indicate that all three verbs denote the coming into existence of an event or phenomenon. However, researchers have noted differences in semantic focus:

“发生” refers to the appearance of something or a phenomenon from nothing, often used for specific events, accidents, or changes.

“产生” highlights causal relationships and generative processes.

“出现” focuses on emergence or perceptibility

Such distinctions suggest that confusion among these verbs is not merely a matter of basic meaning but involves subtle differences in semantic orientation and collocational preference (Lertcharoenwanich, 2023, 365-383). Near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” can be collectively referred to as “appearance” verbs. This category of verbs is a small subcategory of latent verbs in Chinese (Li, 1986) and can form a formal existential sentence structure, the “appearance sentence.” The previous studies of , Li (1986), Yang, (2017), WANG, (2021)and SASING, (2025) have extensively examined existential sentences in Chinese.

Nevertheless, most existing analyses concentrate on theoretical description rather than empirical investigation of learner performance.

5. Research Gaps

Despite extensive linguistic research, learner-based empirical studies remain limited, existing studies tend to focus on well-known synonym pairs, while systematic investigations of high-frequency verbs such as “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” remain limited. These verbs are commonly used in academic texts and formal registers, yet their distinctions are often under explored. Many previous studies rely heavily on dictionary definitions or intuition-based analysis, with relatively few adopting a comprehensive framework that integrates semantic, collocational, and pedagogical perspectives. As a result, the findings are sometimes insufficient to inform classroom practice directly, few studies focus specifically on Thai secondary-school learners, whose learning background and cross-linguistic context may differ from university-level learners commonly studied. Existing research often separates semantic analysis from pedagogical application. There is a lack of a unified framework that integrates lexical-semantic features, learner error patterns, and instructional implications.

Pedagogical studies in Teaching Chinese as foreign language, such as those by Wang Rongshan (2020), Zhou Rongcun (2021), and Hou, (2023), attempt to integrate linguistic analysis and learner error research to explore instructional strategies for confusing words (Lai, 2022). These studies generally agree that teaching near-synonymous should not rely solely on definitional explanations, but should instead employ contrastive analysis, contextualized input, and practice activities to help learners acquire appropriate usage. However, many of these studies are based on small-scale teaching experiments and lack explicit theoretical frameworks or clearly articulated instructional models.

In response to these gaps, the present study investigates Thai CFL learners at Sirithep School in Chiang Mai province and examines their usage of the near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” by analyzing learners’ usage patterns, error types, and contextual appropriateness through questionnaires. The study aims to identify the main causes of misuse and to explore the influence of native language transfer and instructional factors. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence for improving the teaching of near-synonymous verbs in CFL classrooms and to contribute to both theoretical discussion and pedagogical practice in the Thai context.

In summary, previous studies have explored near-synonymous verbs such as “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” from multiple perspectives. First, linguistic studies mainly focus on semantic features, argument structures, and syntactic constraints of near-synonymous verbs. For example, Gao Zailan (2021,1-8) and Liao Yong (2019) conducted comparative analyses of “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” from the perspectives of argument roles and semantic restrictions.

Research Methodology

1. Research Participants

The population of this study was Thai CFL learners at Sirithep School in Chiang Mai province, with a total of 115 students. The population consisted of Thai native speakers who are studying Chinese as a foreign language at the secondary school level. Using a random sampling method, 23 out of the 115 students were selected as the research sample (20% of the total population). During the sampling process, all learners were first assigned identification numbers, and the research subjects were then determined through a random number selection procedure to ensure the randomness of the sampling process. All participants had had studied Chinese for at least one academic semester.

2. Research Instrument

This study employed a questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire was designed to investigate learners’ usage of the three Near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现”. The test items focused on learners’ understanding of word meanings, collocational choices, and selection of appropriate verbs in given contexts.

All test items of questionnaire were drawn from the HSK Corpus (<https://hsk.blcu.edu.cn>). The three target words occurred with relatively balanced frequency. The instrument aimed to examine learners’ awareness of the distinctions among the three verbs.

The contents of the questionnaire are presented in 3 sections. In the first section 5 consists of multiple-choice items: participants are required to select the appropriate word from the three near-synonymous verbs according to the given context. The second section consists of 5 judgment (true–false) questions: in which complete sentences are provided, and participants are asked to determine whether the underlined word is used correctly or not, the underlined words are the three near-synonymous verbs. The third section is a sentence-

production task: in which participants are required to construct sentences using each of the three Near-synonymous verbs respectively.

Scoring Criteria: The total possible score was 13 points. Each multiple-choice and judgment item was worth 1 point. Each sentence-production task was scored on a 0–1 scale: one point for correct verb selection and for contextual and grammatical appropriateness. sentence-production responses were scored by the two Chinese teachers.

3. Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted during regular class time and administered by the researcher. All participants completed the questionnaire individually within a fixed time limit. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Data collection was conducted between September 15 and 22, 2025. Prior to participation, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the nature of the questionnaire. Participants were voluntary and their parents prior to data collection, and responses were collected anonymously, no personal identifying information was collected. All responses were coded numerically during data processing. Participants were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. After collection, the questionnaires were checked, and invalid responses were excluded to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data.

Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the analysis based on the following criteria: failure to complete more than 30% of the items, or invalid responses, such as failure to use the target verbs as required in the sentence-production tasks.

4. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for data analysis. Quantitative analysis was applied to calculate the accuracy rates and error rates in learners' responses to each verb. Descriptive statistical methods were used to calculate frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, to present learners' overall mastery of the three target verbs by Excel. Qualitative analysis was then conducted to classify common error types and to examine learners' difficulties in terms of semantic understanding, collocation, and contextual usage. The findings were analyzed using content analysis to examine learners' use of the target verbs in sentence production, with error types categorized into semantic misuse, collocational errors, grammatical errors, and contextual inappropriateness and summarized.

5. Reliability and Validity

The content validity of the questionnaire was established by designing all items in accordance with the research objectives and the theoretical distinctions among the three target verbs. In addition, three types of tasks context-based word selection, judgment tasks, and sentence production tasks were included to assess learners' comprehension, awareness, and productive use of the target verbs, ensuring adequate coverage of the construct under investigation. Thereby contributing to the representation of the construct under investigation. The inclusion of multiple task types was intended to capture different dimensions of learners' knowledge, including recognition, evaluation, and production.

And the three near-synonymous verbs occurred with balanced frequency across the test items. In the multiple-choice and judgment sections (10 items in total) items were designed to test receptive discrimination, semantic judgment, and productive use of the target verbs. Each verb appeared in roughly three out of ten items. In the sentence-production section, each verb was required once, accounting for one-third of the production tasks.

For the sentence-production tasks, a predefined scoring rubric was developed prior to analysis. Each response was evaluated based on correct verb usage and contextual appropriateness to ensure scoring consistency. Two independent raters evaluated the responses, and inter-rater agreement reached 0.87.

all items in the initial pool were selected from the HSK corpus (15 items in total). Subsequently, the questionnaire was evaluated by three Chinese language teachers with over three years of teaching experience. The three experts conducted the evaluation independently to avoid potential bias or mutual influence. After the initial round of independent ratings, the results were compiled and analyzed by the researcher. Items that did not fully meet the predefined criteria were identified for revision. A summary of the evaluators' comments was then shared with the experts, and minor revisions were made accordingly. In cases where discrepancies occurred, follow-up communication was conducted to clarify evaluative differences and reach consensus. A second confirmation was obtained to ensure that all retained items met the established relevance threshold prior to final inclusion. The researcher was responsible for consolidating the evaluators' feedback, documenting revisions, and ensuring that all modifications aligned with the intended construct definitions.

Prior to evaluation, a structured evaluation form with predefined criteria was developed. Each item was rated on a 4-point relevance scale (1 = not relevant, 2 = somewhat

relevant, 3 = quite relevant, 4 = highly relevant) across three dimensions: (a) clarity of wording, (b) contextual appropriateness, and (c) alignment with the intended semantic distinctions. The item-level Content Validity Index (I-CVI) was calculated by dividing the number of experts assigning a rating of 3 or 4 by the total number of experts. Only items that achieved an I-CVI of 1.00 were retained. As a result, 10 items met the predefined criteria and were included in the final questionnaire.

To ensure procedural consistency, the questionnaire was administered during regular class time under standardized conditions. All participants completed the instrument within the same time limit in 15 minutes, received identical instructions and were not allowed to consult dictionaries. The scoring procedures were applied uniformly to all responses.

Research Results

This study investigated Thai CFL learners' use of the three near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” through a questionnaire which was administered to students at Sirithep School in Chiang Mai province. A total of 23 valid questionnaires were collected.

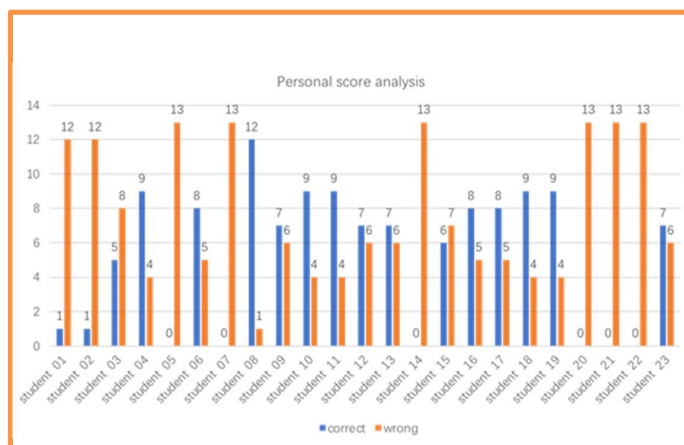


Figure 1: Personal score

The overall results presented in Figure 1 indicate that learners experience varying degrees of difficulty in distinguishing among these verbs and using them appropriately in context. For the purpose of analysis, “demonstrating difficulty” was operationally defined as obtaining an accuracy rate below 60% on the objective items. Based on this criterion, A majority of learners (approximately 92%) scored below the 60% accuracy threshold. Accuracy

rate was calculated by dividing the number of correct responses by the total number of responses and multiplying by 100%. It should be noted that this percentage refers to overall performance rather than isolated errors on individual items, in order to avoid overgeneralization.

This finding suggested that learners' lexical and semantic competence with respect to near-synonymous verbs remains unstable, particularly with respect to verbs that are similar in meaning but differ in usage, collocation, or contextual constraints. The results may indicate reliance on partial semantic understanding or translation-based strategies, which can lead to incorrect or inappropriate verb choices. These difficulties may affect learners' accurate accurate verb selection in context.

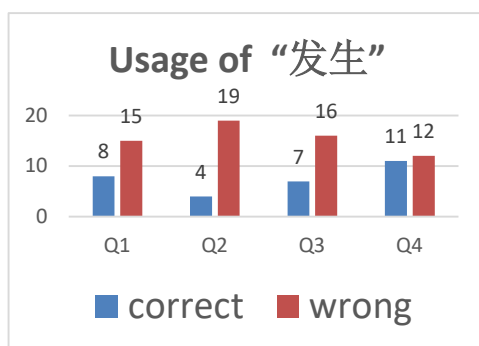


Figure 2 Usage of “发生”

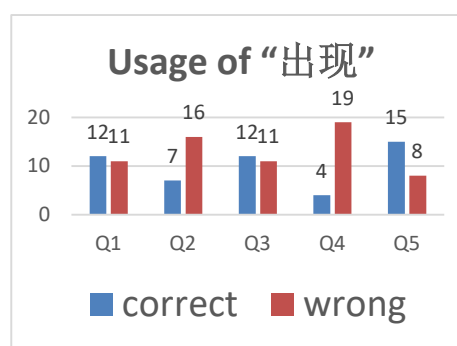


Figure 3 Usage of “出现”

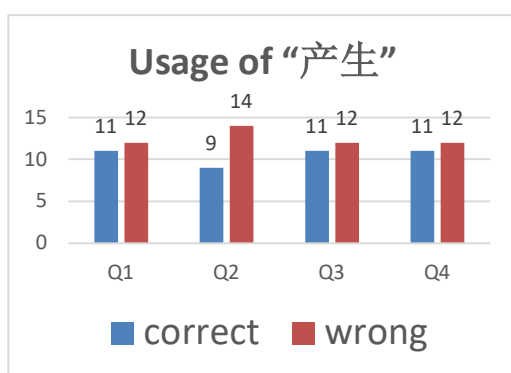
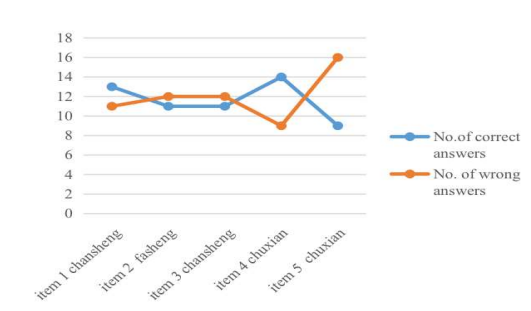


Figure 4 Usage of “产生”

The results indicate that the accuracy rate of 发生 was lower than that of 产生 and 出现, as illustrated in Figures 2, 3, and 4. More than half of participants selected an incorrect verb in these items, despite 发生 being the target answer in the four items.

This pattern suggests a strong tendency among learners to overuse 发生, treating it as a default verb when describing events, situations, or changes. In many cases, learners appeared to overgeneralize its meaning and apply it across a wide range of contexts where 出现 or 产生 would be more semantically appropriate. For example, in Item 5 of the multiple-choice questions, which involved describing an accident, 35% of the participants choose 发生, even though 出现 was the correct target answer. This result indicates that learners may not fully recognize the subtle semantic and contextual distinctions among these verbs, particularly in terms of event initiation, result formation, and state emergence. Overall, the findings reveal persistent confusion in learners' verb selection and point to a need for more explicit



instruction focusing on the nuanced differences in usage, collocational patterns, and contextual constraints of these near-synonymous verbs.

Figure 5 Accuracy of Multiple-Choice

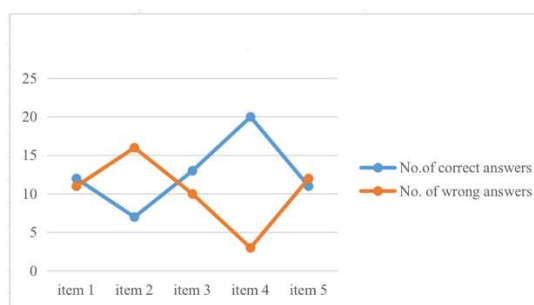


Figure 6 Accuracy of T/F questions

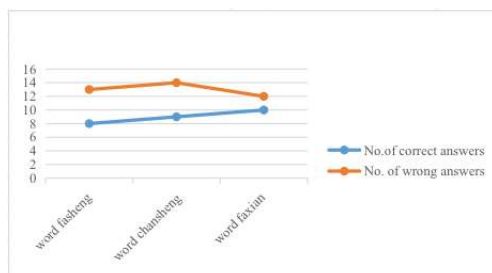


Figure 7 Accuracy of Make sentences

The results indicate that learners' use of the near-synonymous verbs “发生,” “产生,” and “出现” is uneven in Figure 5,6, and 7. Accuracy rates were relatively lower in Item 4 and 5 of the multiple-choice section and Item 2 and 4 of the true-or-false section. Learners performed relatively better when “chansheng” was used to express abstract results or psychological states. In contrast, verbs related to events, especially “fasheng”, showed lower accuracy, indicating difficulty in identifying event-oriented meanings. For “chuxian”, learners achieved higher accuracy in abstract contexts than in sentences describing concrete objects.

In terms of error frequency, the multiple-choice items (Q1–Q5), response distributions varied across contexts. In Q1, the majority of participants selected “产生” (56.5%), whereas in Q4, “出现” was chosen most frequently (60.9%). In Q2 and Q3, responses were more evenly distributed, although “发生” (47.8%) and “产生” (47.8%) were the most frequently selected options, respectively.

For the true–false items (Q1–Q5), accuracy rates ranged from 30.4% to 87.0%. The highest accuracy was observed in Q4 (87.0%), while Q2 showed the lowest correct response rate (30.4%). The remaining items demonstrated moderate accuracy levels, with correct responses ranging between 47.8% and 56.5%.

Table 1 Semantic and Functional Comparison of “发生,” “产生,” and “出现”

Dimension Verb	“发生”	“产生”	“出现”
Core semantic meaning	Denotes the occurrence of an event or situation	Denotes the generation or production of a result	Denotes the emergence or coming into existence of an entity, situation, or phenomenon
Semantic focus	The event itself	Causality and generative process	Perception and cognition
Emphasis on causality	No	Yes	No
Reference to new entities	Not necessarily	Typically, yes	Often yes
Involvement of subjectivity	No	No	May involve perceptual or cognitive perspective
Typical collocates	Accidents, changes, incidents, problems	Effects, results, conflicts, influences	Problems, patterns, errors, phenomena

Table2 Overall Accuracy by Verb “发生,” “产生,” and “出现”

Verb	Number of items	Mean accuracy (%)	Error rate (%)
发生	4	32.6%	67.4%
产生	4	45.7%	54.3%
出现	5	54.3%	45.7%

Table 3 Accuracy by Task Type

Task type	Mean accuracy (%)
Multiple-choice	50.4%
True/False	54.8%
Sentence Production	39.1%

Mean accuracy was calculated by dividing the total number of correct responses by the total number of responses and multiplying by 100%. Across the three task types, the sentence-production section, error rates were higher than correct response rates across all three verbs (Table 3). The highest correct response rate was observed for chuxian (43.5%), followed by chansheng (39.1%) and fasheng (34.8%) (Figure 9). In all three cases, incorrect responses outnumbered correct ones, suggesting considerable difficulty in productive use of these semantically related verbs.

In summary, the results indicate that learners at Sirithep School encounter persistent difficulties in differentiating “发生,” “产生,” and “出现.” These difficulties primarily stem from challenges in understanding subtle semantic features such as causality, processuality, and emergence, which are crucial for the accurate use of these near-synonymous verbs. Overall, the findings reveal systematic patterns of confusion rather than random errors.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Thai learners of Chinese experience persistent difficulties in distinguishing among the near-synonymous verbs 发生, 产生, and 出现, confirming that semantic similarity remains a major source of lexical error in Chinese as a foreign language. These results are generally consistent with previous research, which has

shown that learners tend to rely on partial semantic knowledge and overgeneralization when dealing with near-synonymous words (Guo, 1988; Zhao & Hong, 2009).

From a cognitive-processing perspective, the difficulty was more pronounced in the sentence-production task than in recognition-based tasks. Error frequency was substantially higher in production tasks, where substitution errors predominated, whereas recognition tasks mainly revealed confusion detectable through option selection. This suggests that productive use requires deeper semantic encoding and greater processing demands, whereas recognition tasks may allow learners to rely on surface cues or elimination strategies. This distinction helps explain the uneven performance observed across task types in the results section.

One notable finding is learners' strong tendency to overuse 发生 as a default verb for describing events or situations. This pattern supports Guo's (1988) claim that high-frequency and semantically broad words are more likely to be overgeneralized by foreign learners. This tendency may also be reinforced by input frequency in textbooks and classroom discourse, where 发生 frequently appears in event-related narratives for example accidents, changes, incidents. Repeated exposure to such patterns may strengthen learners' perception of 发生 as a prototypical "event verb," thereby encouraging overextension. It also aligns with Yang's (2004) argument that insufficient contrastive instruction leads learners to ignore contextual and collocational constraints. More specifically, learners appear to conflate simple event occurrence (发生) with generative causation (产生), failing to distinguish between an event that merely happens and a result that is brought about. Sharpening the distinction between event occurrence and event causation is therefore theoretically and pedagogically essential.

This result contrasts with Wang et al. (2018), who suggest that learners gradually form prototype-based semantic categories rather than indiscriminately overusing a single verb. In the present study, such prototype differentiation appears limited, particularly among lower-proficiency learners whose responses showed extensive overlap across the three verbs. Prototype formation may fail to emerge when lexical representations remain underspecified, suggesting that adequate exposure and semantic refinement are prerequisites for stable category construction.

Regarding 出现, learners demonstrated relatively better performance in concrete and perceptually salient contexts. This finding partially aligns with analyses of existence and emergence verbs in Chinese (Yang, 2017; WANG, 2021; SASING, 2025), which emphasize the semantic feature of "emergence" encoded in 出现. The relative success in concrete contexts

may be explained by the perceptual grounding of meaning, when contextual cues involve visibility or sudden appearance, learners can rely on image-based representations. Nevertheless, learners' frequent confusion between 出现 and 发生 in abstract contexts suggests that this semantic feature has not been fully internalized. This supports the view that abstract semantic distinctions pose greater challenges for L2 learners than concrete ones (Li, 1986). From the perspective of conceptual abstraction in L2 acquisition, abstract contexts require learners to map metaphorical or non-perceptual extensions of meaning, a process that is cognitively more demanding. This may account for the higher error rate observed in abstract uses of 出现. Furthermore, Thai verbs expressing appearance or occurrence often overlap semantically without strict morphological marking of emergence versus event initiation. This cross-linguistic similarity may contribute to transfer-related ambiguity.

Cross-linguistic influence may further contribute to this difficulty. In Thai, verbs expressing occurrence or appearance often exhibit broader semantic overlap without strict lexical differentiation between emergence and event initiation. For example, the Thai verb “เกิดขึ้น” may correspond to both 发生 and 出现 without encoding a specific emergence feature. Such structural differences between Thai and Chinese may reduce learners' sensitivity to subtle semantic constraints encoded in Chinese verbs.

In contrast, 发生 was the most problematic verb for learners, particularly in event occurrence, not the causality and result formation. This finding is consistent with Pannika Chavanatnusorn (2019, 1–18), who reports that Thai learners often struggle with Near-synonymous verbs involving abstract semantic relations.

From a Thai to Chinese contrastive perspective, causation in Thai is expressed through syntactic constructions or separate lexical markers rather than through inherent verb semantics. As a result, Thai learners may not readily perceive the embedded generative meaning encoded in 产生. In Thai, the verb “เกิดขึ้น” is frequently used to describe both event occurrence and emergence, without obligatorily encoding fine-grained distinctions. Causation is often expressed syntactically rather than through lexicalized verb contrasts. This structural difference may reduce learners' sensitivity to causative features encoded in 产生. While previous studies have emphasized learning strategies as a solution to lexical confusion, the present findings suggest that strategy use alone may be insufficient without explicit instruction on semantic constraints and event structure. In particular, reliance on translation equivalence

or surface collocation familiarity does not guarantee accurate differentiation when verbs encode subtle causal relations.

Taken together, these findings suggest that learners' errors cannot be attributed solely to lack of vocabulary knowledge, but rather to incomplete acquisition of subtle semantic features such as causality, processualism, and emergence. These difficulties reflect incomplete form–meaning mapping and underspecified lexical-semantic representations within learners' interlanguage systems. The interaction of cognitive-processing demands, input frequency effects, and cross-linguistic influence provides a more comprehensive explanation of the uneven performance observed across task types.

Although the sample size of this study is limited, the observed error patterns are systematic and align with previous research and provide empirical support for a more integrated approach combining error typology, task-based analysis, and Thai–Chinese contrastive perspectives. Future research may adopt larger samples and experimental designs to further investigate the interaction between proficiency level, prototype formation, and event-structure sensitivity in L2 Chinese verb acquisition.

Conclusion

This study investigated Thai learners' use of the Near-synonymous verbs 发生, 产生, and 出现 through a questionnaire survey conducted at Sirithep School in Chiang Mai Province. In accordance with the research objectives, the findings reveal that learners experience persistent difficulties in distinguishing and appropriately using these three verbs. The results show that learners confuse the near-synonymous verbs due to incomplete understanding of their semantic distinctions, collocational constraints, and pragmatic contexts. More specifically, these difficulties can be interpreted as reflecting incomplete form–meaning mapping and underspecified lexical semantic representations in learners' interlanguage systems. From a second language acquisition perspective, the findings suggest that learners have not fully consolidated abstract semantic features into stable lexical representations, particularly those involving event structure and causality. This indicates that near-synonymous verb acquisition requires not only lexical exposure but also progressive refinement of semantic specification, thereby situating the findings more firmly within cognitive and usage-based models of L2 vocabulary development.

The analysis indicates that learners tend to overgeneralize 发生 as a default verb for describing events, which suggests reliance on a high-frequency, semantically broad lexical item when more fine-grained distinctions are not fully acquired. This pattern reflects a compensatory strategy in which learners select a prototypical and frequently encountered lexical item when semantic specification remains incomplete. In contrast, learners' use of 出现 is relatively more accurate in concrete contexts but remains problematic in abstract situations, reflecting challenges in acquiring abstract semantic features at a conceptual level. Among the three verbs, 发生 poses the greatest challenge in overall accuracy rates, indicating difficulty in constructing precise lexical-semantic representations of event occurrence. At the same time, persistent confusion between 发生 and 产生 further reveals learners' limited sensitivity to causality and result formation in event structure. These error patterns suggest that learners have not fully acquired key semantic features such as causality, emergence, and processualism. In theoretical terms, the findings reflect developmental constraints in acquiring abstract semantic distinctions and integrating them into coherent lexical networks within the interlanguage system.

Although the sample size of this study is limited, the findings offer valuable insights into the recurring lexical challenges encountered by Thai learners of Chinese. The results are consistent with previous studies on Chinese near-synonymous verbs and highlight the necessity of improving instructional approaches to vocabulary teaching. Importantly, the study demonstrates that difficulties with near-synonymous verbs stem not merely from insufficient vocabulary size, but from challenges in refining semantic granularity, strengthening form-meaning associations, and mapping lexical items onto abstract event-structure representations. In this respect, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how abstract semantic distinctions are gradually consolidated through repeated contextualized exposure and cognitive restructuring in L2 development. Importantly, the findings can be applied in Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) classrooms, secondary school Chinese programs, and teacher training contexts, particularly in learning environments where learners' first language does not lexicalize fine-grained semantic distinctions among verbs.

From a second language acquisition perspective, the findings further suggest that difficulties with near-synonymous verbs stem not merely from insufficient vocabulary size, but from challenges in refining semantic specification and integrating contextual constraints into lexical knowledge. In this respect, the study contributes to understanding how abstract

semantic distinctions and event-structure features are gradually consolidated in interlanguage development.

From a pedagogical perspective, incorporating usage-based learning principles—such as frequency-sensitive input and contextualized pattern exposure—may facilitate gradual strengthening of form–meaning mappings. Additionally, form-focused instruction that explicitly contrasts semantic features (e.g., event occurrence vs. causation vs. emergence) may help learners develop greater awareness of lexical constraints and event structure. Such theoretically grounded instructional approaches may promote deeper semantic differentiation and support more stable lexical representation in interlanguage development.

Recommendations

1. Pedagogical Recommendations

Based on the findings and in response to Objective 3, this study proposes the following practical teaching recommendations.

First, teachers should implement explicit contrastive instruction when teaching near-synonymous verbs such as 发生, 产生, and 出现. Rather than presenting them as direct translation equivalents, instructors should highlight their semantic differences in terms of event occurrence, causality, and emergence. This approach may help reduce learners' overgeneralization of 发生.

Second, collocation-focused teaching should be emphasized. Teachers are encouraged to introduce these verbs together with their typical collocates (e.g., 发生事故, 产生影响, 出现问题) to help learners internalize usage patterns in authentic contexts.

Third, context-based practice activities should be incorporated into classroom instruction. Tasks such as sentence completion, error correction, and short discourse construction can help learners apply the target verbs in both concrete and abstract contexts. Such activities are particularly useful for addressing learners' difficulties with 产生, which requires a clear understanding of causal relationships.

Finally, these teaching strategies can be effectively applied in secondary-level Chinese courses, CFL classrooms in Thailand, and vocabulary-focused instructional modules, as well as in the development of teaching materials and assessment tasks related to near-synonymous verbs.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

Several directions for future research can be suggested based on the limitations of this study.

First, future studies may include a larger and more diverse sample of learners from different educational institutions or proficiency levels to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Second, researchers may adopt experimental or longitudinal research designs to examine the effectiveness of contrastive instruction or collocation-based teaching in improving learners' mastery of near-synonymous verbs.

Third, future research could incorporate corpus-based methods or learner production data to provide deeper insights into learners' actual usage patterns in spoken and written discourse.

Lastly, comparative studies involving learners with different first-language backgrounds may further clarify the role of negative language transfer in the acquisition of Chinese near-synonymous verbs.

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