

A Study of Junior Students English Writing Based on Error Analysis Theory

Siyi Yang¹

¹School of Public Foreign Languages, China West Normal University, Nanchong, China

Correspondence: Siyi Yang, School of Public Foreign Languages, China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan, China.

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Abstract

Writing is a concrete expression of the ability to pragmatic, as well as an important skill in learning English. In *English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education* (2022), students are expected to be able to use different sentence structures and tenses in their written expressions to describe or introduce people, things or events around them, expressing emotional attitudes, opinions and intentions. In addition, errors in writing can reflect students' knowledge of pragmatic. The British linguist Pit Corder proposed Error Analysis Theory in the late 1960s and pointed out that errors can be used as a learning tool. Integrating Error Analysis Theory with junior high school students' writing can help improving their writing skills. Zizhong Falun Junior High School is located in Falun town, Zizhong county, Sichuan Province, which is a rural junior high school. In this study, the writer collected and analyzed the writing samples of students in the midterm examination of grade two in this school, as well as put forward the targeted suggestions.

Keywords: junior students, English writing, error analysis theory

1. Introduction

According to *English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education* (2022), the general objectives of the English subject curriculum in compulsory education are summarized as follows: students should develop language skills, cultivate cultural awareness, enhance the quality of thinking and improving learning ability through the study of this curriculum. Language skills include the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing, as an output skill, is considered to be one of the most challenging tasks. Zizhong Falun Junior High School is located in Falun town, Zizhong county, Sichuan Province, which is a rural junior high school. In this study, the writer collected and analyzed the writing samples of students in the midterm examination of grade two in this school, as well as put forward the targeted suggestions.

1.1 Background to the Research

For English teaching in junior school, most teachers do not pay enough attention to writing teaching, which also results in short and inefficient writing teaching time. Meanwhile, having students memorize writing models or writing templates seems to have become a common status quo in teaching writing. Therefore, it is necessary to consolidate students' basic knowledge and effectively improve their writing skills. There are often different types of errors in students' writing, but few teachers will analyze these errors. As a result, it is worth studying to improve students' writing skills by combining error analysis with their writing.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of the Study

1.2.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to help teachers analyze the types of errors in students' errors in their writing, further analyze the errors that occur in students' writing, and help improve their writing skill by correcting the errors.

1.2.2 Significance of the Study

English writing expression is an important question type in the Senior High School Entrance Examination, which is used to test students' writing skills. Applying error analysis theory to improve junior students' writing is not only beneficial for teachers to effectively improve writing instruction, but also for students to build a solid foundation before entering high school.

2. Literature Review

This chapter mainly introduces the relevant theoretical basis of this research, including domestic research on error analysis theory in domestic and foreign academic circles.

2.1 Definition of Errors and Types of Errors

2.1.1 The Definition of Errors

The British linguist Corder (1967) put forward the distinction between mistakes and errors. He believed that an error is a direct manifestation of a system within which a learner is operating at the time. It reflects on learners' transitional competence on underlying knowledge. While a mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a "slip", in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. For language errors, linguistics gave many definitions. Carl James (1998) think that errors can be defined as forms that deviate from the norm of the target language, errors are defined as unsuccessful use of language. Friedenberg (1991) holds that errors are imperfections in phonology, structure, vocabulary, and grammar in the speech or writing of a second language learner that appear to the native speaker.

2.1.2 The Types of Errors

Errors are often divided into intralingual errors and interlingual errors according to their source. Interlingual errors occurs when learners misuse language items that have common features with their mother tongue. While intralingual errors occurs when learners made errors within the target language.

According to the characteristics of English writing, this thesis classifies errors into vocabulary errors, sentence errors and discourse errors.

2.2 Error Analysis Theory

In the late 1950s, some linguists such as C.Frises and R.Lado put forward contrastive analysis. They believe that a comparative study of learners' native language and the target language can anticipate the errors learners may make in learning that target language, but the limitations are gradually being revealed. In order to systematically analyze learners' errors, to identify the sources of errors and to provide a basis for eliminating them in the teaching process, a new theory of analyzing linguistic errors, Error Analysis Theory, was born.

Error analysis theory is a branch of applied linguistics, which is proposed by British linguist Pit Corder in the late 1960s. Error analysis refers to the study and analysis of second language learners' errors, and is used as an alternative to relatively limited to comparative analysis. The main claim of error analysis is that many errors made by learners of a second language are influenced by factors other than those of the first language. Corder (1967) pointed out that errors can't just be seen as something to be eliminated, errors themselves have significance.

2.3 The Current Studies Abroad and at Homes

2.3.1 Error Analysis Studies Abroad

In the 1960s, some foreign scholars carried out research on error analysis. Lado, an American applied linguist, made a systematic analysis of the errors in second language learning and initially established the theory of error analysis. Corder (1967) began to classify errors in learning a second language into macro errors and micro errors. In the process of the research, he also divided errors into interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Later, Corder (1971) put forward a great explanation of errors, classified it carefully into different types of errors as well as coming up with the steps and way to analyze errors, which sets up the foundation of error analysis. James (2013) proposed the categorical classification of language, that is, errors can be divided into six categories according to the linguistic characteristics of errors made by learners: errors in verb tense, participle form, predicate verb formation, use of prepositions, use of articles, interrogative errors and other errors.

Based on the analysis of errors made by foreign researchers on English learners, it can be found that foreign researchers have conducted in-depth studies on the relevant theories of error analysis, which provides great convenience for subsequent research.

2.3.2 Error Analysis Studies at Homes

The practice of error analysis in China started slightly later than abroad, and the earliest research on error analysis in China started in the 1980s. Gui Shichun (1985) first mentioned the theory of error analysis as a tool to improve teaching strategies and also to provide an effective way for students to self-reflect. Through the analysis and comparison of error analysis theory and contrastive analysis theory, Wang Chuming (1990) proposed that error analysis can help teachers understand the causes of students' errors, and students can clearly and accurately

understand the causes of their own errors. With the increase of research in error analysis theory in China, in recent years, domestic experts and scholars have also linked error analysis theory to students' English writing. In addition, many scholars in China have put forward corresponding teaching suggestions while classifying students' errors in English writing.

3. Measures to Improve Junior Students' Writing Skills Based on Error Analysis

The writer collected the scores of the writing part in the midterm examination of the second grade of Zizhong County Falun junior school in Sichuan Province. Meanwhile, the writer analyzed the students' writing and made targeted suggestions for teaching accordingly.

Based on Corder's classification of errors and students' writing samples of midterm examination, this paper classifies writing errors into vocabulary errors, sentence errors and discourse errors. In the analysis of students' English writing samples, there are 3,727 writing errors, including 1,641 vocabulary errors, 1,138 sentence errors and 948 discourse errors, accounting for 44%, 31% and 25% of the total number of errors respectively. The above data are represented in the bar chart and pie chart respectively.

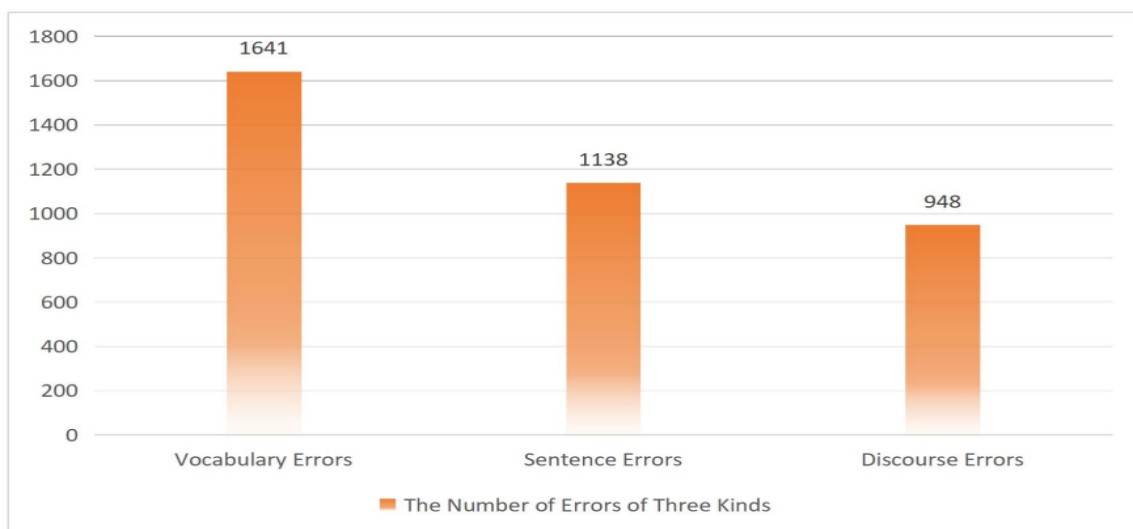


Figure 1

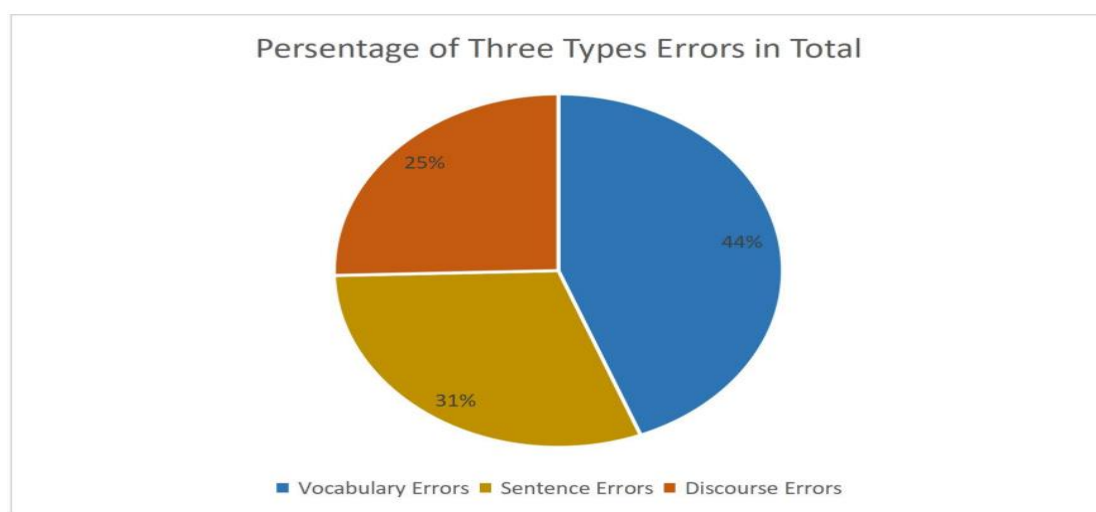


Figure 2

3.1 Distributions of Common Types of Errors in English Writing of Junior School Students

3.1.1 Vocabulary Errors

During the analysis of the students' writing samples, there are 1,641 vocabulary errors, which are classified as spelling and collocation errors in order to better analyze them. And there are 702 spelling errors and 939 collocation errors respectively. As a result, there are 1,641 vocabulary errors, accounting for 44% of the total number of errors, while spelling and collocation errors accounted for 19% and 25% respectively. In order to display them more clearly, the bar chart and pie chart are used to display the above data. And two types of errors are simply analyzed.

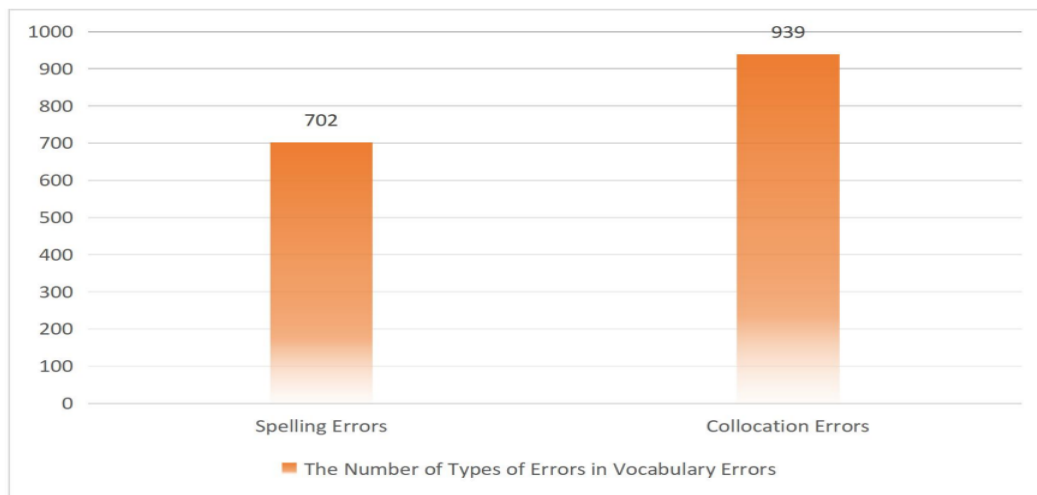


Figure 3

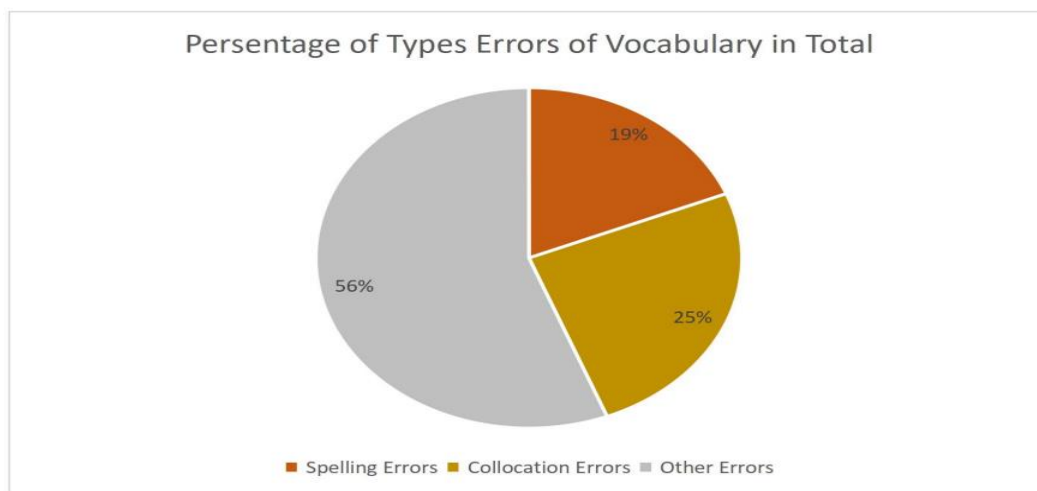


Figure 4

The analysis of students' writing in the midterm examination revealed that students' errors in vocabulary mainly focused on spelling errors and collocation errors. Problems with students' spelling can be categorized as errors or mistakes, as some spelling problems are caused by students' nervousness or penmanship during the examination, while others are due to students' weak grasp of vocabulary. Collocation errors arise mainly from errors in fixed collocations or inappropriate use of language, such as written and unwritten language, formal and informal language.

3.1.2 Sentence Errors

In the process of analyzing students' English writing samples, the writer found 1,138 sentence errors, and in order to make them more typical, they were divided into 556 grammatical errors and 572 contextual errors. In

conclusion, there are 1,138 sentence errors, accounting for 31% of the total number of errors, and grammatical errors and contextual errors each account for 15% of the total number of errors. In order to display them more clearly, the bar chart and pie chart are used to display the above data. And two types of errors are simply analyzed.

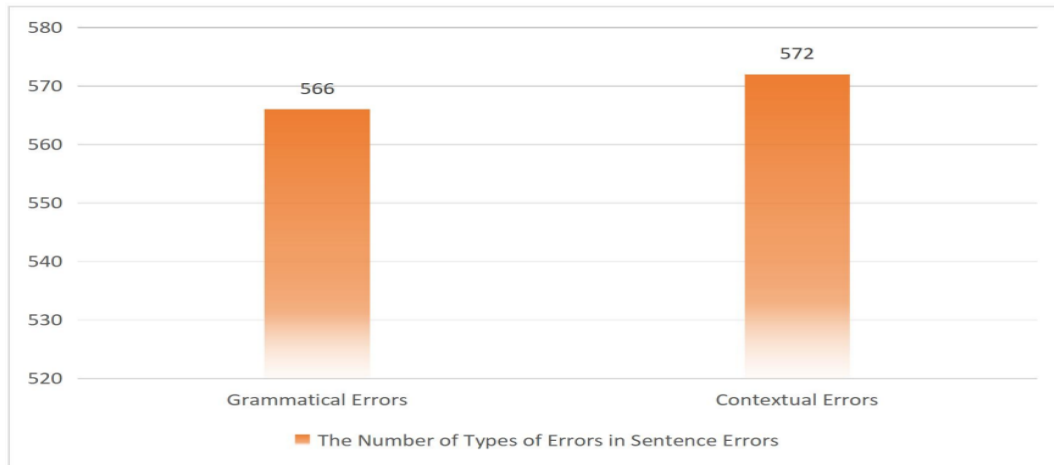


Figure 5

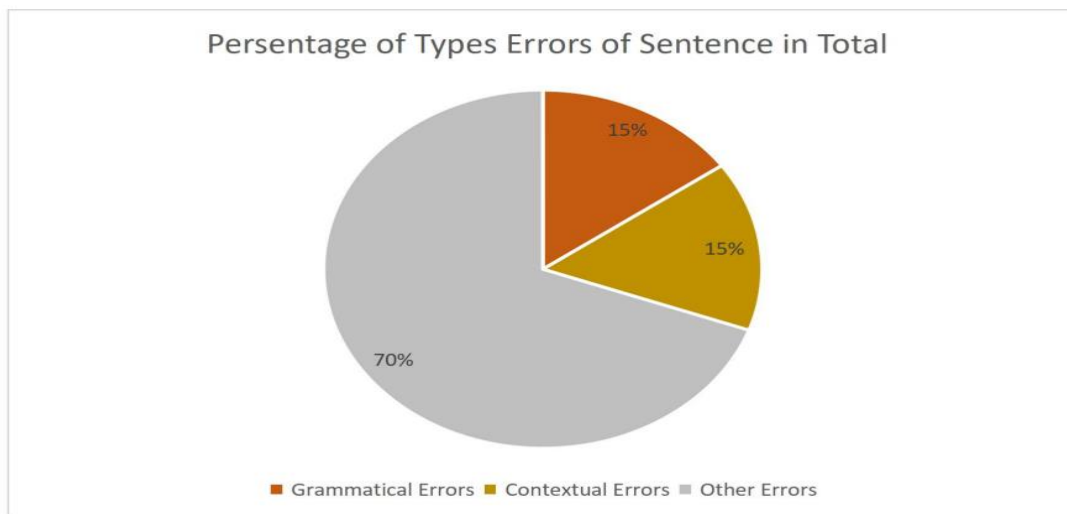


Figure 6

The types of sentence errors that students make in their writing include grammatical and contextual categories. When students’ grammatical errors occur, there will be tense and morphological errors in their writing for ignoring the background information provided by the writing topic or confusing the use of active and passive voice. Regarding contextual errors, the analysis of students’ writing on their midterm examination shows that they are due to the fact that students do not consider specific contexts when writing, but create sentences in isolation, or due to cultural differences.

3.1.3 Discourse Errors

There are 948 discourse errors in the sample of students’ English writing samples, which are summarized as 337 logical errors and 611 cohesive errors. Discourse errors account for 25% of the total number of errors, among which logical errors and cohesive errors account for 9% and 16% respectively. The writer use bar chart and pie chart to display the above the quantity and proportion, and carry on simple analysis to it.

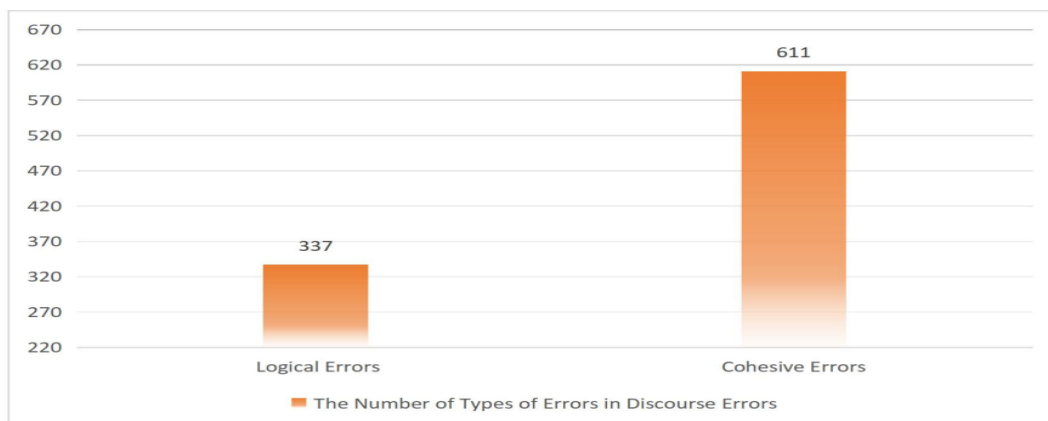


Figure 7

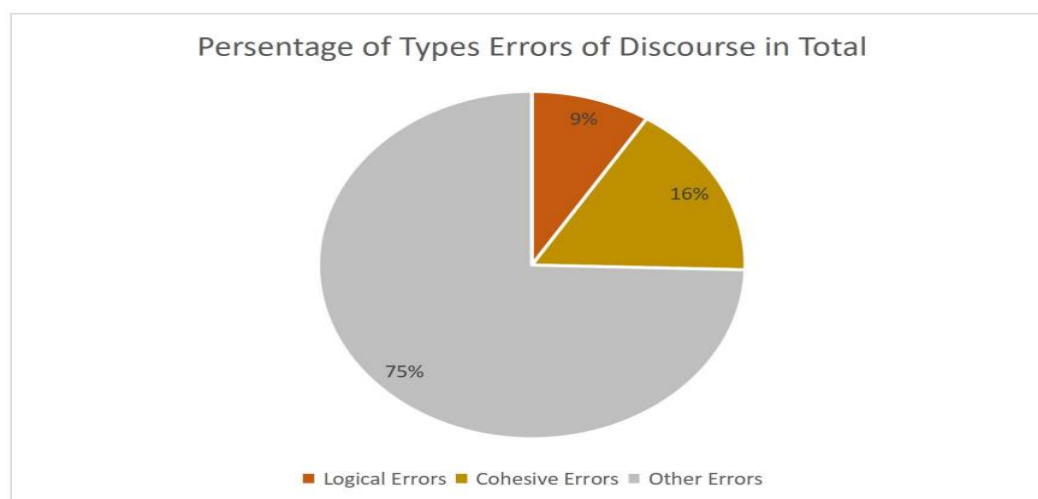


Figure 8

Students’ discourse errors are usually in logic and articulation, such as the use of related words. Most second-year students retained their first-year habits, prefer to use simple sentences when writing, and are not used to applying articulated words in their writing, which leads them to give little consideration to the logic between sentences in the writing process.

3.2 Measures to Improve Students’ Writing Skills Based on Vocabulary Errors

3.2.1 Put the Focus of Vocabulary Teaching on the Use of Vocabulary

Wang (2006) put forward receptive and productive vocabulary and hold that words that one cannot only recognize, but also use in speech and writing, are considered part of one’s productive or active vocabulary. Only when the words are accurately and appropriately used in context by learners can we consider these words as parts of their productive vocabulary.

In order to reduce students’ vocabulary errors, vocabulary teaching should not only be about recognition and spelling, but also about the correct and appropriate use of vocabulary. In the process of teaching vocabulary, teachers can make some sentences with these words so that students can learn and master the vocabulary in concrete example sentences. At the same time, vocabulary teaching can involve students in the process of making sentences to develop their ability to transfer knowledge, so that they can better use the vocabulary correctly in their writing.

3.2.2 Present Words in Context in Vocabulary Teaching

When introducing new vocabulary, teachers should always present words in context. This means that teachers

should not provide a list of isolated and unrelated words for students to learn (Chen). Collocation errors in students' writing are often due to their inability to remember these fixed collocations or remember them well. Teaching vocabulary in context allows students to better understand and remember the fixed collocations of vocabulary, rather than simply learning to use them through repetition and memorization. In addition, teaching vocabulary in context also allows students to think more about the logic within the sentences when writing, which also enhances their thinking logically and allows them to stop writing simple sentences in isolation.

3.2.3 Point out and Make Students Aware of Vocabulary Errors in Their Writing

Vocabulary errors may be considered the smallest and insignificant errors in writing, but they are not. Pointing out and making students aware of vocabulary errors in their writing is one of the important parts to improve students' writing skills. It is known that there is a certain criteria for scoring students' writing in the Senior High School Entrance Examination, and a few errors in spelling words do not affect the final score, so perhaps that is why some teachers and students do not care much about vocabulary errors in writing part. However, improving students' writing skills based on errors analysis does not happen overnight, it requires a step-by-step approach to enhance their writing and ultimately their abilities, starting with small errors, and reducing vocabulary errors is the beginning of that improvement.

3.3 Measures to Improve Students' Writing Skills Based on Sentence Errors

3.3.1 Focus on the Differences Between Chinese and English in the Teaching Process

English sentences follow syntactic rules strictly, with the subject-verb structure as the sentence kernel. And all sentences should be full sentences. Word forms are also restrained by syntactic rules and must strictly change in accordance with the context. Chinese sentences do not always have a subject-verb structure, and minor sentences exist. Thus syntactic structure is flexible, and is not restrained by structure and word forms.

The sentence-level errors students make in their writing come from their errors in tense and voice on the one hand, and from the fact that they write English sentences according to Chinese conventions on the other hand. Teachers can only enable students to avoid such problems if they understand the differences between Chinese and English sentences.

3.3.2 Develop Students' Cross-Cultural Awareness in Teaching

If students lack of cross-cultural awareness, they may write sentences that seem correct but do not fit the context when writing. By analyzing students' midterm essays, the writer finds that they subconsciously put Chinese culture into the situation as they don't know Western culture. In other words, students can't write without knowing background information. Developing students' cross-cultural awareness not only allows them to write the correct sentences in the appropriate context, but also gives them something to say, which also prevents them from running out of things to say in their writing.

Intercultural awareness can help students to write correct sentences based on an understanding of language habits, that is, an understanding of western culture enables students to understand the use of language so that they can write not only correct but also complex sentences in their writing.

3.3.3 Cultivate Students' Ability to Analyze Question Stems

Students often write out-of-context sentences because they do not analyze the requirements of the writing topic, which usually give the context or background of the writing, but they are ignored by the students. Students' essays in the midterm examination showed that one of the reasons for their tense errors in sentences was that they did not get the background information from the topic, and the other was that they confused the time when things happened.

Cultivating students' ability to analyze question stems can help reduce their sentence errors in writing. Besides, in the process of analyzing question stem, students can have a clear idea of the purpose and context of the writing, and can be better prepared for the writing.

3.4 Measures to Improve Students' Writing Skills Based on Discourse Errors

3.4.1 Foster Students' Logic Thinking in Teaching

The writer finds that there will occasionally be some illogical sentences in students' midterm writing. There are two possible reasons in this phenomenon: one is that students did not write the sentences they wanted to write as a coherent discourse, but wrote wherever they thought for; the other is that they do not have the ability to link sentences together in logic on their own.

Fostering students' logic thinking in teaching will enable them to write more coherent and natural sentences and

make their writing read more smoothly. What is more, logic thinking can help students to arrange the structure of their essay in a way that makes them seemed well-structure, well-connected and well-focused.

3.4.2 Emphasize on Discourse Knowledge in Teaching

Discourse knowledge is about how discourse is organized, how discourse expresses meaning, and how people use discourse. And there are two cohesive devices — cohesion and coherence, which belong to discourse knowledge. Learning discourse knowledge is the basis of developing the ability of language application, and discourse knowledge plays an important role in the process of English comprehension and expression. Discourse knowledge can make students use reference, connection, omission, substitution and other devices in their writing so that they can write more compact essays.

From students' midterm essays, the writer see that the vast majority students do not use articulation, which result in writing sentences that are not connected to each other and not coherent. The solution to this problem is that emphasize on discourse knowledge in teaching for that it plays an important role in understanding and expressing meaning, in other words, discourse knowledge can help students express their meaning appropriately in their essays.

3.4.3 Point Out Students' Discourse Errors and Help Them Correct

Most of the time, students are not aware of their discourse errors and have no way to correct them on their own. And it is not easy for poor students to write complete and right sentences, so they are more needed teacher's help with their discourse errors. Some students do not use cohesive words in their writing, and others abuse them for that they do not understand the relationship between sentences. During the process of pointing out students' discourse errors, teachers need to make it clear to students where their errors are and explain the relationship between sentences specifically in the context of their own essays.

The key to help students correct their discourse errors lies in teaching them how to use cohesive words correctly. That is to say, students need to figure out how to connect sentences when they are transitions, continuations, progressions and so on. In addition, while pointing out errors, teachers should teach students how to organize their language and express their meaning based on their own original essays to make them better structured and more logical.

3.5 *Measures to Correct Students' Writing Errors*

3.5.1 Point out and Make Students Aware of Writing Errors

Generally speaking, students cannot realize the errors in the complete sentences they have written, and at this time they need teachers to help them to point out the errors. The purpose of pointing out errors is to enable students to correct their writing errors in a targeted way, and deepen their impression of this type of errors in the process of correcting errors, so as to make fewer or no more errors in the future. Meanwhile, from the students' point of view, some of their writing errors, especially those that seem not so important, such as vocabulary errors, are difficult for students to pay attention to, which may lead them to make such errors over and over again, thus hindering their writing progress. Therefore, while pointing out errors, teachers should remind students to pay attention to their own writing errors, no matter what kind of errors they are.

3.5.2 Collect Students' Typical Writing Errors and Explain Them in Class

The number of students in a junior high school class is generally about 50. In this case, it is almost impossible for teachers to guide each students' writing errors one by one. Then teachers can collect some common errors and typical errors made by students in their essays, explain these errors in class and guide students to correct them. In the process of correcting errors, teachers can also ask students why they write such language and analyze the reasons for students' errors, which can not only improve teacher's writing teaching, but also help students better avoid the same types of errors. In addition, when correcting errors, what teachers should do is to guide rather than directly tell students the answers. Correction itself is not the goal, but the purpose of correction is to improve students' writing skills by making them aware of errors, making fewer errors or even not making errors.

3.5.3 Carry out Mutual Evaluation Among Students

Since it is very time-consuming for the teacher to correct errors one by one, the teacher can have the students correct each other's errors when doing writing corrections. Students correcting each other's errors helps them to discover the errors of their peers and reflect on whether they have the same errors themselves. Correcting their peers' writing errors within their abilities is beneficial to draw their attention to errors, and, to some extent, improves students' writing skills in this way. Not only this, in the process of mutual evaluation, students can also

discuss, analyze and exchange the reasons why they made errors, and exchange writing ideas with their peers, which not only develops students' thinking quality but also enhances their writing skills. However, since it may be difficult for students to spot errors, teachers need to provide tips or help for students at appropriate times during mutual evaluation.

4. Conclusion

The writer classifies and analyzes the errors in the English compositions of the selected subjects into three categories and draws the following conclusions.

4.1 Conclusion of Statistics Analysis

The writer collected the total English score and composition score of two hundred and two students in grade two of Zizhong County Falun junior school, and got one hundred and ninety two valid data by excluding ten students who score zero in composition. The writer classifies the writing errors made by students into three categories and collect data for analysis, then the writer put forward specific suggestions on how to improve students' writing skills based on Corder's error analysis theory.

4.2 Conclusion of Text Analysis

Firstly, the writing errors of junior students mainly focus on three aspects: vocabulary errors, sentence errors and discourse errors. Vocabulary errors include spelling and collocation errors. Some spelling mistakes can be corrected by themselves, while other spelling errors and collocation errors are difficult for them to realize and correct. Grammatical and contextual errors in sentences are basically due to students' weak grasp of knowledge or cultural differences. Discourse errors are the kind of errors made by almost all students, whether they are top students, average students or poor students.

Secondly, there are many reasons for students' writing errors, for example, nervousness during the examination or students' lack of solid knowledge of the content. All these reasons can be more or less obstacles in students' writing and lead writing errors. Only by analyzing students' errors along with the errors why they made them can teachers truly improve students' writing skills based on error analysis theory. Moreover, the implementation of targeted error correction measures and teaching based on students' errors can help students' writing substantially.

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