

An Error Analysis of Verb usages in Composition by Non-English-major Undergraduates

Sun Minghui

Northwestern Polytechnical University, China

E-mail: sunminghui_nwpu@163.com

Published: 31 March 2021

Copyright © Minghui.

Abstract:

The usage of verbs has always been a hot topic in language research. Chinese pays attention to parataxis and Chinese verbs have no obvious morphological changes. However, English pays attention to hypotaxis, and the morphological changes of English verbs make the language more colorful. This difference makes it more difficult for Chinese students to learn English verbs. English writing is also affected by Chinese usage, and errors often occur in the use of verbs. Based on the theory of error analysis, this paper analyzes the compositions of 100 non-English majors, and finds that the errors are mainly concentrated in the non finite verbs, subject predicate agreement and word selection, and the causes are mainly in the aspects of interlanguage errors, intralingual errors and errors of communication strategies, aiming to put forward relevant suggestions for the purpose of writing teaching.

Key words: Verbs; Error Analysis; English Writing; Undergraduates

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

With the increasing globalization of world culture and economy, English plays an increasingly important role in our country. It has become one of the necessary skills for social talents. At the same time, great attention has been paid to English Teaching in various stages of education. As a cultural holy land for talents to be sent to the society, English teaching has become a basic discipline for all majors, striving to make students master the most basic English language knowledge. However, as the second language of our country, it is inevitable for students to have “Chinglish” English in their study. People have different opinions on the standard and fluency of the language. Some people think that they should be tolerant to the mistakes of students in English language learning. Some people think that the biggest disadvantage of doing so will kill the sustainable development of students' English learning. In China, teachers and students are easily influenced by the examination, but in College English teaching , as an important form of output in English learning, English writing is often ignored. At the same time, there is a common phenomenon: in many college English tests, writing scores are often the lowest. However, from the students' examination papers, writing errors often reflect the weakness of writing and the reasons why students make writing errors. Inspired by this point, a large number of scholars have done a lot of research on English learners' writing errors, which are based on error analysis theory. Depending on the teaching and learning of writing, students make a lot of mistakes in writing and their writing ability can not be improved.

1.2 Research Significance

According to the theory of error analysis, language errors in the learning process cannot be regarded as failures. Errors are not only inevitable, but also necessary. It tries to explain mistakes and their causes in the usage of foreign languages between the native language and foreign language. It is discussed what actually differences between a "mistake" and an “error”. An error is the usage of a word, it is a kind of incomplete learning with disadvantages.. Disadvantages always occur in this way also occur when only the native language is used without any foreign-language influence.

This article will focus on verb usages in composition written by Non-English-majors undergraduates. By analyzing the writing mistakes of non-English-majors undergraduates, it helps them to understand where their writing problems are and whether it is appropriate to use their own English learning strategy

1.3 Thesis Structure

Chapter one introduces the current situation in English teaching, it includes the research background, research significance. Chapter two introduces the development of error analysis and theoretical foundation. Chapter three introduces participants, questions and procedure. The last part is to provide some personal opinions.

Chapter II: Literature Review

2.1 Development of Error Analysis

Error analysis was first used as a way of studying second language acquisition in the 1960s. This development went hand in hand in language teaching.

Error analysis holds that language mistakes is an inevitable phenomenon in the process of language learning. Language mistakes in the process of learning cannot be regarded as failures, and mistakes are not only inevitable, but also necessary. It is of great benefit to improve the level. Corder(1967) first proposed the theory of error analysis. He pointed out that errors exist in every stage when learners acquire a certain language, and error analysis is helpful for learning Students find mistakes. He divided the error analysis into five steps: collecting samples, identifying errors, describing errors, explaining errors and evaluating errors. According to this view, errors indicate that a learner actively learns the target language, as they occur whenever a hypothesis tested by the learner does not work. In error analysis, the language learning process is regarded as being influenced by the learner's first language, interlanguage and the target language. Thus, all of these three language systems have an influence on which errors a learner makes. But the gap between the interlanguage and the target language is considered as the most important factors. Therefore, error analyses were carried out in order to generalize errors, interlanguage is used in second language acquisition. Error analysis soon turned out to be regarded as a research tool. By the late 1970s, it was merely contributing to broader second language acquisition theory and research, as it still does today.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Error Analysis

According to linguist Corder(1973), the definition of errors is that, they are signs of an imperfect knowledge of the code, for the learners have not yet internalized the formation rules of the foreign languages. Thus, he has given several steps in any typical EA research. Before the research, there are several steps proposed by Corder in the theory of error analysis.

S.P. corder, a British applied linguist, is the first scholar who systematically discusses the importance of error research. He thinks it's necessary to distinguish between error and mistake before explaining them. Error is a systematic error that occurs when learners master certain grammatical rules of the target language. It is a kind of error that occurs accidentally because learners do not form an automatic mechanism. "There are two criteria to distinguish the two: one is the frequency of occurrence; the occasional occurrence may be a mistake, The other is whether the generator can correct itself.

The first step of Error Analysis is to select the objects of the language samples and decide how to collect these samples. The first one is to collect natural samples, aiming at reflecting the true situation of learners' language use. As for errors, we should classify them, correct some in time, and treat them differently slowly. We have made clear the wrong attitude, but what kind of problems should be corrected and when should be correctly defined according to the nature of the error. It takes a long time for teachers to grade students' compositions. Students are prone to lose confidence and get no improvement. After collecting errors in the samples are supposed to be identified. Ellis believes that there are three steps should be taken into consideration. The first issue is to determine whether the errors

affect the correctness or appropriateness of the sentence. In other words, a sentence maybe grammatically correct but pragmatically wrong and this thesis will just focus on grammatical errors.

Richards (1971) proposed the classification of developmental errors in accepting intralingual and interlingual errors. .Developmental errors are assumptions that learners established on learning objectives based on the condition of limited target knowledge. With the influence of differences between mother language and second language in contrastive analysis restricting the concept of second language acquisition, Richard further categorizes intralingual errors in learner who learning English as a second language: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, and false concepts hypothesis.

Then, Ellis (1995) classifies intellectual errors into the category of intellectual ability and classifies inadvertent errors. He aims to divide the error into two categories and five types: Errors involving knowledge ability are mobility, intralingual, and specific, errors in the ability to use involve dealing with problems and communication strategies. As it has been mentioned, many scholars choose error sources to classify errors. The last step of Error Analysis is to evaluate errors after identifying the causes of errors. To evaluate errors, decisions need to be made on who the listeners and judges will be, what kind of errors will be judged and how to carry out the judgment. Based on the purpose of answering these questions, some researches have been conducted began in the late 1970s. Native judges and non-native judges hold different opinions about evaluation in most occasions.

.Based on Error Analysis theory, this thesis aims at analyzing verb errors existing in non-English Majors' English writings. Before that, it is necessary to have a brief review and introduction of relevant studies on the analysis of verb errors in English writing.

Chapter III: Methodology

3.1 Research Participants

The subject of this research are 100 non-English-majors students from four majors in NPU (Northwestern Polytechnical University) . The 100 subjects as participants were chosen from different major except English major, like the major of architecture, engineering, economics and laws, which ensures that their English abilities were not been trained like English-major students. Every student of non-English-majors has different levels of English competence. Therefore, it is worth selecting non-English majors as participants to figure out main types of verb errors and explore the similarities and differences among types of verb errors

3.2 Research Questions

Regarding research questions, we will focus on the following questions. First, what are the major types of verb errors? Second, What is the proportion of different verb errors? Third, what are the reasons causing these major types of verb errors?

3.3 Research Procedure

In terms of research procedures, the study was conducted in the following two steps: data collection and error analysis.

First, the author collected data. The data include those from sample compositions, questionnaires and interview. To begin with, the writing samples came from compositions written by 100 non-English majors. The students were required to finish a name argumentation. Second, an error analysis of verbs was carried out by following the five steps put forward by Corder (1974): collection of errors, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of error, and evaluation of errors. The procedures are presented as follow.

In the first step, Writing samples were collected. As has been mentioned above, all the compositions were collected from 100 non-English majors respectively. They all write the same topic. All the samples were natural language which can reflect students' real language proficiency. Then, Verb Errors were identified. The author selected one judge to take part in the process of error identification and categorization. The three judges were teachers majoring in English. Thirdly, The identified verb errors were described. The author classified the identified verb error. Fourth, An explanation of verb errors was conducted. Fifth, An evaluation of verb errors was carried out and pedagogical suggestions were provided by second language teaching and learning. James (2011) classifies errors into three types: substance errors, text errors and discourse errors, among which text errors involve lexical and grammatical errors.

Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion

As has been stated in last chapter, this study classifies verb errors into two categories and 11 subcategories. Table 1 is presented below.

Table 1 . Statistics of Verb Errors

Category	No.	%	Subcategories
Lexical Errors	23	10.13	Errors of Spellings
	35	18.18	Errors of word choice
	14	7.25	Errors of Verbal Phrases
	72	35.56	
Syntactic Errors	7	3.62	Errors of Transitivity
	10	5.18	Errors of Tense
	7	3.62	Errors of Voice
	32	16.18	Errors of Subject-predicate agreement
	18	9.33	Errors of Verb Omission
	37	19.13	Errors of Mood
	10	5.18	Errors of Non-finite Verbs
	4	2.07	Errors of modal or Auxiliary verbs
	125	64.44	
Total	197	100	

According to the data, in terms of the two categories, the percentage of lexical errors is 35.56%, the percentage of syntactic errors is 64.44%. In general, non-English-major students all have committed various kinds of verb errors in the compositions. There are two categories of verb errors, lexical errors and syntactic errors in the students' compositions as well as 11 subcategories: spelling errors, word choice errors, verbal phrases errors, transitivity errors, tense errors, voice errors, subject-predicate agreement errors, omission and redundancy errors, non-finite verb errors, mood verb errors and modal/auxiliary verb errors. As for the subcategories, the two most frequent error subcategories in the three grades are errors of non-finite verbs, subject-predicate agreement errors. And the least frequent error subcategory is modal/auxiliary verb errors.

Chapter V: Conclusion

To sum up, the present study uses the theoretical framework of error analysis to research the error of English verbs of Chinese non-English-major students. Based on the research, there are implications of the second language (English) study as follows. Vocabulary errors are important language errors in College English writing, which include spelling and word choice, verbal phrases. Owing to inadequate problems of students' phonetic level, learning strategies and English characteristics, teachers should pay attention to reduce vocabulary errors in writing, strengthening the training in listening and strategies, and improve the quality of College Students' English writing.

At the syntactic level, the long and short sentences can not be used flexibly, the sentence structure is disordered, which is heavily influenced by Chinese thinking. But at the discourse level, most students have no problem in the discourse structure, but the cohesion form of the text is single. Based on the study of students' text errors and the interviews with students and teachers, the author finds that the main causes of errors are related to the interference of mother tongue. The differences in language structure and thinking mode between English and Chinese will inevitably lead to errors in the process of English acquisition.

English learning and teaching mode will also affect students' writing ability. The author would like to put forward the following suggestions and enlightenment for English learning and teaching: Firstly, treating errors correctly and make students less affected by the negative transfer of their mother tongue in the learning process; Secondly, establishing a positive attitude towards learning and teaching, to persist and to accumulate linguistic knowledge. Thirdly, improving the teaching mode and increasing the input and output of language through various means, it is much better to give feedback on mistakes in time, paying attention to the language in class and improve the pragmatic awareness.

References

- [1] Corder, S.P. (1967) "The significance of learners' errors" *International Review of Applied Linguistics*. 5:160-170.
- [2] Corder, S. P. (1971). *Idiosyncratic Dialects and Error Analysis* (p. 14). Groos, Heidelberg.

- [3] Ellis, R. (1994) *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. p.48
- [4] Ellis, R. (2007) *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- [5] James, C. (1998) *Errors in the Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis*.
- [6] James, C. (1989). *Contrastive analysis*. London: Longman.
- [7] Richards, J.C. (1970) *A Non-contrastive Approach to Error Analysis English Language Teaching Journal* 25:204-219.
- [8] Richards, J. (1974). *Error Analysis and Second Language Strategies*. Longman.