An Analysis of Types and Causes of Errors in Chinese EFL Students' Writing

Jin Ying

Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics, Hangzhou, China

Abstract. Given the significance of the development of productive skills in college English teaching in China, writing assessment and evaluation have gained much attention. Previous studies have pointed out that the extent of improvement in learners' writing proficiency can be due to differences in the teaching objectives, syllabus and curriculum. Based on error analysis theory and transfer theory, this paper explores the common types and underlying causes of errors in Chinese EFL students' writings. In data collection, non-English major students from Zhejiang University of Finance and Economic were asked to complete a writing assignment on Pigai Website as their coursework. Pigai, with automatic processing and scoring, conducts online correction and identifies the errors in the writing samples. Altogether, 70 compositions were collected. A semi-structured interview was carried out to get more in-depth insights into learner's writing process. Findings indicated that three typical types of writing errors were among EFL students' writing samples: lexical errors, grammatical errors and discourse errors. Among them, grammatical errors ranked the top, followed by the lexical errors and the discourse errors. Moreover, mother tongue interference, target language interference and psychological factors partly explained the errors in Chinese EFL students' writing. It is hoped that the detailed analysis of writing errors can improve EFL learners' writing proficiency and reduce errors in their writing performances.

Key words: English writing, Chinese EFL learners, error types, language transfer.

Introduction

Writing is crucial in communication, and fundamental in language skills. It is acknowledged that error analysis is one of efficient ways to help learners improve language proficiency. This leads to the present study of errors in English writing practice.

Background

Language learning is a slow and sedulous process which reflects learners' built-in system of language development. Among the basic language skills, writing is widely regarded as the most difficult one due to its attribute of productivity. A good writing basically includes good use of language and well-organization of content. These make teaching and learning writing tough and tricky. Errors and mistakes are here and there in English writing practice. As a coin has two sides, the errors and mistakes are the best indicators which tell learners' way of thinking and weak points in language learning and thus make error analysis popular in second language acquisition.

As early as the 1940s, linguists began to study learners' errors. French (1949) maintains that learners' errors should be thought generally. Lee (1957) first conducts an empirical research of errors. He carries out a study on Czechoslovakia learners' writings. The results show that it is of great importance to analyze learners' errors and it can help teachers to allocate teaching time. As a pioneer of error analysis, Corder (1967: 161-170)

puts forward error analysis theory in his book *The Significance of Learner's Errors*. He believes that errors could be used as learning tools, and systematic analysis of errors could help educators understand learners' cognitive strategies in acquiring knowledge, so as to help educators understand what needs to be taught and strengthened in language teaching. In addition, to improve teaching level, educators should have a deeper understanding of second language acquisition system. Richards (1974) divides errors into interlingual errors and intralingual errors, he analyzes the type of errors from another angle. George (1972) points out in his work *Common Errors in Language Learning: Insight from English* an exhaustive explanation on the types of learners' errors and the dominant factors causing the errors. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* by Rod Ellis (1985) also contributes a lot to the study of errors, which divides error analysis into five steps: collecting samples, identifying errors, describing errors, interpreting errors, and evaluating errors. Researchers can further analyze the collected samples according to these five steps. To provide more specific samples and make a further research on errors, Crewe (1977) collects and analyzes the errors of Singapore English learners and his research benefits the practice and application of error analysis. Haggan (1991) investigates the spelling errors of Arab senior English learners. The study has shown that learners often ignore spelling rules, thus causing many errors. Tafazoli (2014) collects the English writings of 63 Iranian college students, classifies the errors and uses synchronous and asynchronous communication to distinguish the frequency of each error. Supported by corpus study, Zafar's (2016) research shows that taking the most common errors in English writing as teaching focus can have a beneficial effect on teaching efficiency. Meruyert (2016) investigates common English errors made by learners of Kazakh and Russian as their first language. Analyzing the writing errors of 32 participants in the study, the researcher finds the seven most common errors among language learners. This research gives educators an idea of how to make use of common errors to prepare teaching materials.

In China, the study of errors has also made great contributions to language learning and teaching. Gui (1985) mentions error analysis for the first time in his book *Psycholinguistics* and proposes that teachers could use error analysis as a teaching tool. He believes that in order to adjust teaching strategies timely, teachers need to understand learners' weakness by analyzing their errors. Wang (1990) believes that the analysis of errors can help us realize that language learning is an active psychological process, in which teachers can discover the development process and learning strategies of learners. Shu (1994) introduces interlanguage theory into error analysis and believes that the negative transfer of language is a major cause of errors. Cai and Dai (2001: 52-57), Cai and Li (2016: 8-10) try to supplement error classification based on the existing theoretical research. They classify error category from the levels of cognition, language and performance and indicate that the three error types are interrelated and interact on each other. In addition, domestic researchers have also carried out a series of empirical studies on error analysis. Guo (2001) and Ouyang (2001) collect the CET-4 compositions of college students as samples to analyze the error types of learners. Their research also points out the guiding role of error analysis in learners' English writing. Chen (2019: 45-

49) adopts a self-built corpus for statistical analysis, explains the causes of writing errors, and proposes how to use the corpus to avoid learners' writing errors. Jia and Qiao (2014: 63-69) study English writing errors of high school students. They collect writing samples, conduct questionnaires, and interview teachers in an attempt to find out the root of learners' errors.

The literature review above has shown that linguists at home and abroad have done a lot of research on learners' writing errors, including the cause of errors, the type of errors, instance analysis and so on. However, most of them focus on a certain type of errors and the research on general classification and induction of English writing errors has not gained enough attention. Besides, college is a crucial period for English learning. In college, learners' English ability is mature, so their errors can better reflect the problems learners have in English learning. Therefore, it is necessary to find out the causes of college students' errors, and adopt new methods to writing teaching by analyzing learners' errors. In this way, the research space of errors can also be expanded.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This paper aims to classify and analyze errors in Chinese EFL students' writings from three categories: lexicon, grammar and discourse; to find out the potential causes of Chinese EFL students' errors in English writing; to provide some implications in improving students' writing ability.

English writing not only accounts for a large proportion in all kinds of English tests, but also is a very important language skill in actual communication. Writing itself is a good way of expressing thoughts and feelings. It examines learners' proficiency in vocabulary, grammar, syntax and other relevant language knowledge, and is a process of comprehensive use of language. It can fully reflect learners' English level. However, as English as foreign language learners, Chinese EFL students have problems in spelling words, selecting appropriate words to express themselves, and are prone to make errors in grammar and discourse. Errors made by language learners in learning a language are regarded as the failure of competence (Zheng, 2010). By analyzing learners' errors, we can have a better understanding of the roots of errors and then eliminate them.

The entire paper consists of six chapters, and it is organized as follows:

Chapter one is an introduction which provides the background information both at home and abroad, the significance of the research and the organization of the paper.

Chapter two is the theoretical basis, which introduces to readers what is error, and briefly explains the research theory adopted in this paper: error analysis and language transfer.

Chapter three is research design, in which research purpose, participants, instruments and procedures are stated.

Chapter four presents the data analysis and discussion. In this chapter, EFL students' writing errors are analyzed and potential causes of learners' errors are discussed.

Chapter five summarizes the major findings of the research, and provides some pedagogical implications for English learning and teaching in China.

The last chapter expounds the conclusion drawn from the paper.

Literature Review

Theoretical Studies of Errors in SLA

Writing is an essential and basic skill in second language acquisition. The errors in English writing can directly reflect learner's language proficiency. This chapter will introduce the theoretical basis of the research, and also set a foundation for the research and study in later chapters.

Theory of Error Analysis

As a part of applied linguistics, error analysis has been taken to study problems in second language acquisition since 1970s. Corder (1967: 167), the founder of error analysis, holds that "a learner's errors are significant in that they provide to the researchers evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language." So before introducing the error analysis theory, let us first understand what is error? And what is the distinction between mistakes and errors?

Supported by Chomsky's (1957) study of linguistic competence and performance, Corder (1967: 161-170) distinguishes error and mistake in his further study and develops the error analysis theory. According to Corder (1967: 167), mistakes are of no significance to the process of language learning since they "do not reflect a defect in our knowledge". They are the results of the lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or other mental state similar to a strong emotion and are traceable to performance failure. If learners are duly questioned or reminded, they can automatically correct these mistakes. Errors, on the other hand, reflect learners' incomplete target language knowledge, or they just understand target language knowledge partially. Errors suggest failure in competence. Besides, Corder (1967: 169) holds the view that the making of errors is an inevitable and necessary part in language learning and error making is a device the learner adopts in order to learn. He explores error from a more sophisticated and scientific perspective, rather than simply regarding it as a teaching tool. Thus, error analysis theory is gradually coming into being.

Corder (1967: 19-31) classifies the methodology of error analysis into the following five steps:

1. Sample collection. Sample collection is of importance. The first step is to decide what samples to use for analysis and how to collect them.

2. Identification of errors. This step mainly refers to the distinguish between errors and mistakes. As mentioned earlier, mistakes are defined as learners' language deviation in the process of language production. They are not caused by the lack of language knowledge, but the improper language behavior of learners. While errors are caused by learners' lack of knowledge of target language. Errors manifest learners' inadequate language ability. The distinction between errors and mistakes is extremely important in error analysis, which can help teachers and researchers know learners' mastery degree of second language.

3. Description of errors. Categorize errors and reconstruct sentences in the target language according to what the learner wants to express.

4. Explanation of errors. Explanation is concerned with the sources of errors. There are two main sorts of errors diagnosed: interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors mainly result from cross-linguistic interference at different levels such as phonology, lexical, grammar or discourse. And intralingual errors mainly result from faulty or partial learning of the target language, independent of the native language. In the explanation of errors, we should not only criticize errors, but also explain them in many aspects, explore the sources of errors, and then improve teaching strategies.

5. Evaluation. It is necessary to evaluate the seriousness of errors, whether they will hinder learners' understanding and communication. We should distinguish global errors from local errors. Global errors affect the whole organization of the sentence and hinder communication, while local errors only affect individual components of the sentence and do not affect communication too much.

Richards (1974: 159) has summarized the purposes of conducting error analysis in language learning as follows: identify strategies which learners use in language learning; try to identify the causes of errors; obtain information on common difficulties in language learning; as an aid to teaching in the preparation of teaching materials. Errors are significant in telling teachers what needs to be taught, in telling researchers how learning proceed, and errors are a means whereby learners test their hypotheses about the language to be learned. Due to the objectives of the present study, error analysis theory has laid theoretical foundations for the analysis of learners' writing errors and also provided new sight into language learning and teaching. It could help learners to acquire the target language better by analyzing errors and finding out error patterns. Teachers can also adjust their teaching strategies through error analysis.

Language Transfer

As a common source of cross-linguistic study, language transfer is regarded as the key factor for error occurrence. The notion of "language transfer" can be dated back to the behaviorist theories of language learning. They assume that learners tend to transfer the characteristics of their native languages and cultures into foreign languages and cultures that they are learning. Influenced by the behaviorism view, Ledo (1957: 142) holds a view that the easiest part of second language acquisition is the similarities between the target language and the native language, which facilitate target language learning. While the difficulty is the differences among them, which will lead to negative transfer and interfere target language learning. Therefore, he holds that the negative transfer of mother tongue should be the focus of language transfer research. Based on Ledo's (1957) theory, Odlin (1989) further divides language transfer into positive transfer, negative transfer and different lengths of acquisition.

First, positive transfer. Similarities between the mother tongue and the target language are believed to facilitate the learning of the target language. Facilitation as such is called positive transfer. This positive transfer occurs when both the native language and the target language have the same form.

Second, negative transfer. In the process of second language acquisition, learners may mechanically apply native language patterns or rules, which does not accord with the standard of the target language, and will hinder learners to master the target language. The interference caused by the differences between mother tongue and the target language is negative transfer. To make further studies, Odlin (1989: 36) divides the results of negative transfer into underproduction, overproduction, production errors, and mis-interpretation. Underproduction refers to the phenomenon that learners seldom use the language structure of the target language. When learners are not familiar with the target language, they will avoid using certain language structure of the target language to make fewer errors. And overproduction is often the result of underproduction. In order to avoid difficult language structures, learners overuse some simple structures, which leads to overproduction. As for production errors, it mainly consists of substitution, calque, the change of structure and so on. In addition, the structure of mother tongue has an impact on the understating of the target language, which sometimes leads to mis-interpretation. There are many reasons for misunderstanding, such as different cultural background, idioms, word order and so on.

Third, different lengths of acquisition. Odlin (1989: 36) studies the cumulative effects of cross-language similarities and differences on the acquisition process and finds that children spend roughly the same time to learn their mother tongue, about five years. But the time it takes them to acquire the second language varies widely. This suggests that when there are more differences between two languages, learners need to spend more time learning another language. Therefore, the study of language must highlight the influence of cross-language differences and acquisition time.

Based on the origin of transfer, Richards (1974: 174-181) classifies transfer into interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer, and believes both of them can lead to errors. Interlingual transfer refers to the interference of mother tongue, which includes linguistic transfer and thinking pattern transfer. In second language acquisition, learners would ignore the differences in linguistic system and thinking pattern between the target language and mother tongue. Before the system of the second language is established, learners could only rely on the native language system. The phenomenon of interlingual transfer could be found from many aspects in language acquisition, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, discourse, culture and so forth. It explains many errors made in the early stage of second language acquisition. Intralingual transfer is also called developmental transfer. It refers to the transfer comes from the target language itself. Its essence is that the learners apply the rules of limited target language materials to the language materials of a wider scope. Generalization is a fundamental strategy in language learning (Liu and Zhang, 2015: 37-42). In the process of language learning, learners tend to generalize the rules of target language. But when a target form or structure is an exception to a rule, the rules constructed by learners will go wrong and eventually lead to overgeneralization. That is to say, learners usually have learned some rules of the target language, but not learned the restrictions on their use. Intralingual transfer is of great importance for applied linguists to study learners' developmental process in foreign language learning.

From the above, it can be seen that the native language plays an inseparable role in second language acquisition. Language transfer theory can help us analyze the sources of errors and provide a new perspective for teachers to correct learners' errors. Hence, the role of native language in learners' second language is worth careful examination.

Both error analysis and language transfer supply the theoretical foundations for the present study of errors in college English writing practice. Through the above discussion of the two theories, it is clear to find that the role the native language plays in second language acquisition has been widely recognized by linguists. In the following chapters, the methods adopted in the analysis will be introduced.

Material and Methods

Research Design

Based on the theoretical studies, the design of quantitative study will be introduced in terms of research purpose, objectives, participants, instruments and procedures in this chapter.

Research Purpose and Objectives

English writing can directly reflect learner's language proficiency. The aim of teaching writing is to cultivate learners' competence to properly use English to express their thoughts and feelings. In daily writing teaching and learning, people are increasingly aware of the significance of the errors appearing in learners' English writings. Errors are inevitable and it is difficult to correct them in a short time. However, too many errors may hinder the improvement of language ability if we leave them untreated. Therefore, this paper will analyze the errors frequently made in EFL students' English writing practice, explore the reasons behind them, so as to help learners develop correct language awareness and provide some implications in improving learners' writing ability.

By conducting an analysis of errors in Chinese EFL students' writings, the study aims to solve problems as follows: What are the main errors in Chinese EFL students' English writings? What are the possible reasons for these errors?

Research Participants

The participants of the study are 70 college students from Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics. This is a provincial university with a well-established teaching system, and the students of the school come from all over the country, which can ensure the representativeness of the samples. In addition, the teaching quality of Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics is above the average level among universities in China, and students' English level is reasonable, which can objectively reflect the English writing proficiency of Chinese EFL students.

The gender distribution of the selected candidates is relatively equal, and the selected candidates come from different majors of the four grades, which can fully reflect the English writing level of EFL students. Besides, English is considered as a foreign language for all of them and Chinese is their native language. They all start learning English from the third grade of primary school, and have some skills of English writing.

Research Instruments and Procedures

Two kinds of instruments are used in the study: Pigai Website and Excel 14.0. Pigai Website is a corpus-based automated English essay scoring system in China. As an online smart essay scoring system based on cloud calculation, Pigai Website can generate a score, find out errors and make a comment in a short time. Besides, Pigai Website corrects the composition from six aspects, including content, structure, sentence, phrase collocation, vocabulary and fluency, and has reliability. And Excel 14.0 is used to calculate the number and proportion of all kinds of errors.

The research is carried out in the following steps:

First, online survey of learner's writing intention. All the survey has been conducted by WeChat. The designer of the survey aims to learn candidate's willingness to join the writing activity. After all the candidates are selected, a writing assignment is given on Pigai Website. The direction is to write an argumentative composition about 150-200 words within 25 minutes. Dictionary or references are not allowed to use in writing. All the candidates are required to submit compositions on time. Altogether, 70 compositions are valid. Pigai Website offers automatic processing and scoring work. When the candidate submits his writing on Pigai Website, online correction will automatically identify the errors in writing. To ensure the reliability of the results, advanced English learners and native speakers are invited to make a double-check of all errors in the writings.

Second, error identification and data collection. The errors are classified into lexical, grammatical and discourse groups in accordance with James' (2001) criteria. All the data collected have been processed by Excel 14.0.

Third, after-writing interview. The following questions are asked after candidates submitted their writing work.

(1) What are the main difficulties in your writing?

(2) Will your nervousness or your likes/dislikes affect your writing performance?

(3) Could you make self-correction of your own work?

This interview is carried out to find more useful information. As an online interview, candidates are willing to state their answers.

Results and Discussion

After a hard and painstaking process, 313 errors are identified in learners' writings. The findings are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number and percentage of three types of errors

Type of Errors	Number	Percentage
Lexical Error	114	36.42%
Grammatical Error	179	57.19%
Discourse Error	20	6.39%
Total	313	100.00%

Table 1 tells that there are 313 errors in total. Among them, 114 are lexical errors, which account for 36.42%. This indicates that learners are not familiar with the spelling

and usage of certain words. Grammatical errors take the most percentage 57.19%, a total of 179. It shows that English grammar baffles English learners in China. There are only 20 discourse errors, accounting for 6.39% of all errors. Most of them are pragmatic errors due to Chinese thought pattern transfer and learner's lack of cultural knowledge.

This research adopts Pigai Website to classify and analyze the errors in candidates' writings, and an interview is carried out to make the results more comprehensive. However, some errors may be ignored or double-counted because when some words are analyzed in different degrees, there will be different types of errors. To a certain extent, it will affect the results. In the next chapter, the errors occur in candidates' writings will be explored in detail and relevant analysis will be conducted to establish the sources of these errors.

All the data collected and processed will be analyzed and discussed in this chapter. Combined with James's (2001) classification of errors, the errors in writing have been classified into three types and analyzed respectively.

The Classification of Errors

The present study makes classification of errors on the basis of James' (2001) work.

At lexicon level, errors mainly exist in orthography and word selection. Grammatical errors can be classified into morphology errors and syntax errors. Morphology errors refer to errors in word structures, which are common errors in the English learners' writings. Syntax errors include errors of phrase, clauses and sentences. According to Halliday and Hasan (1985), there are two types of discourse errors: micro-level and macro-level. Micro-level means cohesive devices, which can be identified into five types. They are reference, substitution, lexical cohesion, conjunction and ellipsis. At the macro-level, discourse errors are classified into the following aspects: whole discourse organization, introductory paragraph, concluding paragraph and topic sentences. Discourse errors at micro-level are the main object the for the present study.

Errors at Lexicon Level

In candidates' compositions, lexical errors take up 36.42%. Three subordinated errors are concluded in lexical errors, that is, spelling error, assumed synonymy and mix-up of parts of speech. Among them, spelling errors have the highest percentage, accounting for 19.81%. Coming next is meaning of words, which accounts to 29, 9.27% of the total. The number of assumed synonymy is 23 with 7.35%. The specific number and its proportion of lexical errors can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Number and percentage of lexical errors

Type of Errors	Number	Percentage
Spelling Error	62	19.81%
Assumed Synonymy	29	9.27%
Mix-up of Parts of Speech	23	7.35%
Total	114	36.42%

Spelling Error

As shown in Table 2, the percentage of spelling errors is much higher than others. According to James (2001: 130-141), spelling errors can be divided into five types including addition and omission of the letters, use Chinese letter to stand for English, wrong choice, wrong letter order and other. Generally speaking, the spelling errors are largely caused by similar spelling or pronunciation between two words, unfamiliar to word spelling, and anxiety caused by carelessness. Examples will be given as follow (the spelling errors are italicized and underlined, and the correct ones are in brackets):

1. Now, taking a part-time job is more and more popular to the *collage* (college) students.

2. People differ on *weather* (whether) parents should pay for their kids for doing housework.

In these two sentences, the direct causes of spelling errors are similarities in spelling or pronunciation, and anxiety caused by time-limit in writing. When the candidates are asked to read the sentences one by one, all of them can find out and correct the errors as soon as possible.

3. First of all, we should use the existing energy reasonably and increase *enegy* (energy) efficiency.

4. *Futhermore* (Furthermore), owing to the heavy traffic...

In the above two sentences, the spelling errors are made due to the misuse of Chinese pronunciation rules, in other words, the negative transfer of native pronunciation rules. Chinese and English are very different in pronunciation system and writing form, but the candidates still use the spelling strategy of pinyin and omit the voiceless letter "r".

5. It will bring us a clean, refreshing *wrold* (world).

6. *Accroding* (According) to some people, they think we should have choice to read books.

In sentence 5 and 6, both of the candidates misplace the letters. The errors here seem to be caused by candidates' carelessness. In other words, they are performance errors instead of competence errors and they only need self-correction.

Assumed Synonymy

Assumed synonymy is the second common errors that learners tend to make at lexicon level. According to Lyons (1996: 194), expressions with the same meaning are synonymous. Synonyms are identical, not merely similar. The main cause of assumed synonymy is that these synonyms have no one-to-one correspondence in Chinese, which leads to interlingual and intralingual transfer. Here are some typical errors on assumed synonymy in the following samples from online writing:

1. Last but not at least, through the process of *learning* **(**acquiring**)** knowledge...

The word "learn" in Chinese means "学", and the word "knowledge" means "知识", so in Chinese learner' opinions, "学知识" should be "learn knowledge". This is a typical Chinglish expression. The idiomatic expression should be "acquire knowledge".

2. Nowadays, *little* (few) people are aware of the dangerous of the global warming.

This sentence indicates the problem on the overextension of analogy. "Little" and "few" are synonyms. "Little" is used with uncountable nouns while "few" is used with

uncountable nouns. The choice of adjective depends on the noun modified. The word "people" is a countable noun, so the adjective here should be "few" instead of "little".

Assumed synonymy is the result of language transfer and insufficient knowledge of synonym. When writing, learners often come up with the English words that corresponding to Chinese to express meanings, but in most cases, they will ignore the restriction of these words. They do not have the ability to think in English, so they inevitably make errors when writing in Chinese thinking pattern.

Mix-up of Parts of Speech

From candidates' writings, we find that there are 23 lexical errors caused by mix-up of parts of speech. Mix-up of parts of speech mainly involves three types: misuse of nouns and verbs; misuse of nouns and adjectives; misuse of adjectives and adverbs. Such errors appear mainly due to the great differences in vocabulary and morphology between English and Chinese and the complexity of prefixes and suffixes in English words. The examples are listed below:

1. It is known to us all,with the development of the *social* (society), global warming becomes a more and more serious problem.

2. Nowadays, few people are aware of the *dangerous* (danger) of the global warming.

3. If you go to street, it is *easily* (easy) to be surrounded by automobile exhaust.

4. Before I came to college, everyone told me that you would have a *leisurely* (leisure) life.

5. The best way is to choose a job that is *benefit* (beneficial) to us.

Possible reasons lead to mix-up of parts of speech are negative transfer of Chinese and improper ways of word memorization. Because Chinese does not need to consider the part of speech of words, learners easily forget there is such a concept in English. In daily learning, learners should emphasize on the context in which words are used rather than just their meaning.

Errors at Grammar Level

Among the three domain types of errors, grammatical errors are the most frequent ones, which account for 57.19%. Grammatical errors refer to the errors caused by learners' insufficient knowledge or incorrect use of grammar. Table 3 shows the distribution of grammatical errors. There are mainly six types of grammatical errors: verb errors, article errors, proposition errors, sentence errors, noun errors, adjective errors and adverb errors. In the following sections, these types of grammatical errors will be analyzed in detail.

Table 3. Number and percentage of grammatical errors

Type of Errors	Number	Percentage
Verb Error	75	23.96%
Article Error	39	12.46%
Preposition Error	20	6.39%
Sentence Error	20	6.39%
Noun Error	18	5.75%

Adjective Error	4	1.28%
Adverb Error	3	0.96%
Total	179	57.19%

Verb Error

According to sample analysis, verb errors are the most common grammatical errors. There are 75 verb errors in total, including non-predicate verb errors, subject-verb disagreements and tense errors. The rate of non-predicate verb errors is highest among the others. It is 11.50%. The second is subject-verb disagreement, a total of 30. The least is tense error, which only takes up 2.88%. The number and percentage of each type of verb errors is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Number and percentage of verb errors

Type of Errors	Number	Percentage
Non-predicate Verb Error	36	11.50%
Subject-verb Disagreement	30	9.58%
Tense Error	9	2.88%
Total	75	23.96%

Non-Predicate Verb Error

As shown in Table 3, non-predicate verb errors rank first among verb errors. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* (2009: 1356), a non-predicate verb form is not marked according to differences in the person or number of the subject and has no tense. And there are three forms of non-finite verbs: infinitives, gerunds and participle. Generally speaking, the main reasons for the misuse of non-predicate verbs are the negative transfer of Chinese and learners' faulty or partial learning of relevant knowledge. Here are some examples:

1. By contrast, they often go out *wear* (wearing) masks.

2. On the other hand, *increased* (increasing) use of electrical appliances requires more fossil fuels.

3. Yet there is no denying the fact that we have less time *playing* (play) or *studying* (study).

4. Planning a travel by yourself and *find* (finding) a free time to make it come true.

The above errors show learners' lack of linguistic competence in non-predicate verb. Due to the differences in grammar, Chinese learners are easy to be confused by their mother tongue thinking pattern when learning and using non-predicate verb, which leads to the wrong use of non-predicate verb. The large number of errors in learners' writings is a good proof.

Subject-verb Disagreement

In terms of the use of verbs, subject-verb disagreements often occur in EFL students' English writings, accounting for the second place among verb errors. Subject-verb disagreement is actually the disagreement between person and number. This problem seems simple, but is complicated in actual practice. Especially in complex

sentences, the subject-verb relationship is difficult to distinguish, which is one of the reasons why this kind of errors often happens. On the other hand, Chinese English learners are less aware of subject-verb agreement because there is no such requirement in Chinese. Interfered by their mother tongue, they often make errors on changing the predicate verbs' form. Several representative examples will be shown below:

1. Trees *has* (have) many other functions.

2. All in all, using solar energy not only *reduce* (reduces) petroleum combustion, but also solve our energy problem.

3. Also, in modern society, there *are* (is) a lot of information for us to choice.

4. Global warming becomes a more and more serious problem which *attach* (attaches) people's attention.

Most learners know the concept of subject-verb agreement, but they still make errors repeatedly. The main reasons are the different grammar between two languages, and learners' scarce knowledge of subject-verb agreement.

Tense Error

Tense is a grammatical category of verbs in English, which expresses distinctions of time. It is widely acknowledged that tense is difficult, especially for Chinese English learners. As we know, Chinese does make a distinction of tense, but it does not need to change the form of verbs to express different tenses. So influenced by the grammatical rules of their mother tongue, Chinese learners tend to write sentences that violate the rules of English grammar. Here are some examples concerning tense errors:

1. If everyone *stuck* (sticks) to the rules, we can do a great thing by protecting our earth.

2. Before I came to college, the college that in my mind *is* (was) a place where student could do everything they like.

3. We could acquire knowledge through reading books if libraries *were* (are) established in each town.

From the above examples, we can find that it is the differences between Chinese and English that influence learners' writing ability and thinking pattern, and cause tense error. In the interview, it is found that although some candidates are aware of changing tense, they fail to use it in a specific context. It calls attention to the learning of English grammar.

Article Error

Table 3 shows that article errors rank second among grammatical errors. There are three kinds of articles in English, including definite article "the", indefinite article "a/an" and zero article. Since the concept of "article" does not exist in Chinese, learners are likely to ignore articles, and think articles are dispensable. Hence, it requires learners to pay more attention to them. Here come some examples:

1. Protect (the) environment, begin from me.

2. (The) Earth is our mother, it's time for us to protect her!

3. For example, if you enjoy teaching, you can find a job about teaching, such as *the* (/) tutor.

4. Measures must be taken before *a* (/) thing goes worse.

From the above four examples, we can find that articles are another difficulty for learners. This might due to the negative transfer and interference of mother tongue, because Chinese language does not have any articles. Although there are only three kinds of articles, the usage of them is extremely flexible and diverse. If learners do not fully grasp the use of articles, it will also lead to the appearance of such errors. It is suggested that learners should learn to distinguish the three articles and be able to use them flexibly.

Preposition Error

Prepositions errors also appear in EFL students' English writings. Errors of proposition occur because of learners' lack of specific knowledge of prepositions, which makes them put Chinese grammatical rules into use. Besides, there is a large number of prepositions in English which have flexible usage and are always in fixed collocation, so learners have difficulty in memorizing them accurately. Correcting preposition errors is very important to improve Chinese EFL students' English writing ability. Here are some detailed examples of preposition errors:

1. Third, we can *call people* (call on people) to protect the environment.

2. ...usually they want to *go classroom* (go to classroom) and *listen teacher* (listen to teacher), but they have no time.

3. It is very convenient for most people to share, communicate and even *make friends* (make friends with) who have the same interests.

4. And it's also my dream to *return to society* (return society).

In the above examples, the differences between Chinese and English in prepositions and learners' unfamiliarity with the usage of certain prepositions are the reasons for the errors. As we know, there are also prepositions in Chinese. However, in terms of grammar functions, Chinese prepositions are not as active as English prepositions, so students can easily think in Chinese thinking pattern. In addition, the usage of prepositions is very flexible, but the grammar books seldom introduce them in detail, which leads to learners' insufficient grasp of this knowledge, and makes this kind of errors easy to happen.

Sentence Error

In the collected samples, the sentence errors that candidates are prone to make mainly include: run-on sentence, fragment, lack of sentence components, and redundant components. Generally speaking, sentence errors are mainly caused by the negative transfer of mother tongue. The Chinese way of thinking will influence the way learners use English to express. Besides, learners haven't paid enough attention to sentence structure, which also leads them to make errors in this aspect. The specific example will be listed in the followings:

1. It is never too old to learn ,(and)we may read a lot of books in our life.

This is a run-on sentence, that is, two complete sentences are joined together without appropriate punctuation or conjunction. This is a kind of sentence errors that learners tend to make. When dealing with this problem, learners can choose to divide the original sentence into two separate ones, or use proper conjunctions.

2. I choose this way *had* (for) three reasons.

This sentence is not grammatical. This error occurs due to the negative transfer of Chinese thinking pattern. Through interview, many candidates express that they prefer to write in Chinese first and then literally translate it into English, so they sometimes write sentences that violate the rules of English grammar.

3. Modern people (are) always busy.

4. Otherwise you would be alone and (have) no friends.

Lack of sentence elements is one of the common sentence errors Chinese students make. The above two sentences have the same problem that they both miss the predicate. This is largely because students often rely on their Chinese thinking pattern. As a result, errors are caused due to their literal translation.

Other Error

Among all the errors collected, it also finds that EFL students make errors in the use of nouns, adjectives and adverbs, but the frequency of these errors is not high. Here are some examples:

1. Why do we have a try in order to have a better *surroundings* (surrounding)?

This sentence mainly mentions the addition of plural-s. In English, there are countable and uncountable nouns, but there is no such distinction in Chinese. On account of the negative transfer of Chinese, learners usually ignore this grammatical rule in English.

2. It can help students learn the knowledge *more easy* (easier).

The main cause of the above error is intralingual transfer. As long as the candidate has a thorough grasp of relevant knowledge, he can identify and correct the error.

3. Cloth bags *also are* (are also) convenient.

The error in the above sentence is the incorrect position of adverb. During the interview, some candidates say they sometimes write a sentence in Chinese first and then translate it in English word by word. They are easily influenced by Chinese thinking pattern. Besides, this kind of errors also shows learners' understanding of adverbs is not good enough.

Errors at Discourse Level

There are 20 errors at discourse level, taking up only 6.39%. Compared with the other two kinds of errors, the number of discourse errors is not too much. There are 13 places of conjunction errors in the samples, followed by reference errors which accounts for 2.24%. The distribution of discourse errors is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Number and percentage of discourse errors

Type of Errors	Number	Percentage
Conjunction Error	13	4.15%
Reference Error	7	2.24%
Total	20	6.39%

Conjunction Error

In Table 5, we can find that candidates are most likely to make conjunction errors at discourse level. Conjunction errors mainly refer to the lack of logical conjunction and the

misuse of it. Without conjunctions, the composition will become loose, incoherent and short of logic, which will make readers feel puzzled. It is believed that conjunction errors occur due to the differences between two languages. Although some learners have the awareness of applying conjunctions in their writings, which is a good sign, they still have trouble using them. Here are some typical examples:

1. *Nonetheless* (Therefore), if we aware the consequence of the air pollution, all of us are obliged to assuming the responsibility to protect our earth by walking more and driving less.

In this sentence, the candidate intends to express the causal relationship between sentences, but because of the faulty learning of English, he mistakenly thinks "nonetheless" can express causality and finally makes an error.

2. *Because* we live in society *so* (/) we need money and experience.

The sentence above is representative of showing that the candidate is under Chinese interference. Unlike Chinese, the conjunction "because" and "so" cannot exist simultaneously in English. When "because" is used, "so" mustn't be used. In this sentence, the candidate is misled by Chinese thinking pattern and makes an error.

From the above two examples, we can find that learners are aware of using conjunctions, but they use them wrongly. The probable cause of these errors is mother tongue interference. Learners are easily interfered by their mother tongue and apply the language habits of their mother tongue. In addition, their insufficient English ability could be another reason. They are deficient in the usage of conjunctions.

Reference Error

Reference errors always occur when the content expressed by the reference is not clear enough or exists ambiguity. The inconsistent reference often makes readers puzzled and even leads to comprehension problem. This kind of errors is mainly caused by carelessness and the negative transfer of Chinese. Here are some examples listed to make a discussion:

1. ...you may be estranged from *our* (your) honey friends.

2. Every knowledge has its own impact, we don't know when we should use *them* (it).

In the sentences above, the references are shifted improperly. This is mainly due to learners' carelessness in writing. During the feedback and interview time, all the candidates could find out the errors and make self-correction at first sight.

3. What we can do is just listen to the teachers and accept *them* (what they say).

"Them" in the sentence should refer to what the teachers say. However, when using the reference, the candidate is influenced by Chinese writing habits and transfers them into English writing, resulting in ambiguity.

Analysis of the Causes of Writing Errors

There are many reasons why learners make errors in their English writings. After analyzing and discussing the specific errors in learners' writings, it is believed that mother tongue interference, target language interference and psychological factors are responsible for these errors.

Mother Tongue Influence: Interlingual Error

Lado (1957: 142) points out in his *Cross-cultural Linguistics* that learning a foreign language has such a tendency, that is, language learners transfer the structure, word meaning and word order of their mother tongue and native culture easily to the foreign language and culture. Interlingual errors can be traced back to the mother tongue. According to Brown (2000: 213), interlingual errors mainly refer to the language errors caused by the interference of the mother tongue to the target language. In the process of language learning, before the system and structure of the second language are established, the native language system and structure are the only linguistic system and structure in the previous experience upon which the learners can draw (Yu, 2006; Robert and Hatcho, 2018). When the required target language item is unknown or when the learner knows the target item but fails to access it, the learner will borrow the knowledge of mother tongue as a substitute. However, the structure and word order of Chinese are completely different from that of English, so few learners can succeed in the transition from Chinese to English. This leads to mother tongue transfer errors. And interlingual transfer explains many errors made in the process of second language learning.

Due to limited vocabulary, learners have a tendency to depend on their mother tongue to express themselves in English words but Chinese way of thinking. As we can see from the case analysis of errors in Chapter Four, learners often transfer Chinese expressions into English. In the after-writing interview, all the candidates review that they often neglect English context, collocation, and cultural meaning when a lexical item in English is identical with its Chinese counterpart in meaning and connotation. This undoubtedly leads to inappropriate use of words in writing. In addition, James (2001: 143) finds that learners' spelling errors related to misuse of the pronunciation rules of their mother tongue or the target language. Chinese and English are very different in pronunciation system and writing form, so it can be imagined that Chinese learners' spelling errors will result from the misuse of Chinese pronunciation rules. For example, Chinese learners often spell "enslave" as "inslave", "nose" as "noze", and "reflect" as "reflekt" (Xiong, 2007: 133-136).

Grammatical errors are mainly reflected in those grammatical rules that exist in English but not in Chinese. English and Chinese are very different in grammar. English has a clear and strict grammar system, such as word order, verb tenses, sentence structure and so on. Therefore, it causes great difficulties for learners in application. For example, Chinese and English use different grammatical devices to express sentence tenses. English expresses the tense of a sentence by changing the verb tense, while Chinese uses the adverb of time without changing the verb form. Besides, the syntactic order of English sentences has its own particularity. But Chinese learners, influenced by the grammar of their mother tongue, tend to write sentences that violate the rules of English grammar.

In a word, examples of mother tongue interference can be easily found in learners' writings. Teachers should attach great importance to the mother tongue interference in English writing teaching. And by doing so, English learners will not make so many errors.

Target Language Interference: Intralingural Error

In addition to errors of translating rules from mother tongue, our subjects also make many errors when the learner has learned some rules of the target language but has not learned the restriction of their use (Brown, 2002: 214). Errors of this kind are called intralingual errors. Generally speaking, intralingual errors mainly come from faulty or partial learning of the target language, independent of the native language. That is to say, learners' inadequate learning of target language, incorrect understanding of the rules and their inability to flexibly apply language rules are the reasons for these errors.

Generalization is a fundamental strategy in language learning. In the process of language learning, learners tend to form generalizations of rules to predict how the different items will behave. But when a target form or structure is an exception to a rule, the rules constructed by learners will go wrong and eventually lead to overgeneration. Overgeneration is defined as the use of previously available strategies in new situations (Zhu, 2000: 51-55). For example, some learners add an "s" to irregular plurals. Because the plural form of countable nouns is to add "-s/-es" at the end of the word in English, some learners will think that all plural nouns can follow this rule, resulting in some errors like "peoples" and "childs". In this case, overgeneralization occurs as learners do not obey the structure of the target language and ignore the restrictions of rules.

Obviously, these errors are not caused by the interference of the native language, but largely due to what learners know of the target language. Therefore, different developmental stages of language learning should be taken seriously by teachers and learners.

Psychological Factor

The feedback of interview shows that psychological factors are major cause of errors in language learning. Through the interview, it is learned that many candidates are afraid of writing and tend to feel nervous and anxious during the writing process. Most candidates also express that some of their writing errors are simply due to carelessness. Writing is the last part of English exam. Learners often face with the situation that there is not enough time for them to write, which will inevitably make them nervous and anxious and affect their actual performance. For example, spelling error makes up a considerable proportion of EFL students' writing errors, although we usually think it as the least error-prone. Besides, the English test now places more emphasis on the judgement of language knowledge instead of application. Learners have accepted the fact that reading, vocabulary and grammar is of great importance. As a result, they begin to pay less attention to writing and become less motivated to write.

Writing is such a complex psychological process, and psychological factors have a certain impact on writing quality. Fortunately, errors caused by psychological factors are easy to discover and correct. After learners repeatedly correct the error, the probability of the same error in the future writing will be reduced to some extent.

A thorough analysis is made in this chapter. It is observed that learners' English writing errors are mainly distributed in three categories, namely lexical errors, grammatical errors and discourse errors. Among them, the type of errors that learners make most is grammatical errors. In addition, it is also found that mother tongue interference, target language interference and psychological factors are responsible for

these errors. In the next chapter, all findings of the study will be summarized and discussed, and pedagogical implications will be provided.

Findings and Implications

After analyzing and discussing the results of candidates' writing samples, based on the above given results and discussion, some critical findings and implications are to be illustrated in this chapter.

Major Findings

The study focuses on the errors made by 70 candidates from Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics. After analyzing these errors, some findings are successfully found out. Among all errors, candidates are most likely to make grammatical errors, especially verb errors. These errors are committed due to mother tongue transfer and learners' limited knowledge of English. English and Chinese are very different in grammar. Learners can reduce such errors by consolidating and strengthening grammar knowledge. Also, raise awareness of the differences between Chinese and English grammar can help reduce the negative transfer of mother tongue. At lexicon level, it is learned that candidates frequently make spelling errors, and this kind of errors can be easily recognized and self-corrected. Besides, the errors on assumed synonyms and mix-up of parts of speech also reflect learners' poor grasp of basic vocabulary knowledge. Through orderly training, learners can reduce language errors effectively and improve language quality. As for discourse errors, the errors in pragmatic failure are more than in coherence. It is believed that these errors are caused by Chinese thinking pattern transfer and learners' lack of cultural knowledge. Learners can avoid such errors by reading extensively, understanding the cultural background of other countries and developing a sense of English language.

All in all, the study finds that grammatical errors rank top in students' English writings, the subsequent ones are lexical errors and discourse errors. Based on error analysis and language transfer, it also finds that mother tongue interference, target language interference and psychological factors can account for why Chinese EFL students cannot do well in English writing.

Implications of the Study

Lu (1980) believes that the most useful help for Chinese learners in English learning is to make them realize the differences between English and Chinese. First of all, teachers can help learners expand the width and depth of reading. Reading is the most effective language input method in college English teaching. The main obstacle to the improvement of EFL students' English writing is the lack of correct input. Reading content in class should not be limited to textbooks. It can be English news, background knowledge or history of English-speaking countries, or English classics. Learners can feel the charm of language in reading, and their English thinking ability can be improved. Besides, teachers can ask learners to enlarge their vocabulary in reading, copy unfamiliar words in a notebook, and understand the specific context in which the words are used. These methods are certainly better than rote learning in class, and to some extent can reduce the negative transfer of mother tongue in vocabulary. To increase correct language input, teachers should also urge learners to develop the habit of reciting and imitating authentic

English expressions. Reciting is particularly important in English learning and teaching. Reciting some classic literature and beautiful sentences can cultivate learners' sense of language, train their English thought, so as to avoid the interference of mother tongue.

Second, teachers should emphasize the explanation on grammar and vocabulary, equipping learners with a solid English foundation. In terms of word explanation, it is of great importance for teachers to not only explain the meaning, but also put the words into a specific context to explain their usage. They can encourage learners to look up the English definition of words in dictionary and understand the subtle differences between synonyms. Teachers can also adopt situational teaching method to let learners experience the context and train learners' competence of using language, which can undoubtedly reduce the improper use of vocabulary in writing. Besides, grammatical errors occur frequently in EFL students' English writings, which is usually due to their poor grammar foundation. Therefore, teachers should pay more attention to grammar teaching in class. Teachers can strengthen grammar knowledge, focus on the cultivation of learners' analysis ability and application ability, and add the content of sentence structure to daily teaching, so as to improve learners' ability of analyzing English sentences in theory and practice.

Third, teachers should help learners to stimulate their interest in writing and develop good habits of error correction. Most students have difficulty in writing. They do not know what to write, how to write and what the criteria are, and become afraid of writing. This is because the English test in China is still mainly based on multiple choice and learners have fewer opportunities to practice English writing. Based on the above problems, teachers can assign some homework such as writing English diary or letters to make learners practice more, help learners overcome the fear of English writing, and develop their confidence. In addition, learners' awareness of error correction should also be developed. This requires teachers to correct learners' writings in time, urge learners to confront their problems and make corrections actively.

Conclusion

This paper, taking candidates from Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics as research subjects, explores the errors existing in Chinese EFL students' English writings. From the analysis results of the research, Chinese learners' English writing is influenced by several aspects, such as mother tongue influence, target language influence and psychological factors. In order to reduce learners' errors and enhance their writing proficiency, some implications are presented in this study. It is hoped that the analysis and findings will be helpful to both language learners and teachers in college.

Meanwhile, although the author has tried hard to make the research design as reasonable as possible, some limitations in the study cannot be neglected. One is limited resources. Great effort has been made in collecting typical research data, but only 70 samples have been collected in this study. There are some problems in the study of English writing errors in China, such as insufficient quantity, limited scope and weak strength, which need to be solved urgently. Therefore, the data should be expanded to achieve more insightful findings. On the other hand, due to the limitations of the author's

academic ability and the lack of international standards to analyze errors and their sources, some errors in writing samples may not be identified. Hence, this study can be analyzed from a more professional and comprehensive perspective. Even though there are still shortcomings in this paper, the author hopes that it can play a role in promoting Chinese EFL students' English writing, and other researchers are expected to make up for the above shortcomings and continuously improve the study of errors.

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