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Error Analysis in English Written Essays of Undergraduate Students of Northeast Normal University Changchun

Judith Makse Patrick, Zhong Yang & Mingcai Sui

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Abstract

This study carried out an error analysis on written essays of forty-nine (49) third year undergraduate students, offering their major courses in English in the school of foreign languages, Northeast Normal University Changchun with Chinese as their mother-tongue. The instrument for data collection was a narrative essay written by each participant in class. Errors were identified and classified under eleven categories of the grammatical aspect. Six of these errors which were 5% and above were rated as most common; and these included; verb- tense, word order, preposition, punctuation, omission and spelling.

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The study further highlighted the fact that mother -tongue has a high influence on errors identified from participants' essays. The exposure of these errors should be a point of reference and focus for teachers to guide the students. It would also be an opportunity to improve their methods of teaching; and educate students on more similarities and dissimilarities in grammatical rules of Chinese and English languages. These participants and others, studying in English as a second or foreign language; should have a high command on vocabulary and the respective rules of grammar to produce improved written essays irrespective of their areas of specialty in the university.

Keywords: Error analysis; errors, grammatical rules; written essays; undergraduate students; second language; foreign language.

1. Introduction

Errors are inevitable in a second or foreign language learning situation. Error is due to the complex nature of English itself. The level at which errors are committed in language usage varies from one individual to the other (Onike 2007). The same author further posited that nobody learns a language without goofing. According to him, learners' errors help them to understand the processes of second language acquisition instead of considering them as linguistic sins. He additionally cited Noam Chomsky (1998) stating that errors are unavoidable and necessary part of the learning process. They are visible proof that learning is taking place.

This study was carried out to find out the level of errors in written Essays of undergraduate students of English department in Northeast Normal University Changchun. Analysis of errors gives the opportunity to have a better understanding of the root causes of these errors to enable teachers of English language sort for ways of eliminating them. Error Analysis (EA) is based on the assumptions that errors made by L2 learners can be predicted, observed, analyzed, classified and described (Gao, 2009).

Talif and Edwin (1989) emphasized further that one of the main aims of error analysis is to help teachers to assess more accurately what remedial work would be necessary for English as a second language (ESL) to students preparing for an English Language test, so as to help these students avoid the most common errors. They further explained by citing Corder (1981) on the function of error analysis and that there are two justifications for studying learners' errors: its relevance to language teaching and the study of language acquisition process. They added by quoting Corder thus, "... the pedagogical justification, namely that a good understanding of the nature of error is necessary before a systematic means of eradicating them could be found, and the theoretical justification, which claims that a study of learners' errors is part of the systematic study of the learners' language which is itself necessary to an understanding of the process of second language acquisition".

It could therefore, not be wrong to state that undergraduate students of this University studying their major courses in English would be battling with different types of error in their written production. This could be due to interference of mother tongue, overgeneralization of ideas and other linguistic issues.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Brief history of English learning and teaching in China

English has no legacy in the People's Republic of China. After the establishment of a new China in 1949, the use of English was replaced by the Russian Language as the foreign tongue spoken in the country in the 1950's. The substantial change according to our source toward teaching English language in China didn't occur until late 1978 when Deng Xiaoping came to power as a communist modernizer acceptable to the capitalist world during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding - SACU, 2006). English was once again prominent as the main foreign language being taught in various schools in China. Not long after in the early 80s, English was restored

as a compulsory subject in the national college entrance examinations (Network ESL, 2013).

Furthermore, with the open-door policy being established, a number of Chinese students had the chance to travel abroad to receive higher education in foreign countries. Chinese people now regard English primarily as an indispensable tool which can make access to modern scientific and technological advances to the countries where English is the major language.

Chinese administrative law was revised in January 1998 to allow school systems, rather than only Universities to bring foreigners to China as language teachers. Shenzhen Education Bureau seized the opportunity to begin its language program. They have continued to move ahead in the various programs introduced by bringing different experts in the field from abroad (Shenzhen Education Bureau 2008).

Other research like the submission of Hubber (2009) has shown that China and Japan do not use most of English, because they are very conversant with their own respective language. It was also stated that when they meet with global competition, only then do they require English. This makes them to transliterate instead of translating from the mother tongue (Chinese) into English. This is attributed to the public's attitude not because of negligence towards culture. Furthermore, Chinese is said to lack the following consonants sounds: b, d, v, gz, x z, th. They have few that are similar, and many that English doesn't have, but they will slip the most on the "th" and the "v". They also mix up "r" and "l", and it's difficult to know if Chinese has a true "r" sound. The above factors notwithstanding, the economic progress China has made in recent times, it was able to enter into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and even bid for The Olympic Games in 2008. English has become the most popular and dominant foreign language in modern China.

China needs and will continue to study English rather urgently. In order to function, and become economically efficient within the global market, China needs to bring a large number of people to higher proficiency level in English for a wider variety of functions. Success of teaching the English language, and learning it, depends greatly on understanding English as a tool for communication (Network ESL, 2013).

The need for proficiency in English is a forceful trend in China now, this could be the reason why so many school proprietors are out hunting for any available and willing teachers of English to teach at the kindergarten, primary and some secondary schools even if it is one or two hours in a day or a week. This research is therefore prompted on the fact that these undergraduate students who have decided to study in English need to be assisted in every way possible through the analysis of written essays. Some possible errors would be figured out and suggestions offered where necessary. This would help them to interact internationally in their future endeavors.

2.2. Second language acquisition

Second language acquisition refers to the subconscious or conscious process of which a language other than the mother tongue is learnt in an informal or formal setting. This includes developing all aspects of the language like phonology, grammar, lexis and pragmatic knowledge. “Second language acquisition” refers to what learners do and not what teachers do. Ellis (1997) presented similar view saying, the systematic study of second language acquisition is a recent phenomenon, belonging to the second half of this century which he said it’s timely as the world has turned into a global village. The need for people to learn a second language has become eminent because of educational pursuits or seeking for employment not just for pleasure.

2.3. Error Analysis (EA)

It is important to understand what constitute an error. An error refers to systematic error of competence, both covert and overt, that deviates from norms of the target language. Covert errors are grammatically correct but not interpretable within the context

of communication whereas overt errors refer to the obviously ungrammatical utterances (Brown, 1994). Errors come from so many sources which are seen to be the causes of errors among learners of English as a second Language. Mother tongue interference is prominent and tends to surface in the areas of syntax, lexis and pronunciation. Ali (1996) observed that some factors have been identified by various error analysts which includes the one presented below:

When learning a foreign language an individual already knows his mother tongue and it is this which he attempts to transfer. The transfer may prove to be justified because the structure of the two languages is similar - in that case we get 'positive transfer' or 'facilitation' - or it may prove unjustified because the structures of the two languages are different - in that case we get 'negative transfer' - or 'interference'. (p. 199)

Due to some orthographic resemblance of original English words and loan words derived from the foreign language into the national language is another source of errors for learners. English is said to be a rich and complex language. Therefore, some features of the language are naturally difficult for the learners. In some cases, the teachers of English may not be perfect models of the language with regards to spoken, written or teaching as the case maybe. The method of teaching the second language can induce errors in learners, emphasis maybe on oral aspect while the written aspects which learners are likely to use in expressing themselves is relegated to the background. Furthermore, materials which have teaching items sequenced in certain way or lack organization could lead to errors as posited by the citation of (Norrish, 1983 cited in Talif and Edwin, 1989) gives an example of material - induced errors:

Although it is the simple present tense which is normally used to describe a sequence of events that takes place at the present moment, some teaching materials use the present progressive aspect. This results in the use of English which is neither normal nor natural. (p.13)

The inadequate exposures to English language by learners who live in a country like China where it is taught as a foreign language certainly do not have adequate exposure. The opportunities to use English in both the productive and receptive areas of the language are limited. This definitely can give rise to errors in grammar, spelling punctuation and other linguistic features..

2.4. Errors and Mistakes

To analyze learner's language in a proper perspective, it is fundamental to make a distinction between mistakes and errors which are in principle two different phenomena. A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a "slip," in that it is a failure to utilize known system correctly. Both native and non-native of a second language are liable to make mistakes, even though native are more in the position to correct their lapses than the non-native. Errors on the other hand, are referred to as "goofs," for which no blame is implied. In another way, error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner (Brown, 1994).

Talif and Edwin (1989) highlighted Norrish (1983)'s opinion to further make a clear distinction between errors and mistakes. He was quoted by stating errors as "a systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently 'gets it wrong.'" He added that when a learner of English as a second or foreign language makes an error systematically, it is because he has not learnt the correct form. Norrish also defined mistakes as "inconsistent deviation." When a learner has been taught a certain correct form, and he uses one form sometimes and another at other times quite inconsistently, the inconsistent deviation is called a mistake.

Error analysts distinguish between errors, which are systematic, and mistakes, which are not. They often seek to develop a typology of errors. Errors can be classified according to basic type: omissive, additive, substitutive or related to word order. They

can be classified as overt errors or covert errors. Closely related to this is the classification according to domain, that is, the analyst must be able to examine the breadth of the context and extent. They can be phonological, lexical, syntactic errors (Wikipedia: Second Language Acquisition, 2013). It is therefore imperative to pay attention to the students' essays during analysis to differentiate the errors from mistakes. This will give room for the appropriate remedial drills to improve on their writing skills in English.

2.5. Importance of errors in second language learning and teaching

The importance of errors in second language cannot be underestimated because; it is the meeting point of the learners and teachers of language. A review of some related researches were summarized as follows. The review showed that many of the learners' errors happen due to the strategies that they use in language acquisition, especially their L2. The problem includes the reciprocal interference of the target language items; i.e., negative effect of their prior knowledge of their L1 on their absorption of L2. In this situation, EA would allow teachers to figure out on what areas to be focused and what kind of situation, attention is needed in an L2 classroom. They also consider learners' errors to be of particular importance because the making of errors is a device the learners' use in order to learn. Additionally, the review explained that EA serves three purposes. Firstly, to find out the level of language proficiency the learner has reached. Secondly to obtain information about common difficulties in language learning and thirdly, to find out how people learn a language. The review also explained that the teachers need to view students' errors positively and should not regard them as the learners' failure to grasp the rules and structures but view the errors as process of learning. Some authors subscribe to the view that errors are normal and inevitable features of learning and added that errors are essential condition of learning. Lastly, the review again claimed that errors if studied could reveal a developing system of the students L2 language and this system is dynamic and open to changes and resetting of parameters (Richard, 1971; Weireesh, 1991;

Sercombe, 2000; Stark, 2001 & Mitchell and Myles, 2004 cited in Darus and Subramanian, 2009).

Dan (2008) shared the same ideas with the researches cited above on the relevance of errors by quoting the submission of S.Pit Corder's seminal 1967 paper titled "The significance of learners' errors"; he made five crucial points which Dan presented below:

1. "We should look for parallels between L1 and L2 learning, since these are governed by the same underlying mechanisms, procedures and strategies.
2. Errors are evidence of the learners' in-built syllabus, or of what they have taken in, rather than what teachers think they have put in: intake should not be equated with input.
3. Errors show that L1 and L2 learners both develop an independent system of language, 'although it is neither the adult systemnor that of the second language' (Corder, 1967:166) but is evidence of a 'transitional competence'.
4. Errors should be distinguished from mistakes
5. Errors are significant in three aspects: they tell the teacher what needs to be taught; they tell the researcher how learning proceeds; and they are a means whereby learners test their hypotheses about the L2."

The discourse above has shown that learners' errors should be seen as an effective way of enhancing their proficiency in the L2 (English) and not as a source of witch hunting for retrogression. When students understand the motive behind teachers identifying and correcting their work, it will give a favorable environment for change.

3. Statement of the Problem

After some sessions of observation of these undergraduate classes, it was noted by the researchers that students make errors in their written presentations just like their oral

communication. Students tend to transfer the structure of the mother tongue (L1) into usage of the second language (L2) which leads to grammatical errors in presentation of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement; sentence structure mechanics and errors of meaningless and clumsy expressions. The view was shared by Lee (2002) where he asserted that grammatical differences between Chinese and English lead to errors in the process of writing and that majority of errors could be due to interference from the L1 as stated earlier. This has prompted the study in this aspect. The analysis provided an opportunity to pinpoint the errors by frequency and percentage; and possible root causes of these errors.

Chinese undergraduate students have difficulties in writing especially, in the use of grammatical structure, punctuation and capitalization, omission, syntactic presentation, subject-verb agreement, spelling, indulging in transliteration of words and expressions from their mother tongue to English. This invariably led to Error Analysis and the deployment of a variety of strategies to get out of this difficulty. This applied to both female and male students. Students had the tendency to use avoidance strategy when writing. They evaded areas of difficulty in grammar, which lowered the quality of their essays. This also limited the desire to produce and present their essays effectively.

4. Purpose of the Study

This research was aimed at carrying out Error Analysis of English written essays of undergraduate students at the school of foreign languages, Northeast Normal University Changchun. It aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To identify errors in students' written essays according to the frequency of occurrence.
2. To ascertain the causes of these errors.
3. To determine mother tongue interference in their essays.
4. To investigate the influence of their spoken English during writing.
5. To find ways of minimizing written errors among undergraduate students.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions were used:

1. Which category of errors occur more in students' essays?
2. What are the causes of frequent written errors among undergraduate students?
3. Does the mother tongue (Chinese Language) have influence on the written English essays of undergraduate students?
4. To what extent does the spoken English of undergraduate students affect their written presentation?
5. In what ways can these errors be minimized among the undergraduate students?

6. Significance of the Study

The findings and suggestions proffered at the end of this study served as a source of assistance to teachers of English as a second language in the school of foreign languages and the university where applicable.

Teachers would have clear focus on areas of difficulties among students during essay writing at some point in class exercises or examinations. The findings would also be useful to language curriculum planners in the Ministry of Education of the Peoples' Republic of China in terms of modifying some English course books for students.

It would serve as a point of reference to other researchers in the field of English language teaching as they carry out the study at a wider and more advance level.

The researcher desires that this study should contribute to making the teaching and learning of English more interesting. Especially in Chinese dominated schools which have great aspiration in promoting effective English language learning.

7. Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the theory of Error Analysis of S.P. Corder who brought its prominence as a scientific method in the field of linguistics in the 1970s. "It was not until the 1970s that EA became a recognized part of applied linguistics, a development that owed much to the work of Corder". Research has it that before Corder, linguists observed learners' errors, divided them into categories, tried to see which ones were common and which were not, but not much attention was drawn to their role in second language acquisition. It was also on record that Corder showed to whom information about errors would be helpful; these are students, teachers and researchers (Karra, 2006).

Karra further highlighted some major concepts in Corder's article titled, "The study of learners' errors" which was related to this study. These insights have played significant roles in linguistics research and especially in the aspect of errors; these include the following: The linguistics input is determined by the learners. The teacher can present a linguistic form which is not an input but what is available to learn. Before Corder's work, syllabuses were only based on theories not learners' needs.

Corder introduced the difference between systematic and non-systematic nature of errors. He stated that unsystematic errors occur in one's native language which he referred to as "mistakes" and states that they are not relevant to the learning process. "Errors" are reserve to the systematic ones which occur in the second language learning. He submits further that errors are significant in three ways to the following:

- the teacher: they show learner's progress.
- the researcher: they show how a language is acquired, the strategies used by the learner.
- the learner: he can learn from these errors.

Many errors are due to the fact that learner uses structures of the native language. Corder claims that the possession of one's native language is facilitative. Errors in this case are not inhibitory, but evidence of one's learning strategies.

8. Method and Procedure

8.1. Research Design

The study was a qualitative research designed to carry out an error analysis of undergraduate students in the school of foreign languages of Northeast Normal University Changchun offering their major courses in English. This design was used because students' essays were individually assessed and analyzed based on personal presentation instead of a formatted questionnaire.

8.2. Population

The target population of this study was third year undergraduate students in the Department of English taking all courses in English language who were available during data collection and forty-nine students participated.

8.3. Instrument for Data Collection

The researchers collected the needed data through a narrative essay written by each student titled, "HOW I SPENT MY NEW YEAR HOLIDAY" (SPRING FESTIVAL). This was administered by the researchers with the assistance of the course lecturer and was collected at the end of twenty-five minutes instead of forty; this was not to exceed the time allocated by the course lecturer. The exercise was done in such a way to capture students' ability to think and write a meaningful essay on a topic they are very conversant with. It gave them a free flow of ideas which was noted by the researcher, time limit notwithstanding.

8.4. Method of Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the essays several times, since it was done manually to get the different errors in the order of occurrence (spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, subject/verb agreement, and misrepresentation of preposition, articles,

word choice, word order, verb tenses, omission and sentence construction) for further analysis. This was a qualitative study therefore; frequency and percentage was used to analyze the data. The researchers kept making reference to the data collected for clarity, identification of various error occurrences for proper report during result presentation and discussion. Examples were also cited where necessary.

9. Results

Table I here shows the presentation of error analysis according to frequency of occurrence, types of errors, and total errors committed by all participants and percentage rate of each error.

Table1: Analysis of Error Items

Item	Type of error	No. of errors	Percentage (%)
1	Verb Tense	159	26.1
2	Word Choice	91	14.9
3	Punctuation	76	12.5
4	Preposition	71	11.6
5	Omission	68	11.1
6	Spelling	66	10.8
7	Subject/Verb Agreement	28	4.6
8	Sentence Construction	17	2.7
9	Word Order	15	2.4
10	Article	10	1.6
11	Capitalization	7	1.1
Total		608	100

Taking into consideration the results of the finding, verb tense took the highest position of the errors with (26.1%), followed by word choice (14.9%), Punctuation

(12.5%), preposition (11.6%), omission (11.1%), spelling (10.8%). Some examples of occurrence of these errors in the essays will be highlighted during discussion.

The following errors were less than five percent in the order of occurrence, subject/verb agreement (4.6%), sentence construction (2.7%), word order (2.4%), article (1.6%) with the least percentage of occurrences in capitalization (1.1%).

Table 2: Errors with high percentage of occurrence

<i>Error</i>	<i>Identifying Errors</i>	<i>Correct Sentences</i>
<i>Classification</i>		
<i>n</i>		
Verb Tense	1. I usually <u>playing</u> games With my cousins while my Mother and my aunts <u>prepare</u> the meal.	1. I usually <u>play</u> games with my cousins while my mother and aunts <u>prepare</u> the meal.
	2. In the evening, we <u>sit</u> around the charcoal fire and watched cctv Spring Festival Gala.	2. In the evening, we <u>sat</u> around the charcoal fire and watched CCTV Spring Festival Gala.
	3. I <u>visit</u> some teachers who <u>teach</u> junior or senior school.	3. I <u>visited</u> some teachers who <u>taught</u> me during my junior and senior school.
Word Choice	1. Usually on Spring Festival eve, my family members would gather, prepare <u>delicate</u> food.	1. Usually on Spring Festival's eve my family members would gather to prepare <u>delicious</u> food.
	2. Kids always <u>gain</u> some money during this period.	2. Kids always <u>got</u> some money during this period.

	3. Every year when the New Year Holiday comes, my <u>big</u> family will get together and have a dinner <u>when the sun goes back home.</u>	3. Every year when New Year holiday comes, my <u>large</u> family get together and have a dinner <u>at sunset.</u>
	4. I <u>have</u> no other interest, so I <u>choose</u> watching TV to <u>kill</u> time.	4. I <u>had</u> no other interest so I <u>chose</u> watching TV to <u>while away</u> time.
Punctuation	1. The day before the Spring <u>Festival Eve</u> my old sister reached <u>home.</u>	1. The day before spring <u>festival's eve,</u> my elder sister arrived <u>home.</u>
	2. I visited some relatives of my <u>boyfriend,</u> and they like me very <u>much.</u>	2. I visited some relatives of my <u>boyfriend</u> and they liked me very <u>much.</u>
	3. My younger brother is becoming mature since he went to <u>college.</u> the first year.	3. My younger brother is becoming matured since the first year he went to <u>college.</u>
Preposition	1. I have to visit my grandparents <u>in</u> the very first day of the year.	1. I have to visit my grandparents <u>on</u> the very first day of the year.
	2. Sometime I buy New Year present <u>to</u> my parents and friends.	2. Sometimes I buy New Year presents <u>for</u> my parents and friends.
	3. <u>In</u> the January 1 st , we never go out our home as traditional, but in modern life, some people don't do like that.	3. <u>On</u> January 1 st , we never went out <u>of</u> our home being traditional; but in modern life, some people do.

Omission	1. I think sometimes both of us should learn to <u>^</u> tolerant.	1. I think sometimes both of us should learn to be tolerant.
	2. This Spring Festival, I ate Happily <u>^</u> played happily.	2. Last Spring Festival, I ate and played happily.
	3. Most of <u>^</u> time, my parents go out and I will just stay at home and watch TV.	3. Most of the time my parents go out, I just stay at home and watch TV.
Spelling	1. I feel very happy every time I celebrate our new year fasterval .	1. I feel very happy every time I celebrate our new year festival .
	2. The next day, we got up a little later , the whether was very cold outside.	2. The next day we got up a little late and the weather was very cold outside.
	3. Our family go to the tombyard to prey for our ancestors.	3. Our family goes to the tomb yard to pray for our ancestors.

10. Discussion

10.1. Verb Tense

From the results, verb tense was represented as having the highest percentage of errors. This could be because of the nature of the verb tense in Chinese which is their mother tongue; it is said to be stative and dynamic in nature. Research has shown that Chinese has only one basic verb form unlike English which verb form changes according to tense or time of application. It was also noted that the subjects have ideas on the rule of applying suffixation to form the continuous verb tense but lack the ability of appropriate application in English sentences. The ‘ing’ in sentence 1:1 above was an error because the verb tense was supposed to be in past tense. It shows that students know that these

rules exist in English grammar but are constraint on its proper usage; thus, the highest rate of error occurrence.

Furthermore, the fact that Chinese has one basic verb form used for each person and tense and does not take the inflectional suffixes for the different tense like English instead adverbs are sometimes used for the past. Another way is to use aspect participles “guo” or “le” which cannot stand alone but can be used to express past events (Wikipedia: Chinese Verbs, 2013). This rule is transliterated into English verb tense rules; this can be seen in sentences 1:2, 3 in table 2. This phenomenon gave birth to the use of the present form of the verb tense in situations where past form should occur.

10.2. Word Choice

The essays analyzed were plagued with subjects’ limited vocabulary which manifested in wrong choices of words in strategic points during the writing exercise. Examples above 2: 3 & 4 in table 2 are clear indications of mother tongue interference where “kill” and the phrase “when the sun goes back home” are literally used in the wrong contexts. This is an occurrence among some Chinese students during oral presentation in an English class.

10.3. Punctuation

Errors in punctuation could be due to carelessness because this generation of students has encountered similar punctuation marks in their mother tongue unlike the ancient one according to research. This prompted the inappropriate replacement of period (.) with (,) in sentences. Also, some marks in Chinese take the space of two characters like () without breaking could possibly be the reason for the placement of punctuation mark in example 3: 3 in table 2. The absence of some punctuation marks like periods at the end of sentences, improper separation of words in sentences with comma, quotation marks to mention a few was highly noted in subjects’ essays.

10.4. Preposition

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The inability of students to choose correct prepositions to suit the context during writing could have paved way for the high percentage of errors in this area. Mother tongue (Chinese) is another possible cause due to the fact that unlike English, some Chinese prepositions also serve as verbs or what is referred to as Coverbs. Example of this dual function is the preposition “zai”. In some cases prepositions are used in conjunction with postpositions in a sentence which does not occur in English (Word order in Chinese, 2013).

Errors also probably occur due to the fact that at times one preposition in Chinese may have more than one equivalent in English, this might have given rise to the wrong use of this part of speech in students’ essays. Examples in table 2 are just but a few out of many errors made. The error analyzed however, discovered more cases of misplaced prepositions due to confusion on the appropriate one to use in context. Omission of same have occurred also because of their limited stock of prepositions so they avoid its usage completely thereby, leaving a gap. Overgeneralization of a preposition brought other errors too. For example is the occurrence of “in” in sentences 4: 1&3 of table 2.

10.5. Omission

So many omissions errors occurred in the students’ essays especially in indication of parts of speech like prepositions as stated above, articles, omitted letters in spellings and mostly punctuation marks. The researcher however, noted as a matter of concern the source of wrong representation of the omission symbol as submitted in table 2 above.

10.6. Spelling

The students’ phonetic perception contributed to some errors in spelling. Looking at example 6:3 of table 2, the word “prey”, “whether” and others identified during analysis were bending towards their assumed phonetic sounds. The influence of mother tongue was another major cause that led to errors in spelling, some words were conceived in the mind with intonation, stress and tone of the L1 and subsequently written in some of these essays and of course, they were categorized as spelling errors. Example 6:1 in table 2 and others like “memeries, enought, fesevel”. Overgeneralization of plurality made

some students to present wrong spelling in words like, “photo (es) and air(s)”. Some spelling errors may perhaps be due to complete ignorance of the correct spelling; however, some were just out of carelessness or hasty work therefore, omission of some alphabets occurred.

In addition to the errors discussed above, others like word order, article, capitalization, subject verb agreement and sentence construction are also considered to have great impact on students’ written essays. Their inability to organize appropriate words during sentence construction, omission of articles and capitalization gave way to fragmented and run-on sentences in some of the essays analyzed. For example in the following representations:

a) I sleep after the new year ring ringing. Begin my new year. fragment

I sleep after the New Year bell rings, which begins my new year.

b) For we think, people must start a new being by clean himself and things around us.

fragment

We feel people become new beings by cleaning themselves and things around them.

c) It’s very simple indeed. For my family, all we need to do is spending time together, enjoying the joyful atmosphere. run-on

It’s very simple indeed for my family; all we do is spending time together enjoying the joyful atmosphere.

d) You see, Spring Festival is really a big time, It is the most important festival for us.

run-on

You see, spring festival is really a big time; it is the most important festival for us.

11. Summary of Findings

The following items summarized the findings of the study:

1. Mother tongue influenced the subjects written output to a large extend; especially, in the area of verb tense, preposition.

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2. Some errors were due to overgeneralization of ideas by the subjects.
3. Findings also showed that subjects' vocabulary stock is limited in terms of word choice and subject/verb agreement during writing.
4. In addition, some errors were the product of carelessness during the exercise.
5. The findings and interaction on a general note were worthwhile as the subjects have the willingness to improve on their level of proficiency if given the adequate assistance.

12. Recommendations

These recommendations are not final as there could be other ways of taking care of pedagogical issues in relation to errors found in undergraduate students' essays. Having identified mother tongue as a source of influence on students' written work, teachers should expose their students to grammatical rules of Chinese and English language even as undergraduates.

Due to the static and dynamic nature of the Chinese verbs; difficulties encountered by students should be taken into cognizance and appropriate drills be used by teachers.

The university should constantly organize and encourage English corner, debate and essay competitions among undergraduates offering their majors in English from the different departments and schools. Furthermore, they could be encouraged to participate in inter university and even the CCTV 9 essay competitions.

Teachers should also introduce more practical than theoretical methods of teaching essay writing to inculcate and improve students' writing strategies.

Appropriate instructional materials and facilities like language laboratory, library should be adequately utilized.

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Judith Makse Patirck, Zhong Yang & Mingcai Sui

Error Analysis in English Written Essays of Undergraduate Students of Northeast Normal University Changchun

Above all, teachers should make it a point of duty to update their knowledge within their discipline through further studies, seminars, workshops, professional meetings sponsored or not.

13. Conclusion

The findings unveiled the most common errors found in the essays of Chinese undergraduate students offering their major in English language which are verb-tense, word choice, spelling, punctuation, prepositions, and omissions. As already discussed, mother tongue has great influence on students' written output especially considering the static and dynamic nature of the Chinese verbs, the tendency of dual functions of the Chinese preposition, perceived phonetic sounds of English words and limited stock of vocabulary gave birth to the high percentage of errors in their essays. Generally, mother tongue influenced most of the essays analyzed; this was evident in manipulation of words to give flavor to their work, fragmented sentences, and spelling, presented in tables above. The highlighted errors will give teachers areas to focus on, in addition to the ones they are already aware of; this would limit the outcome of students' learning problems in writing and other aspects of English language.

There is need therefore, to continue educating undergraduate students on the similarities and differences of grammatical rules in the mother tongue (Chinese) and English. Also, to make them to be aware of the need to handle these concepts in their unique ways and always apply correct writing strategies where relevant.

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