

Review of the Acquisition of Third Person Singular Form on Chinese EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, English no longer simply represents a language, but represents a right to participate in global communication, which makes more and more people begin to learn English. As a large country of English learning, China has included English into the scope of the college entrance examination. In the process of English learning, due to the different language phenomenon between Chinese and English, the errors of verb using is one of the most common grammatical point, and it is also the pain point of Chinese learning grammar for a long time. In this paper, I briefly introduce the importance of learning the third person singular and the problems faced by learners in learning the third person singular and the teaching difficulties that teachers need to pay attention to in the teaching process. These all bases on the situation of Chinese people learning English.

Keywords: *Language learning, third person singular form, negative transfer, subject-verb agreement*

1. INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, the phenomenon that verbs have to conjugate and nouns, pronouns and adjectives have to inflect (for example, walk turns into walks) is called "inflection", and such language is called "inflection languages". Without these inflections, the language that judges the grammatical function only according to the position of the word in the sentence is called "analytic language". English has a transition from inflectional language to analytic language. Adding s to the verb is the residual trace of inflectional language after some historical evolution.

It is found that in China, most English beginners believe that the verb inflection after the third person singular is a difficulty. There is no very difficult grammatical phenomenon, but it is a common mistake made by English learners. They often forget the suffix of verbs, especially the irregular form of verb inflection, and ignore the change of person in oral and written expression. The above phenomenon are closely related to language classification. Chinese is a typical analytic language without inflectional changes as English.

2. THE DIFFICULTIES IN ACQUISITION OF THIRD PERSON SINGULAR FORM

2.1. Subject-verb Agreement Errors in Verb Inflection

In all the subject-verb agreement errors, the frequency of the third person singular form errors cover 21.8% from tested Chinese-L1 ESL group [1]. In China, most of the young children do not understand why there is an s after a verb just because it is in the third person singular form. When teachers are asked about what is third person, they will say the third person is that something neither you nor I. This is acceptable to children under the age of 7 but it takes a long time to judge whether this person is the third person and whether it is singular. Therefore, once there is no time for thinking or insufficient concentration, the errors of subject-verb agreement occur. Table 1 shows the rules of inflection of third person singular verbs.

Table 1. The rules of inflection of third person singular verbs.

Add s directly	give—gives,ask—asks,take—takes,get—gets,write—writes
Ending with s, x, sh,	fix—fixes ,pass—passes

ch, o, add es after the verb	,watch—watches,wash—washes,go —goes
Ending with a consonant letter + y, change y into I and add es	study—studies,carry—carries,worry—worries
Have	have—has
The third person singular of Be	am is are(depends to the subject)

2.1.1. The Neglect of Irregular Verb Inflection

When most Chinese students are exposed to the third person singular and the noun is inflected, the teacher will tell them that they usually add s after the verb. If there are irregular inflections, they need extra learning. But students often associate the third person singular with S. Therefore, teachers have developed a relatively universal law for students to remember:

The reason why teachers do this is that English accounts for a large proportion of scores in various entrance examinations in China, which is called the main subject. As an error prone point, the third person singular is included in the test site of grammatical blank filling. Generally speaking, the teacher does not allow the students to make mistakes involving this grammar point. Therefore, English teachers will repeat to exam the students to let them remember these rules, accompanied by certain punishment.[2]

2.1.2. The Instability of Suffix -s in Oral Expression

Chinese English learners often use pause to buffer the thinking blank of thinking when speaking. Learners usually give themselves time to think about what they want to say next by extending the final pronunciation of the last word. Due to the teacher's repeated emphasis on the third person singular at the beginning of learning, students will unconsciously add the pronunciation of s at the end of the verb, and even add the pronunciation of s after the noun. This leads to the instability of the verb change of the third person singular in oral expression.

Moreover, when analyzing the correct verbs produced in 3rd person singular end in the sound [s] or [z][3]. It is found that compared with other learners who have never gone abroad, exposure to English over a period of time may affect learners, who will better express the third person singular morpheme-s in written and oral registers. Therefore, under such experimental results, it can be easily found that it is very helpful for learners to have long-term exposure to English context for the learning of the third person singular[4]. This is why more than 80% of English teaching is advocated in the classroom of English second language learners. This is to minimize the interference of mother tongue. Table 2

shows the Influence of Exposure to Foreign Language in Third Person Singular Form.

Table 2. The Influence of Exposure to Foreign Language in Third Person Singular Form.

Children Age: 11- 14	Subject 1
No correct verbs -s morpheme: Written	7/27
No correct verbs -s morpheme : Oral	15/32
Correct verbs Written	-S MORPHEME: says, goes
Correct verbs Oral	-S MORPHEME: goes, says, gives looks, leaves, and thinks. Verb TO BE: is.

2.2. Negative Transfer of Mother Tongue Causes the Difference in Verb Inflection

2.2.1. Verb Inflection

As is known, English is a language with inflectional changes while Chinese is not. In Chinese, verbs don't change in tense or person no matter when or whom the sentence refers to. It is found that in China, most English beginners feel the verb inflection after the third person singular is a difficulty. There is no very mysterious grammatical phenomenon, but it is a common mistake made by English learners. They often forget the suffix of verbs, especially the irregular forms of verb inflection, and ignore the change of person in oral and written expression. The above phenomena are closely related to language classification. Chinese is a typical analytic language without the same inflectional changes as English. This leads to the differences in expression between the two languages, leading to the phenomenon of negative transfer.

Therefore, in both oral and writing, people should pay attention to the negative transfer of language and correct it according to the different characteristics of the two ways of expression. There are few studies on the acquisition of the third person singular form with the negative transfer of mother tongue as the core, so it needs follow-up research as a supplement.

2.2.2. The Order of Acquisition of Grammatical Morphemes

Due to the positive transfer of mother tongue, English learners with rich inflectional changes are more inclined to use 3SG morphemes, because they use more inflectional verbs and are easier to summarize rules [3]. However, Chinese learners have never been exposed to inflectional changes, so they tend to use earlier learned morphemes to replace the suffix -s. This reminds teachers that they need to pay attention to the acquisition

sequence in the early stage of learners' exposure to English, recognize the inflectional differences between Chinese and English, and better design the curriculum plan.[5] Table 3 shows the order of Acquisition of Grammatical Morphemes for L1 and L2 Learners of English.

Table 3. Order of Acquisition of Grammatical Morphemes for L1 and L2 Learners of English.

Acquisition Order of L1 Learners of English	Acquisition Order of L2 Learners of English
1. Present Progressive -ing	1. Plural-s
2. Plural -s	2. Present progressive -ing
3. Irregular Past Tense	3. Copula be
4. Possesive -'s	4. Auxiliary be
5. Copula be	5. Articles a /an and the
6. Articles a /an and the	6. Irregular Past Tense
7. Regular Past Tense -ed	7. Regular Past Tense -ed
8. 3rd person singular Present Tense -s	8. 3rd person singular Present Tense -s
9. Auxiliary be	9. Possesive -'s

3. APPLICATION AND REFLECTION IN TEACHING PROCESS ON EFL LEARNERS

3.1. Enable Learners to Have a Preliminary Understanding of Linguistics

A large part of the reason for the third person singular error is that students don't understand why they should inflect verbs. This work must be handed over to educators, because rote teaching will make learners bored. In constant repetition, although learners remember the inflection of all verbs, their enthusiasm for learning will be eroded. Teachers could let learners have a general understanding of inflectional language, agglutinating language and analytic language. In the early stage of students' contact with English, teachers should simply describe the origin of language to students to increase the depth of English learning, and input some professional knowledge appropriately[6].

3.2. Pay Attention to the Error Correction Timeliness in the Early Stage of Learning

Although English grammar teaching is not only a classroom teaching task, it is undeniable that the effect of classroom teaching is more important than tutoring after class [7]. When learners make the same subject predicate mistake for the first time, teachers should correct it in time to avoid forming the wrong habit. Among high school and College English learners as a second language, basic errors in pronunciation and grammar are

common, which also reflects the lack of timeliness of teaching feedback[8-10].

4. CONCLUSION

The subject-verb agreement of the third person singular is a very basic point in the process of English learning. If learners want to learn English well, they must pay attention to every detail. This requires educators and learners to work together to find the systematization and regularity of language learning. English teachers should teach students according to their aptitude according to the situation of Chinese learners. Paying attention to the negative transfer of mother tongue and timely and effective correction are effective ways to improve language accuracy. Teachers should be flexible, and educators need to formulate appropriate syllabus and pay attention to feedback and input.

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