Analysis of English Writing Errors Among Vocational High School Students

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Abstract: This study analyzes 66 writing samples collected from vocational high school students and explores the causes of errors. It finds that common mistakes including verb errors, noun errors, preposition errors, article errors, and Chinglish. The research proposes teaching strategies, such as emphasizing vocabulary instruction, cultivating English critical thinking, and holding a proper attitude towards students' errors.

Keywords: Errors, Error Analysis, English Writing

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, the purpose of English learning is also undergoing changes. Early English learning was primarily aimed at acquiring Western culture, which sparked a wave of English fever. However, the invasion of Western culture has increasingly permeated Chinese culture, leading scholars to emphasize the importance of inheriting Chinese culture. Therefore, the current purpose of English learning is to better promote and disseminate Chinese culture. As beneficiaries of vocational education going global, vocational high school students shoulder the responsibility of promoting Chinese culture, making their English learning crucial. Through three years of teaching practice, it was observed that vocational high school students in remote areas have weak English foundations. To identify specific English learning issues among them, this study analyzed errors in their English writing by 66 vocational high school students, which not only helps them pinpoint their learning challenges and improve efficiency but also boosts their confidence in English learning, thereby enhancing their writing skills. For teachers, understanding these writing errors enables them to better clarify classroom teaching objectives and implement targeted instruction.

2. Error Classification

Different scholars have categorized errors based on varying criteria. Yang Yonglin and Ding Tao (2016) categorized Chinese students' errors into three major types: component deficiency, redundancy, and inconsistency. Component deficiency includes missing subjects, predicates, objects, conjunctions, or incomplete sentences; redundancy involves repeated verbs, adjectives, nouns, or modifiers; inconsistencies include subject-verb agreement, tense errors, morphological discrepancies, spelling/grammatical inaccuracies, number/predicate misuse, phrase errors, and dangling participles. Building upon Yang Yonglin and Ding Tao's (2016) [1] classification while considering the characteristics of writing errors among vocational high school students, this study categorizes errors into verb errors, noun errors, preposition errors, article errors, and Chinglish. .

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

(1) What are the primary writing errors among vocational high school students?

(2) What are the main causes of these errors?

3.2 Research Subjects

This study analyzed the English writing errors of 66 vocational high school students from our institution. All participants, who are native Chinese speakers, enrolled through the general high school entrance examination and have 6-9 years of English learning experience. The analysis was based on monthly exam papers, specifically focusing on an application writing task: an invitation letter for the Spring Festival celebration with Tom. Given the students' relatively weak foundational skills, supplementary vocabulary prompts were provided, including terms like "Chinese Lunar Month," "family reunion," "temple fairs," "dragon dance," "traditional crafts," along with phrases such as "I am writing to.....The Spring Festival" and "I would be delighted if you could join us to..."

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Verb Errors

4.1.1 The main verb errors are the lack of predicate verbs, for example:

False: People very happy.   True: People are very happy.

Research shows that the absence of predicate verbs is the most frequent error among Chinese students, mainly due to poor mastery of verb transformations and an overemphasis on meaning at the expense of sentence structure.[2]

4.1.2 Improper Verb Collocation

The error of verb collocation mainly refers to the improper collocation of verbs and nouns.

False: We will look temple fairs.   False: We will play the temple fairs together.

"look"or "play"should be replaced by "go to ". This kind of error is mainly caused by the influence of Chinese thinking, because Chinese often express "kan miao hui", so students adopt the strategy of literal translation, resulting in errors.

4.1.3.Error in the use of modal verbs.

The error in the use of modal verbs mainly refers to the incorrect form of verbs used after modal verbs. For example, we can watching dances. The correct expression is: We can watch dances. This kind of error is mainly due to the lack of firm grasp of the meaning of modal verbs in English.

4.14.Tense Errors

Tense Errors mainly refers to the misuse of tense, such as:

False: We are watch TV.   True: We are watching TV.

Tense errors in verb usage mainly stem from inconsistent tense usage due to weak grammatical mastery.

4.1.5.Error of Non-Finite Verbs

Non-finite verb errors mainly refer to the incorrect form of non-finite verbs, for example:

False: I want invited to you celebrate the Spring Festival with me.

True: I want to invite you to celebrate the Spring Festival with me.

Non-finite verbs primarily stem from students' inadequate grasp of this grammatical category. The study of non-finite verbs has long been a persistent challenge for linguists, as Chinese learners often lack exposure to the concept of non-finite verbs, making them difficult to comprehend. This represents one of the key differences between Chinese and English. While Chinese sentences may contain multiple verbs, English strictly permits only one predicate verb per sentence. Consequently, influenced by Chinese grammar, students tend to use multiple verbs in English sentences.[3]

4.2 Noun Errors

Noun errors refers to abuse of countable and uncountable nouns, for example:

False: many delicious food   True: much delicious food

The main reason for the occurrence of noun errors is that learners find it difficult to distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns. This is mainly due to insufficient daily accumulation or the influence of Chinese culture. In Chinese, there are no strict singular and plural changes in nouns.

4.3 Article Errors

Article errors is the lack and redundancy of articles, for example:

False: This is happy day. True: This is a happy day.

The occurrence of grammatical errors is mainly influenced by the native culture.

4.4 Preposition errors

Preposition errors mainly manifest in the omission of prepositions and the wrong use of prepositions in phrases, such as:

False: I'm looking forward your reply. True: I'm looking forward to your reply.

False: It is at the first day of the Chinese lunar month.

True: It is on the first day of the Chinese lunar month.

The misuse of prepositions is mainly due to the learners' poor memory of fixed collocations and their lack of mastery of preposition usage.

4.5 Chinglish

Chinglish refers to sentences written by learners that don't conform to English expression habits, for example:

False: I very like Spring Festival. The correct sentence is: I like Spring Festival very much. The above errors are mainly caused by the influence of Chinese thinking, and learners adopt a literal translation strategy.

5. Insights

This study analyzes English writing among vocational high school students, identifying common errors including verb errors, noun errors, article errors, prepositions errors. To address these challenges, the author proposes the following recommendations.

5.1 Emphasize Vocabulary Instruction

The study shows that most errors stem from foundational knowledge gaps in vocabulary. Therefore, teachers should prioritize vocabulary instruction and reinforce basic knowledge in daily teaching. Highlight the importance of part-of-speech differentiation in English learning: Focus on spelling exercises for vocabulary errors; conduct sentence structure analysis and training to address verb omission/redundancy; cultivate chunking habits through collocational studies for improper verb collocations; and enhance modal verb acquisition for correct post-modem particle usage.

5.2 Develop English Thinking Patterns

Writing errors often reflect native language influences, with students producing sentences exhibiting Chinglish characteristics. To overcome this, teachers should implement Sino-English cultural comparison lessons to clarify linguistic differences, or encourage students to read authentic English literature. Furthermore, in daily writing training, it is essential to emphasize the guidance of writing strategies, cultivate students 'proper writing habits, and minimize the influence of Chinese thinking patterns.

5.3 Holding a Proper Attitude towards Students' Errors

Since errors are inevitable, teachers should hold a proper attitude towards students' errors during instruction rather than implementing an all-encompassing correction strategy. Vocational high school students primarily engage in English learning with instrumental motivation, and some learners may even believe they inherently struggle with the language.

Therefore, adopting a strict error-correction approach could undermine their motivation to learn.

References

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