

# A study on the interlanguage fossilization in senior high school English writing

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**Abstract:** In second language acquisition, many learners experience fossilization, particularly in senior high school English writing, impacting language development. This study identifies fossilization errors, analyzes their causes, and proposes effective teaching strategies to enhance writing skills. Findings suggest that theme-based instruction, peer review, minimizing mother tongue interference, and fostering cross-cultural communication significantly improve writing proficiency and reduce fossilization. This study aims to provide both theoretical insights and practical teaching references for improving senior high school English writing.

**Key words:** interlanguage fossilization; senior high school English writing; teaching strategies

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## 1 Introduction

In the era of global integration and the information age, foreign language proficiency is crucial for individual competitiveness. In second language acquisition, interlanguage fossilization occurs when persistent errors resist correction despite increased exposure. This phenomenon, introduced by Selinker in 1969, describes a dynamic transitional linguistic system between a learner's native and target language [1]. Fossilization in senior high school English writing affects grammar, vocabulary, and discourse structure, limiting language proficiency. This paper examines its causes and proposes effective teaching strategies to mitigate its impact. English writing reflects not only language knowledge but also logical thinking, cultural understanding, and creative expression. Therefore, educators must implement targeted strategies to help learners overcome fossilization and enhance their language abilities.

## 2 An overview of interlanguage fossilization

Selinker (1972) defined fossilization as persistent linguistic errors, later refined as the permanent cessation of language development [2]. Fossilization can be individual (recurring errors, competence stagnation) or group-based (socially accepted errors) and may be temporary (reversible) or permanent (entrenched) [3]. Understanding fossilization helps educators minimize its impact on language learning [4].

## 3 Literature review on interlanguage fossilization

### 3.1 Domestic research on interlanguage fossilization

Lu Jianji (1993) viewed interlanguage as a dynamic system. Chen Huiyuan (1999) identified psychological and cognitive factors. Dai Weidong & Niu Qiang (1999) highlighted teachers and textbooks. Ji Shaoli (2008) explored mother

tongue transfer, while Zhu Qingyun (2015) applied Krashen's affective filters.

### 3.2 Domestic research on the fossilization in English writing

Zhu Shuhua and Tao Guifeng (2011) suggested increasing second-language input and integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing to prevent fossilization. They emphasized the importance of authentic contexts in language teaching. Yu Li and Wang Jianwu (2006) noted that fossilization in senior high school writing often manifests as persistent grammatical errors, which, if uncorrected, may become permanent habits. Wang Shi, Mei Ziling, and Sun Nan (2018) found that vocabulary errors, such as unclear word classes and preposition misuse, contribute to fossilization, advocating for active vocabulary guidance [5]. Wang Yongjiang (2019) highlighted psychological mechanisms, such as habitual errors and negative transfer from the native language, impacting writing accuracy. Wu Xiaorui (2021) compared teaching approaches, concluding that process-oriented methods better guide students in forming correct writing habits and reducing fossilization. Bai Lanping (2021) analyzed rigidity in college students' English writing, attributing it to exam-focused education, which leads to reliance on templates and hinders independent thinking. Liao Xiaoxiang (2023) advocated for diverse teaching strategies and timely feedback to reduce fossilization, emphasizing cultural knowledge to enhance learners' intercultural communication skills.

### 3.3 Foreign research on interlanguage fossilization

Selinker (1972) introduced fossilization, describing it as a stagnation in second language learning. Vigil and Oller (1976) emphasized positive emotional and negative cognitive feedback to counter fossilization. Lenneberg (1967) linked it to the critical period hypothesis. Han (2004) equated fossilization with difficulties in adult language acquisition. Tajeddin et al. (2017) suggested enhancing sociopragmatic awareness to reduce fossilization. Khelf and Mostari (2019) highlighted mother tongue interference, while Barone (2024) noted that fossilization follows systematic patterns in language development.

## 4 Research gaps and summary of previous studies

While interlanguage fossilization research has progressed, domestic studies focus on theory-practice integration, whereas international research emphasizes theoretical exploration and empirical analysis. However, studies on senior high school English writing fossilization remain insufficient. Most research targets college students, overlooking younger learners. Addressing fossilization in high school writing, especially exam-related challenges, requires further study. Expanding research into cognitive science, psychology, and computational linguistics can enhance understanding. Existing domestic studies rely heavily on foreign theories and lack diverse methodologies. More focused research on high school fossilization is needed for both theoretical advancement and teaching improvement.

## 5 Manifestations of fossilization in senior high school English writing

At the vocabulary level, fossilization appears in misused parts of speech, incorrect prepositions, spelling errors (e.g., activities as activetis), and article misuse (Wang Shi et al., 2018). These stems from overgeneralization and misunderstandings of vocabulary.

At the grammar and syntax level, fossilization includes subject-verb agreement errors (my mother apology to me instead of my mother apologizes to me) and overgeneralization of tense and sentence structures (Yu Li & Wang Jianwu, 2006). Negative transfer from Chinese, such as excessive theme-based structuring, also leads to unnatural sentence flow, tense confusion, and improper voice usage in English writing.

## 6 Teaching strategies to reduce fossilization in senior high school English writing

### 6.1 Theme-based instruction in writing pedagogy

Enhancing vocabulary output through theme-based instruction can help reduce fossilization. By introducing unit

themes and thematic vocabulary, students build a semantic network, improving word understanding and contextual usage. Teachers should guide students in exploring word meanings, broadening vocabulary, and creatively expressing ideas. Tools like COCA and SKELL allow learners to compare word usage and improve language authenticity. The reading-to-write model integrates reading with writing, boosting input and output abilities. Selecting high-quality reading materials aligned with writing tasks fosters vocabulary internalization and enhances writing performance.

#### 6.2 Peer review mechanisms for fossilization reduction

Peer review fosters collaboration, enabling students to revise compositions by focusing on content and language quality rather than scores. Using symbols (e.g., underlining strong sentences, highlighting vocabulary), students provide direct linguistic feedback through additions, deletions, or modifications. Teachers can ensure review quality with adequate supervision. This process raises awareness of fossilization, offering immediate feedback and prompting self-reflection. Peer interaction encourages diverse perspectives, helping students recognize weaknesses and refine writing habits. The feedback mechanism enables quick adjustments, fostering innovation and reducing fossilization. Ultimately, peer review creates a dynamic learning environment, enhancing writing skills and critical thinking.

#### 6.3 Mitigation of mother tongue negative transfer

Chinese writing follows a spiral structure, unfolding gradually, while English favors linear thinking, presenting arguments directly. This difference can lead to implicit errors in English writing, affecting semantics, discourse, and pragmatics. To address this, teachers should compare English and Chinese syntax, highlighting differences (e.g., the position of adverbial clauses). Exercises like fill-in-the-blanks, error correction, and sentence transformation enhance syntax awareness. Exposure to authentic materials (e.g., reading, listening, videos) helps students internalize English structures. Continuous practice enables clear, direct expression, improving writing and cultural adaptation.

#### 6.4 Cultivation of intercultural communication competence

Enhancing intercultural communication skills helps prevent fossilization. Educators should integrate diverse cultural readings (e.g., literature, news, history) to broaden students' perspectives and foster appreciation for multiculturalism.

Practical writing tasks, such as international emails and cross-cultural festival descriptions, allow students to apply these skills in real-world contexts. Critical thinking activities—discussions, debates, and case studies—help students recognize cultural biases and consider multiple viewpoints.

### 7 Conclusion

This study analyzes fossilization in senior high school English writing, examining its impact on vocabulary, grammar, and syntax while identifying root causes. To mitigate fossilization, it proposes strategies such as enriching language input, fostering student interaction, reducing mother tongue interference, and enhancing intercultural communication skills to improve writing proficiency. Future research should adopt an interdisciplinary approach incorporating cognitive science, psychology, and computational linguistics to deepen understanding. By implementing tailored teaching strategies, educators can address fossilization challenges and enhance students' overall English proficiency.

#### Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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