A Discussion of the Reasons for Errors

in College English Writing on the Basis of Error Analysis Theory

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Abstract.   Based on the theory of Error Analysis, this paper attempts to discuss the types of errors and various reasons for the occurrence of errors in college English writing. Besides, it demonstrates the principles of error correction. This research will be conductive to
the appropriate adoption of teaching strategies and teaching focuses in college English writing.

Introduction

Writing is an important part of College English teaching. As a practical reflection of students' English learning, writing is not only stressed in the teaching, but also in various examinations, job hunting and works in reality. With the global economic integration and China's accession to the WTO, the development of society, economy, market demands for talents is also rising, the ability of using fluent foreign language contacting with the outside world has become an important index for inspection personnel ability. However, it is very difficult to improve students' writing skills in practical teaching. College teachers have adopted various methods to improve the teaching, while the result is still not satisfactory.

This article tries to explore how to treat students' errors and error correction strategies in College English writing teaching from the perspective of the basis, classifications and causes of Error Analysis theory, hoping to help students improve their English writing ability.

Development of Error Analysis Theory

English Applied Linguistics Corder S.P., a pioneer in the modern sense of error analysis theory, he pointed out in *The Significance of Learner's Error* (1967): Making errors is an indispensable important part of learning process. A comprehensive and systematic analysis of the errors made by users using the target language can help explore and investigate its causes, thus preventing or reducing errors in language use.

The linguistic theory of Error Analysis is based on the Generative (T.G.) Grammar system of Chomsky which believes that in the language learning process, errors are not only inevitable and necessary, "language errors appeared in the process of learning is not failure" [2]. Because it reflects a hypothesis made by the learner about the target language and deviation will appear when this assumption does not match target language system.

The psychological basis of Error Analysis is the Theory of Transfer in psychological linguistics. According to the Theory of Transfer, the mother tongue habit will transfer to the foreign language habits and the nature of the mother tongue will make it easy or difficult to learn some aspects of the foreign language [3]. The promoting effect of mother tongue on foreign language

learning is called positive transfer; while if the Chinese language habits hinder foreign language learning, it is called negative transfer, that is, interference [2]. Difficulties and errors are caused by interference in foreign language learning, while errors can provide information feedback. Error analysis and application in College English writing teaching can help teachers understand what factors influence students' writing process, how to organize teaching effectively, and improve the efficiency of students' learning.

Present situation of College English Writing Teaching

Writing is a kind of productive language using ability, and it can produce good effect on teaching. Since the origin of CET4 and CET6, essay writing has been adopted as a way of testing, namely to write an essay of about 120 words in 30 minutes, according to the given topic and tips. This guided writing composition try to keep content control, do not let students go so far to ramble to express things they are not capable of [4].

Writing ability is a comprehensive reflection of people's thinking ability, cognitive ability and writing ability, and writing reflects the students' mastery of English and the degree of application. It is pretty common that students with high English scores, their writing is not necessarily good, affecting the smooth progress of effective communication.

From the results of CET4 and CET6 in recent decade, students' overall scores have improved, but their ability to write in English did not make due progress. Most of the students' writing is not up to the expected level.

Classification of Language Errors

Linguists believe that different learning processes will cause different language errors. According to Yang Lianrui (2007) causes of language errors can be divided into the following six aspects:

Interlingual Language Errors

In the process of generating the target language, Learners will be easily influenced by the experience of their mother language in voice, meaning, grammatical structure, cultural customs and other aspects.

Interlingual language errors are caused by language transfer in the inappropriate use of the meaning, rules and usages of learners' mother tongue. When learners want to express complex content, they will turn to the corresponding expression method verbatim in their mother tongue and then translate them into English. English expressed in this method is often dubious The so-called "Chinese English" is such a case.

Eg:

（ 1 ） His body is very healthy.   (False)

He is very healthy.

Intralingual Language Error

In the learning process, learners make incorrect assumptions about language with their Obtained, limited, incomplete knowledge and language experience, therefore analogizing a deviated structureSuch errors can be considered as errors in development, they do not reflect the characteristics of the mother tongue, but are generated in learning process of the second language. According to Richards's point of view, they can be divided into the following kinds [6]:

A. Over generalization

In learning a foreign language, students often sum up, to expand the scope of the use of a certain rule of the foreign language, resulting in the creation of a number of errors in the language

structure.

B. Ignoring the rules and restriction

Students have mastered some foreign language rules, but ignored their restrictions therefore mistakes occur.

C. Incomplete application of rules

Students have learned a number of rules, but often cannot fully understand and use them.

D. Errors of conceptual assumption

Language Errors Caused by Cultural Interference

Language and culture are inseparable. The relationship between language and culture is like the relationship between the vehicle and the traffic control light. In the process of learning a foreign language, if the learners are lack of considerable knowledge and understanding of the target language, errors in judgment, phenomenon of mutual misunderstanding and communication disruption may occur.

Language Errors Based on Communicative Strategies

On some occasions, learners should express their ideas in a foreign language, but their existing language knowledge and skills can not completely meet the needs, he had to resort to communication strategies. Communicative strategy is often one of the causes of errors; such errors mainly include avoidance and transformation of language.

For example, because of the impact of different levels of the mother tongue, when learners can not express a clear meaning in a foreign language, they may use one or two words in their mother tougne, hoping the other side can understand their own probably mean [5].

Eg:

The classroom is very luan. (False)

The classroom is in mess

Language Errors Produced by Cognitive and Affective Factors

Cognitive and affective factors are one of factors that affect foreign language learning, and have something to do with the amount of errors. [9]. Learners' intellect levels motivation, interest, memory, learning effort, physical condition, mental state and so on can lead to errors. Generally speaking, confident, outgoing, independent, serious, responsible and other personality characteristics are conducive to learning a foreign language, and timid, careless, introverted tension, lack of self-confidence and other personality characteristics count against foreign language learning.

Errors of Language Teaching

The errors above are mainly due to the learner itself., while actually external factors are also one of the factors that lead to errors, External factors such as: classroom, teaching materials and teachers, learning environment factors such as imperfect teaching materials, defected structure of teachers' knowledge and improper teaching methods may also be reasons for errors.

How to Treat Errors in Writing

According to Error Analysis Theory, the process of foreign language learning is a process of creative construction of language. It is an inevitable phenomenon to make errors in the process of learning [2]. How to treat and deal with these errors is always an issue of controversy for linguists.

At present, there are two diametrically opposed attitudes: One is mechanical attitude of behaviorism with emphasis on the accuracy of students' language, thus students are not allowed to make mistakes. The other is a tolerant attitude of functional school, emphasizing the efficiency of communication; therefore the students' errors are let drift. Those two error-correcting attitudes are

all one-sided. To treat the errors, we can neither correct all the errors nor adopt laissez faire. We should take different approaches for different types and reasons of errors to accelerate the process of language learning.

Identify the nature of errors

English learning is a very complicated cognitive process, which involves many factors. The causes of the errors in the use of English for communication are also various. Burt & Kiparsky (1972) divided the learners' language errors into two types from the perspective of the intelligibility of language: the global errors and local errors.

Global errors appear in the important structure of the sentence, resulting in the difficulties in understanding a sentence or utterance affecting the normal communication which is also called breakdown errors. This kind of mistakes should be corrected, and the teachers should show their correct meanings and usages.

Local errors are errors that affect the meaning of a part of a sentence, such as a clause or phrase. Such as, a misuse or leakage of the verb or noun suffix form, articles or auxiliary verbs misuse or leakage etc. This kind of error will not interfere with the normal communication, so it is also called non-breakdown errors.

Therefore, teaching does not mean to point out and correct writing errors. teachers should encourage students to express in he target language actively and boldly, for those local errors that will not cause interruption of communication or misunderstanding , they should not be pointed out and corrected as far as possible for the purpose not to hurt the learner's enthusiasm. But for the systematic error , teachers should correct them , otherwise this kind of mistake will be internalized and become rigid.

Master Error-Correcting Techniques

Error correction is an art. The attitude of teachers will directly influence the effect of error correction. To respect and encourage students will be an important guarantee of correcting errors without hurting their enthusiasm. Teachers should regard the error correction to be a positive measure to improve learning efficiency .Through this activity, students' errors can be corrected, and teachers can also get feedback on "teaching", finding out problems in a timely manner to guide future work.

To make this error correcting art tends to be more perfect, the author thinks that teachers should pay attention to the following points: combination of direct correcting and indirect rectification; distinguishing immediate correction and afterwards correction; combination of teacher's instruction and the student's self correcting; protection of student's learning initiative. In addition, teachers should also consult and classify the common errors in students' writing and make timely adjustment of the teaching points in the future in the fight for the initiative. The analysis and study of the errors can help teachers predict the difficulties that students may encounter in a certain period, which can help students to improve their ability of using English.

Conclusion

Writing is not only the process of expressing their thoughts and opinions, but also the process of the foreign language learners' finding out errors, correcting errors and improving their language ability. Error is an inevitable phenomenon in the process of learning. Errors, on the one hand, reflect the lack of teaching and learning; on the other hand, it indicates that the students are in the process of language learning and development, and the error is the result of the interaction of many factors [7].

Teachers and students should adopt a positive attitude towards errors: teachers do not have to

exaggerate, and emphasize the mistakes. They should take a more tolerant attitude, to encourage and cultivate students' interest is more important than error correction and students should not avoid writing because they are afraid of making mistakes. In the use of error analysis method, we should avoid weaknesses, so that it will become an effective way to improve the quality of teaching.

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