
Analysis of College English Writing and Its Implications for Teaching

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Abstract

Chinese college students' English writing level has been in a low level. The main reason is that students' mastery of vocabulary, to a large degree, stays in cognition, and doesn't become a habit; at the same time, the grammar knowledge is not solid. Stylistic rules and layout is often affected by Chinese thinking. This paper analyzes the problems that exist in College English writing, which can help students avoid their language errors in writing, and which also urges students to conceive the proposed several suggestions by the English way of thinking, so as to improve the teaching of intensive reading.

Keywords

China college students, English writing, analyses of problems, teaching reflection.

1. Introduction

English writing is a process of recreation by thinking and using the knowledge of language. Writing level is an important indicator of a person's language proficiency. Writing teaching is an important part of College English teaching, but, due to the College English teaching hours and other conditions of the restrictions, that has been the weak link. In the College English teaching, we don't devote to the writing teaching. Teachers usually arrange a thesis after the intensive reading class, make a score according to the standard of CET-4, and finally give essays to the students. Consequently, students poorly understand the basic knowledge of English writing, and also write articles with many Chinglish errors. Because of the restricted class hours, teachers generally ignore these errors. That affects the quality of English writing teaching and the improvement of students' English writing level as a whole.

This paper analyzes some typical errors and problems in students' compositions, discusses the causes of these errors and problems, and puts forward several methods to improve teaching. Due to the limited class hours, we should try to mix the writing teaching with the intensive reading teaching.

2. Problems analyses

Kroll has proposed "to express their views, the writer has to be taken into account at least four structural levels: the whole discourse level, paragraphs structure, sentences structure and words structure." This article analyzes the typical mistakes and problems in College English writing from the lexical, syntactic and discourse aspects.

3. Vocabulary

A large number of errors are about the collocation. Collocation refers to the most common and typical environment in which a word is located. It may be the collocation of notional words with function words or the lexical collocation. Here is our copy from a student's composition in some way of expressions:
die a hard look→die a horrible death

if I remember not→if I am not mistaken
 in most occasions→many occasions
 study knowledge→get/acquire/obtain knowledge

On the one hand, these errors reflect the depth of the students' vocabulary is not enough. Their grasp of the vocabulary only stay in the quantity, but not the quality. On the other hand, the students' understanding of the words is only reflected in the cognitive stage, not forming a habit. In standardized tests, they can choose the correct answer from the four choices. However, when writing, they do not search these correct collocations, whereas they make some words themselves. So, the result is that Chinese teachers can understand their essays, but not foreign teachers. It can also give our vocabulary teaching a question -- whether some of teaching contents do not conform to the rules of language? The traditional idea is that vocabulary is composed of words and phrases. We spend a lot of time enlarging students' vocabulary, but they make so many mistakes in the word use? In recent years, some linguists study based on the corpus of English found, "English language communication is not only through the use of words or fixed phrases, but 90% of natural discourse is achieved by the two semi fixed 'plate' (chunk) structure ". Experts divided these chunks into words and phrases, namely traditional vocabulary, collocation, idioms, and sentences frame speech. From the students' compositions, we can see students can not grasp enough chunks, and their mastery of many words only stay in the traditional pronunciation, form and meaning.

3.1 Syntax

The errors of syntactic level are mainly concentrated in the aspect of the difference between Chinese and English. Many linguists have found that there are many differences between the two languages by comparing the two languages in English and Chinese. English language is syntactic, so it can make full use of the morphological changes of word order and function words to express grammatical relations. English sentences focus on formal cohesion and structural integrity to form meaning; while Chinese mainly express grammatical relations of the typical analysis language by word order and function words. In Chinese, sentence coherence is more important than structural integrity, and sentences often cast shape with meaning. Students' errors in the compositions mainly perform in the following aspects:

(1) Subject-“theme instead of subject”

The study of language scholars shows that English is a language with the subject predicate (SV) as the salient feature. The subject and predicate structure is the center of all kinds of relations. While Chinese is a significant language with a theme (TC) structure, theme is often subjective, but not subject. And even subject is sometimes omitted or implied. Affected by that, students often directly translate Chinese theme into the subject of English, so they make many Chinglish sentences. For example: His body js healthy.→He is healthy.

In fact, fresh water is very shortage.→There is s acute shortage of fresh water.

(2) Predicate

Chinese predicate is complex, and it may be a verb, noun and an adjective. No morphological changes consist between subject and predicate. On the contrary, in English sentences, person、 number、 gender and meaning must be consistent. Under the influence of the Chinese, there are a lot of errors in students' English writings, such as water sentences, breaking sentences, grammatically inconsistence, lack of tense echoes, a mixture of parts of speech and so on.

For example: Lack of communication is the most important reason caused the generation gap.→Lack of communication is the most important factor, which led to the generation gap.

And it gave us the opportunities to play snow. Go skate and to have a hot meal.→And it gave us the opportunities to play snow, go skate and have a hot meal.

I know this company enjoy good reputation. →I know that this company enjoys good reputation.

There was a great increase in people's income in the past twenty years. →There has been a great increase in people's income in the past twenty years.

Our family has no warm and happy instead of quiet. →There are no warmth and happiness in our family.

So they against it. →So they are against it.

3.2 Overall Planning

Mode of Chinese traditional thinking focuses on intuitive experience and is accustomed to intuitive experience. We'd often like to summarize our practice experience and inner understanding ideas from the main conjecture. Affected by that, students don't more often than go straight to the theme, but from far and near. They twist and turn in their writings, and when it comes to the subject, they just write a few words.

4. Reflection

From the above analyses, we can see students are deeply affected by the language knowledge, thinking habits and cultural differences, and all kinds of problems and errors occurred. In the College English teaching class, the task of intensive reading is heavy, and there is no special writing class. These error analyses to our college English teaching can put forward some new ideas. One is to change the past teaching style that teachers only pay attention to each word rather than the lexical chunks. From then on, teachers should try to guide students to grasp a large number of the word chunks, and focus on the teaching and learning of the lexical chunks. The other is that teachers should strengthen the discourse analysis, pay attention to the cultural factors, and reduce the explanation of language knowledge. And another is that teachers need to strengthen the students' practice on the listening, translation, reciting, and writing in the arrangement of the extracurricular practice. Listening, speaking, reading and writing is supposed to complement each other, so in the intensive reading class, teachers need teach writing; meanwhile, in writing class, teachers need to improve students' English level.

5. Conclusion

English writing is the process of expressing their own ideas and opinions by use of their language knowledge, which can actually reflect students' English level. In this process, there will inevitably be a variety of language errors, as well as cultural differences brought about by the problems. In the College English class, teachers should attach importance to vocabulary and writing errors that often appear in the syntactic and textual analysis, and let the students master the common error types and understand the roots of problems so as that students can make less or no similar mistakes. At the same time, the study and analysis of lexical, syntactic and discourse mistakes in college students' English compositions is also a tool to test the effectiveness of our teaching way, which can help us to discover the defects that existed in the teaching and adjust teaching emphases by using different teaching strategies and teaching methods in the limited College English class hour in order to improve students' English level at last.

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