

# Intralingual Errors in Grammatical Aspects of Chinese University L2 Learners' Compositions

Xinyi Liu<sup>1, †</sup>, Mengying Wang<sup>2, †</sup>, Lingyue Zhang<sup>3,\* †</sup>, Mengxiao Zhou<sup>4, †</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of English Language and Literature, Jiangnan University, Wuhan, Hubei province, 430056, China

<sup>2</sup> School of English Language and Literature, Capital Normal University, Beijing, 100089, China

<sup>3</sup> College of Software, Jilin University, Changchun, Jilin province, 130015, China

<sup>4</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, Zhejiang province, 321004, China

Lingyue Zhang Email: zhangly5519@mails.jlu.edu.cn

<sup>†</sup>Those authors contributed equally.

## ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the most challenge tasks for EFL learners. Intralingual errors in L2 writing greatly reflects learner's target language proficiency. This study aimed to identify different types of intralingual errors and determined the most frequent one in the augmentations written by Chinese university students. The research analysis is based on error analysis and seven intralingual categories proposed by Carl James. 49 intralingual errors were distinguished. Based on the examination of grammatical features, those intralingual errors were classified into those seven categories after analyzing. The most frequent intralingual error is misanalysis (37.78%), followed by overlooking cooccurrence (24.49%). And the grammatical feature of article misuse (40%) or emission and noninfinite verb misuse (41.67%) take the largest proportion in misanalysis and overlooking cooccurrence, respectively. The researchers deuced that the ignorance of article rules is the main reason of misanalysis error and misunderstanding of sentence structure and noninfinite verb forms accounts for the overlooking cooccurrence error. Based on the research findings, EFL teachers could improve their teaching methods to help students reduce intralingual errors in writing.

**Keywords:** intralingual errors, argumentative writing, error analysis.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are four basic skills for EFL learners. According to the academic mean performance by nationality of IELTS in 2019, the average score of reading and listening of Chinese candidates was 6.2 and 5.9 respectively, whereas the writing band score of was only 5.5 (total points are 9). Therefore, English writing is a relatively difficult and complex skill for Chinese L2 learners, and errors in writing are found as an unavoidable part of EFL student writing. H. Douglas Brown classifies sources of errors into interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, the context of learning and communication strategies [1]. According to Jack.C.Richards, intralingual errors in writing are items produced by the learners which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language[2].

Intralingual errors are of high frequency in writing errors. According to Noralyn.G.Agaby, Intralingual errors and interlingual errors are interrelated in English

writing and most error intralingual errors are caused by interlingual errors [3].Conversely, another finding by Erhan Sari and Muhammad.T.E.Purnama showed that all errors made in writing are intralingual errors. These conclusions above showed that the cause of intralingual error and interlingual error is intertwined and uncertain [4]. This ambiguity makes it more difficult to explore cause of each type of errors respectively. Therefore, in order to provide clear characteristic of intralingual error for further study and some targeted solutions for teaching, this research aims to investigate and identify the proportion of different types of intralingual errors in Chinese university students' L2 writing.

Based on the phenomenon of intralingual errors in L2 writing, this research will first introduce the clear definition of intralingual error. By using text analysis, the intralingual errors in 28 argumentative writings of two topics with almost the same length will be analyzed. This study will use the classification criteria of intralingual errors mentioned in Errors in Language Learning written

by Carl James to classify these errors into generally 7 categories, including false analogy, misanalysis, incomplete rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking co-occurrence restrictions, hypercorrection and overgeneralization[5]. Then, the number and proportion of each kind of errors will be counted based on the criteria. This study will focus on the category that accounts for the large proportion. The source of each category will be analyzed based on the grammatical features of errors. From the result and analysis, we can provide a view for targeted teaching strategy in order to reduce intralingual errors in L2 writing.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***2.1. Definition of Error***

Language is systematic and regular. According to James, a system is composed of its internal components, which restrict each other [6]. In the whole learning process, learners may violate the rules of this system for a variety of reasons. Therefore, only by taking these rules as a reference scale can we judge whether errors occurred in the second language writing. Errors should not only be regarded as something to be eliminated, but also of great significance. For this purpose, before judging and classifying those errors, distinction should be made between error and mistake.

According to Brown, an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker which reflects the competence of the learner[7]. It is an error which is caused by the learner's inability to express correctly and even if this error is pointed out, they may not be able to correct it. On the contrary, Endang Fauziati stressed that mistakes may be due to performance factors like memory limitation, fatigue and emotional strain[8]. And if the mistake is pointed out, it can be self-corrected.

### ***2.2. The resources of error***

In 1970s, researchers began to classify the resources of error. Richards first mentioned the concept of Interlingual Error and Intralingual Error [9]. Meanwhile, Heidi.C.Dulay and Marina.K.Burt suggested another concept of Interference Error, Developmental Error and Unique Error. However, the three types of error can be categorized as both Interlingual and Intralingual Errors [10]. Therefore, the concept from Richards seemed to be more relevant. Richards classified errors into two categories: Interlingual errors: These errors are caused by mother tongue interference. Intralingual and developmental errors: this kind of errors occurs during the learning process of the second language learning at a stage when the learners have not really acquired the knowledge.

### ***2.3. Categories of Intralingual Errors***

Historically, there are many kinds of classification of intralingual errors, two of which are influential and frequently cited.

Richards classifies intralingual errors into four categories, including over-generalization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of the rules and false concept hypothesized [2]. James in his book *Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis* subdivided Intralingual errors into seven categories: false analogy, misanalysis, incomplete, rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking co-occurrence restrictions, hypercorrection and overgeneralization (or system-simplification) [5]. This research uses the latter one to classify intralingual errors.

#### ***2.3.1 False Analogy***

A kind of over-generalization. L2 learners do not fully understand the internal rules of the target language is the main cause of false analogy. They often wrongly assume rules in the target language based on their known information. The deformation errors of noun plural and verb past tense are the main examples.

#### ***2.3.2 Misanalysis***

According to Fatmawati.Riri, Misanalysis is caused by the wrong concept of a particular rule of the target language [11]. Misanalysis reflects L2 learners mistakenly assume that a particular grammar rule of the target language can be applied in all contexts.

#### ***2.3.3 Incomplete Rule Application***

This sort of error is opposite to overgeneralization.[6] In the process of learning target language, L2 learners pay more attention to the function of communicating than to understanding the rules of grammar. They might ignore the complex syntactic structure of the sentence and tend to use a relatively simple rules for effective communication.

#### ***2.3.4 Exploiting Redundancy***

Exploiting redundancy refers to learners repeat the grammatical features that do not contribute to the meaning of an utterance. According to Chittima Kaweera, those unnecessary repetitions should be eliminated for do not improve writing but add noting to what has been expressed [12].

#### ***2.3.5 Overlooking Cooccurrence Restrictions***

This error indicates that writers ignore the restrictions of target languages' grammatical rules.[6] As a result, improper collocations and structures are often produced

in language output. Monnipha Sompong also mentioned that Many students usually make use of the wrong rules in contexts where they do not apply. Overlooking co-occurrence can be seen as the misunderstanding of concepts [13].

### 2.3.6 Hypercorrection

Hypercorrection is non-standard use of language that results from the over-application of a perceived rule of language-usage prescription [6]. Writers who produce a hypercorrection generally believes through a misunderstanding of such rules that the form is more “correct”, standard or otherwise preferable, often combined with a desire to appear formal or educated. According to Kaweera, the reason of these errors is that the learner's insistence in applying knowledge of certain rules to other information [12]. In other words, students are over cautious, and they tend to use the familiar rules.

### 2.3.7 Overgeneralization (System-Simplification)

In linguistics, overgeneralization is the application of a grammatical rule in cases where it doesn't apply. And system-simplification is simplifying an utterance by substituting a single form in the native language where the target language uses two or more. Thomas Scovel mentioned that his error sort is found once the author learns a rule or pattern within the target language, he or she then, assumes that the rule or pattern operates while not exception[14].

## 3. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

In this research, quantitative description method is adopted to investigate the different types of intralingual errors and their proportions in L2 argumentations written by Chinese university students.

### 3.1. Analysis material

The participants of this study were 28 students of the first grade in Chinese universities. The data sources were 28 students' English compositions in Academic year 2020/2021. The form of the compositions is argumentative writing, and in every text, the number of words is around 250 words.

### 3.2. Data collection

The data of this research were gotten from the collection of students' argumentation texts. It consisted of 28 texts. The data was collected through reading, note taking and picking out the errors. Researchers used the checking software to complete the three steps. The whole process was repeated to ensure the validity of data. And data analysis was done during the data collection procedure.

### 3.3. Data analysis procedure

The data were categorized by the 7 categories of intralingual errors suggested by James and analyzed by the error analysis proposed by Brown. Researchers applied the following steps to analyze them: 1. Researchers identify all errors in the L2 written pieces. 2. Intralingual errors are distinguished and classified into different error types according to the 7 categories. 3. The frequency of different errors will be calculated. 4. The researchers will compare and analyze the frequency and get the results.

## 4. RESULT

In this study, there are 69 intralingual errors contained in 28 argumentations written by Chinese college students. The intralingual errors were categorized based on their grammatically features consisting of noninfinite verb misuse, article misuse or omission, incorrect preposition collocation and so on. Combining with semantics and the author's writing intention, the intralingual error was analyzed based on the seven categories proposed by the James. During the analysis, not all intralingual errors fit in this error source classification criteria. Therefore, the 20 errors that did not meet the criteria were excluded in this study.

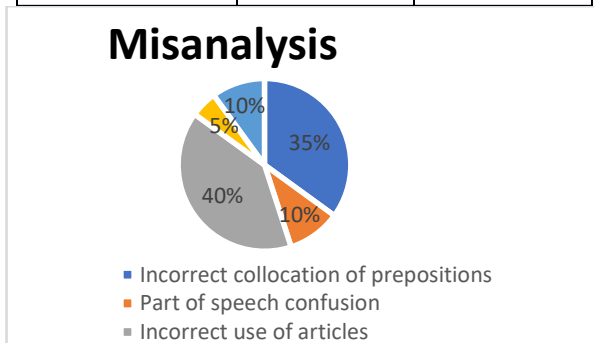
According to Table 1, the proportion of each type is misanalysis 38.78%, overlooking cooccurrence 24.49%, exploiting redundancy 16.33%, false analogy 8.16%, incomplete rule application 6.12%, overgeneralization 6.12%, hyper correction 0%, which is shown in Table1. The proportion of errors can greatly reflect the degree of difficulty in learning different grammatical rules. In the chart, the most frequent errors occur in misanalysis (38.78%) and overlooking cooccurrence (24.49%). This meant that most students can easily have the two kinds of errors when writing argumentative writing. The least frequent error occurred in Hyper Correction (0%). This proved that students didn't apply the wrong forms to show their correctness. And the researchers will mainly analyze the errors in Misanalysis and Overlooking Cooccurrence.

The misanalysis category contains 5 different grammatical features, among which incorrect preposition collocation and article misuse or omission account for a large proportion, 40% and 35% respectively (Figure1). The overlooking cooccurrence category contains 6 grammatical features shown in the Figure2. The misuse of noninfinite verb misuse (41.67%) almost takes up half proportion, and the proportion of the remaining categories is relatively average. It is worth noting that the grammatical feature of overlooking cooccurrence error may look similar to those in misanalysis category, for example, the incorrect preposition collocation and the preposition misuse. This is because the similar errors at grammatical level may have different causes based on the

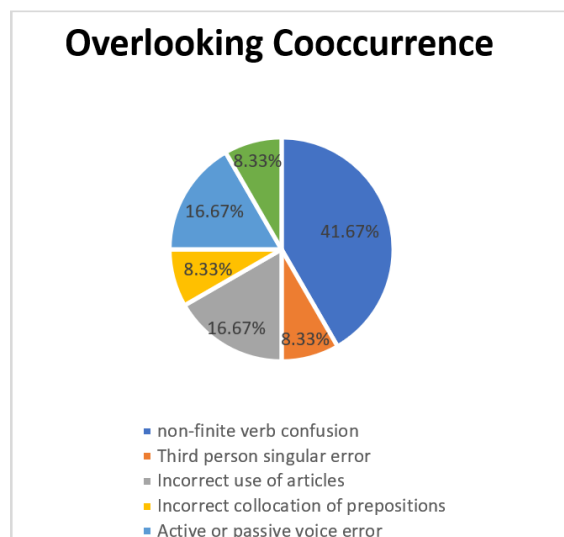
semantics and the writing intentions. Therefore, in this study, all analyses are based on the textual content.

**Table 1.** The number and proportion of seven intralingual error types

Error type	Number	Proportion
False Analogy	4	8.16%
Misanalysis	19	38.78%
Incomplete rule application	3	6.12%
Exploiting redundancy	8	16.33%
Overlooking cooccurrence	12	24.49%
Hyper correction	0	0%
Overgeneralization	3	6.12%
TOTAL	49	100%



**Figure 1** The number and proportion of grammatical features in misanalysis



**Figure 2** The number and proportion of grammatical features in overlooking cooccurrence

## 5. DISCUSSION

Through the collection, analysis and classification of grammatical errors in these writings, it is found that misanalysis and overlooking cooccurrence restrictions account for a high proportion of intralingual errors. Few previous researches mentioned about the further reasons behind these two kinds of errors. It was recognized that these two types of errors are the main sources of intralingual errors. The linguistics feature of each error is the token of error. Therefore, analyzing the largest proportion of error's grammatical feature can facilitate the understanding of error source.

The first source of intralingual errors is misanalysis. From the above table, misanalysis accounts for the highest proportion of intralingual errors. According to James, misanalysis refers to L2 learners have formed a hunch or hypothesis concerning an L2 item, which they are now putting into practice, but the hypothesis is unfounded[5]. Hasyim Sunardi also puts forward term 'false concept hypothesized'. He explains that this type of error can be defined as "something due to poor gradation of teaching item" [15]and leads to the fact that the learners may wrongly assumes that one particular grammar feature can be applied in all contexts. An example among the collected writing errors: *We are very familiar with the story of Steve Jobs, \*who was the co-founder, chairman, and CEO of Apple Inc.* In this example, *the story of Steve Jobs* should be regarded as a whole. However, the student mistakenly analyzed the sentence constituents and *who* is used to modify *Steve Jobs*. Another example occurs in *Neither should a person regard wealth as \*a (an)ultimate aim to fulfill his dream.* The student wrongly assumes that "a" could be used to modify all single forms and did not consider the rule that words begin with a vowel should be modified by "an". Therefore, misanalysis is a common type of error in second language writing.

Among the many causes of misanalysis, the incorrect use of articles is the most common. By analyzing the essential causes of misanalysis, incorrect collocation of prepositions, incorrect use of articles, mistakenly analyze sentence constituents and so on will all lead to misanalysis. And article errors occur most frequently. In this research, there are two reasons which lead to article errors. The first reason is the writers mistakenly assume that all singulars can only be modified by "a", just like the example has been mentioned above. The second reason is the student does not distinguish definite article and indefinite article. There is an error in this research that belong to this condition: *Photography is \*the (a)slow-living pastime that suits me best.* Probably the student not having understood the different usages between "a" and "the" and not having analyzed whether or not photography appears in the previous passage. And in this sentence, "the" should be replaced by "a". It can be found from the figure 1 that L2 learners often ignore

the rules of articles, which is the main reason for misanalysis.

The second source of intralingual errors is overlooking cooccurrence restriction. From the above table, overlooking cooccurrence restriction accounts for the second highest proportion of intralingual errors. According to Richards, a learner occasionally overlooks or fail to observe the restrictions of existing structures[2]. In the previous results, the errors can reflect the incomplete understanding of sentence structures. James also pointed out that overlooking co-occurrence appears in verbs frequently.[6] Many errors in the composition were caused by the changing of verb form. For example, *visible wealth cannot bring us the true happiness which invisible wealth bring\* for us(brings)*. In this sentence, "invisible wealth" is a single form, and it requires a singular subject of adding "s". The student ignored that the subject must agree with the verb. They should appear in the same form to fit in the structure. Another example is that *I used to love \*read (reading)books*. The writer forgot the rules of non-finite verb. When a verb is combined with "to be" it should be changed into -ing form. Overlooking cooccurrence is a common type of error.

Among the many causes of overlooking cooccurrence, the misuse of non-finite verb is the most common. By analyzing the essential causes of overlooking co-occurrence, non-finite verb, passive voice, third person singular and so on lead to overlooking co-occurrence. And non-finite verb occurs most frequently. In this research, there are mainly two reasons that lead to the misuse of non-finite verb. The first is that students can not combine different forms of verbs with the context. According to Ruzheng Lin, the use of gerund and particle change with inflection.[16] For example, *I believe baking will make my retirement life more \*relax. (relaxed)*. The student failed to understand that in the part of object complement, past principle should be used. As a result, the writer overlooked the rule and chose the wrong form. Essentially, students still have some problems with the understanding of sentence structure. Another reason is the complexity of each non-finite verb. For example, the form of gerund serves as subject, object, adverbial part and so on. In the sentence *It is not the fame but the happiness and the satisfaction that drives him \*doing this year by year. (to do)*, gerund serves as the object of the sentence, and it should match with the formal subject "it". In different functions, it has fixed collocations, the student did not master them. So when the formal subject appeared, the student ignored the rules of gerund and used the wrong form. When students learn the non-finite verbs, they can not distinguish different functions clearly. In this research, the two reasons mainly caused the errors in non-finite verb. And the misuse of non-finite verb accounts for the most in overlooking cooccurrence.

## 6. CONCLUSION

For English L2 learners, the process of writing is challenging. In L2 writing, students have to acquire proficiency in the use of the target language, compared with native language writing. The intralingual error in L2 writing pieces is a great reflection of learner's target language proficiency. The present study was an attempt to identify the intralingual errors and investigate the proportion of different types. The focus of the study was mainly the intralingual error in the grammatical aspect of argumentations written by Chinese university students. The study employed the procedure of error analysis. Seven categories of intralingual errors (false analogy, misanalysis, incomplete rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking cooccurrence restrictions, hypercorrection, overgeneralization) were used to classify intralingual errors. The result of this study showed that 28 argumentations contain 49 intralingual errors in total, among which the proportion of each type is misanalysis 38.78%, overlooking cooccurrence 24.49%, exploiting redundancy 16.33%, false analogy 8.16%, incomplete rule application 6.12%, overgeneralization 6.12%, hyper correction 0%. The grammatical feature of each error type was examined firstly, then the intralingual errors were classified into seven categories after analyzing.

Some pedagogical implications can be drawn from this study. First of all, teachers could expand the relative uses of new words or grammar rules. In this way, students' understanding of the target language system can be elaborated and deepened, reducing the error of misanalysis and overlooking cooccurrence. For example, the teaching of phrase collocation and synonym can be introduced into the class. Secondly, teachers may use the appropriate teaching strategies to explain the oddities of target language (e.g., child-children, goose-geese), and guide students to compare and analogy correctly. Thirdly, in order to help students to realize and correct the redundancy in the writing, teachers could provide positive feedbacks and necessary instructions. The text analysis and error analysis applied in this study is limited to investigate the cause of intralingual errors further. Therefore, other research methods could be adopted to explore the error formation process.

## REFERENCES

- [1] H.D. Brown, *Principles of Learning and Teaching English*, New Jersey Prentice- Hall Inc., 1980, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.37.1.121b>
- [2] J.C.Richards, *A Non- Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis*. Richards, J.C edition, *Error analysis*, London: Longman, 1971, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/XXV.3.204>

- [3] N. G. Agbay, Scrutinizing interlingual and intralingual error: Basis for English writing program, *The Educational Review, USA*, 3(10), 2019, 142-151. DOI:10.26855/er.2019.10.003
- [4] E.Sari, M. Purnama, Interlingual Errors and Intralingual Errors Found In The English Narrative Text Written By Smp, Smk And University Students' In Lampung (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta). 2015, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23917/humaniora.v17i2.2501>
- [5] C.James, Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis, Bei Jing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2001, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1012430028030>
- [6] C.James, Errors in language and use: Exploring error analysis. Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1998 , pp.173-181, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588202>
- [7] H.D.Brown, Principles of Language Learning and Teaching, New York: Pearson Longman, 2007.
- [8] E.Fauziati, Readings on applied linguistics: a handbook for language teacher and teacher researcher, 2009.
- [9] J.C.Richards, Error analysis: Perspectives on second language acquisition, London, UK: Longman, 1974, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315836003>
- [10] H.Dulay, M.Burt, A new perspective on the creative construction processes in child second language acquisition. *Language Learning* 24, 1974, pp.253-268. DOI:12.<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1974.tb00507.x>
- [11] F. Riri, H. Haryanto, K. Saliya Interlingual and intralingual errors in writing English composition made by EFL students of Muhammadiyah University of Makassar (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Negeri Makassar)
- [12] C.Kaweera, Writing Error: A Review of Interlingual and Intralingual Interference in EFL Context. *English language teaching*, 6(7), (2013), 9-18. DOI: 10.5539/elt.v6n7p9
- [13] M.Sompong, Error Analysis. *Thammasat Review*, 2015 16(2), 109–127. DOI:<https://sc01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/tureview/article/view/40756>
- [14] T. Scovel, Learning New Languages: A guide to second language acquisition, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle, 2001
- [15] S. Hasyim “Error Analysis in the Teaching of English.” *Kata: A Biannual Publication on the Study of Language and Literature* 4 (2002): 62-74.
- [16] R. Lin, Mother Tongue Interference to Target Language, *Journal of Hunan University Social Sciences: Changsha*,1980