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CHINESE STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS: COMMON ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

Writing is a key act in the process of foreign language acquisition. The ability to write properly and accurately is essential for effective communication and critical for human employment. Semantically accurate and grammatically proper writing is of paramount importance especially for students in higher educational institutions. Hence, the present research tends to examine the mistakes made by second language learners in writing essays and proposes recommendations how to improve the English writing skills of the Chinese students. The goal of the research is to reveal common and contrastive features of language errors and help Chinese students to improve their grammatical competences. In order to achieve the above-mentioned goals, the following tasks have been set forth: to discuss and specify the characteristic features of common errors made by Chinese college students; to study different types of errors in writing samples provided by Jiangxi Tellhow Animation Vocational College students; to analyze the possible transformative teaching tendencies and methods that will improve second language learners' writings abilities. The practical significance of the paper is deeply supported by the applicability of its content in education. The methods of inquiry, comparative analysis, component analysis, observation, data collection, etc., have been applied to the research to fulfil the tasks of this research.

Key words: *common grammatical errors, writing skills, second language learner, English language, topic-based writing, Chinese-English expressions, overgeneralization, mother tongue interference*

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Introduction

It is beyond question that the status of the English language has dramatically changed in the last half-century or so, as innovations in different aspects of human life, especially those of mass-communication technologies, have happened. The rise of the Internet and improvements in transportation among and within countries have drastically increased international communication and cultural exchanges. Naturally, the latter caused massive spread of the English language to speakers with different cultural, linguistic, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Nowadays, English has attained an even more dominant position as a world language due to its key role in international communication. It is not only considered as the mother tongue of about 600 million speakers in many countries, but also used widely in the world as an international language (Bharatti, 2015, p. 1).

A lot of people in the world are interested in learning English as a second language as it provides many opportunities in different aspects of human life. Learning English is in a high demand especially in Asian countries: China, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, and so forth. In Asian countries, for some years now, China has been cited as a major English-learning society (Bolton & Graddol, 2012, p. 7).

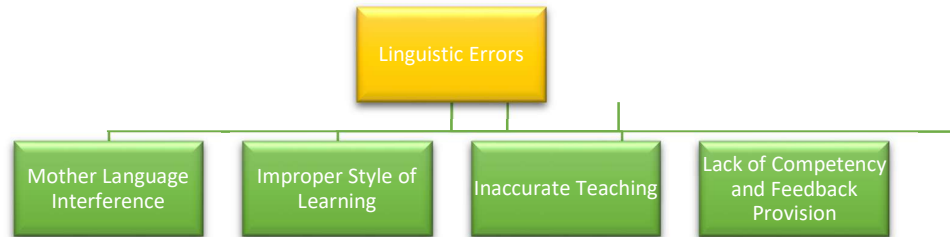
China has the biggest English education market in the world, however learning English as a second language is too challenging for the Chinese students. So, in this article we will attempt to reveal the main problems that Chinese students face in learning English.

Chinese speakers take at least a few years to speak English fluently and write it properly. Some students learn English from preschool age. In fact, Chinese speakers often master reading and writing faster than listening and speaking. The latter is common with a lot of non-native speakers. Whether the language is spoken or written, Chinese students tend to make errors. Errors by foreign language learners, by and large, are common. Undoubtedly, language mistakes are a natural part of language learning, but their errors vary according to nationalities. It can be related to mother language influence, mentality, etc.

Asian linguist Touchie distinguishes 8 major causes for second language learners: 1) simplification, 2) overgeneralization, 3) hypercorrection, 4) faulty teaching, 5) fossilization, 6) avoidance, 7) inadequate learning, 8) false concepts hypothesized (Touchie, 2018).

In order to find out the main sources of mistakes done by Chinese students and find solutions to improve those mistakes, a survey, conducted by three different teachers in Jiangxi Tellhow Animation college, the major causes of linguistic errors are: mother language interference, improper style of learning, inaccurate teaching, lack of competency and feedback provision.

Figure 1



Among all language skills, writing plays a pivotal role in the learners' foreign language acquisition and is commonly perceived as more difficult than the other three language skills, namely, listening, speaking, and reading (Liao, Liao, 2022, p. 1). If students do not write grammatically correct, it will become hard for the reader to follow the text because the flow of meaning is interrupted. In writing the student needs to be accurate in grammar to be able to form grammatically correct sentences (Effendi et al., 2017, p. 43). It is worth mentioning that accuracy in writing also plays a paramount role in English language assessment.

Substantial research has been conducted on writing aspect of language to figure out the most common errors. Different studies focus on different aspects of ESL writing.

Errors are a natural part of learning foreign languages. Errors made by L2 learners should be treated differently: some errors should be taken seriously, meanwhile others should be treated with a more liberal attitude. Linguist Lado put forward the hypothesis contrastive analysis to find out what makes certain things difficult for learners and what makes other things easy: those elements that are similar to the learners' native language will be simple for him, but elements that differ will be difficult (Lado, 1957).

Grammar is an integral part of English. That is to say if any student or individual wants to write in an authentic English, correct grammar is considered to be the first requirement. Some researchers and educators find that numerous Chinese students make grammatical mistakes when they are writing articles, theses or graduation papers.

Some English grammatical categories lack in Chinese and some Chinese grammatical categories do not exist in English. These categories make language learning challenging for L2 learners. Chinese students find it hard to accurately perceive the structure of unfamiliar grammatical categories. Hence, the aim of the

current paper is to study, observe and categorize Chinese students' errors when writing in English. This will enable language teachers to implement useful grammatical implications when teaching English grammar in China.

Methodology

The current paper mainly employed the quantitative method of investigation, the collection of empirical data in the form of students' essays and passages for an analysis of grammatical errors committed.

Writing samples, analyzed in this paper, are mainly collected from the passages and essays written by Jiangxi Tellhow Vocational Animation College students. College students started to learn English from preschool age, some of them have been to English speaking countries for different purposes. Overall their English learning experience stretches from 10 to 15 years.

Students were asked by three foreign teachers to compose different essays during the whole academic year by three foreign teachers. The topics included: Means of Transportation, Technologies: Good or Evil, My Future Profession. Essays and passages were required to be not less than 250 words. More than 250 writing samples were collected from the students in different classes.

After the identification and determination of errors, we have tried to investigate and explain the probable causes. An attempt was made to discuss errors where applicable in terms of the following factors: overgeneralization, incomplete application of grammar rules, ignorance of rule restrictions.

In addition, it should be mentioned that all the students had their compulsory education in China, and that English was taught as a compulsory subject in the school curriculum. The majority of students are mainly from middle-ranking class.

Findings and Discussion

From all the writing samples more than 1.500 errors was identified. The data findings clearly show that the top writing errors include: verb tense and form, spelling, use of special phrases and expressions (Chinese-English expressions), singular and plural forms of nouns, part of speech, articles. Other frequent types of errors include adverbial clauses, non-finite verbs and so on. Table 1 illustrates the total percentage, numbers and major error types.

Table 1: Errors

Errors in:	Writing 1	Writing 2	Writing 3	Errors percentage
Tense and Verb Form	112	154	134	13.3%
Spelling Errors	97	113	119	10.9%
Use of Special Phrases and Expressions (Chinglish Expressions)	41	45	37	4.1%
Nouns: Singular and Plural Forms	22	17	31	2.3%
Part of Speech Errors	15	10	19	1.4%
Non-finite Verbs	9	13	7	0.96%
Pronouns	5	9	14	0.93%
Clauses	7	4	11	0.73%
Be+adjective Constructions	3	2	5	0.33%
Definite and Indefinite Articles	17	31	24	2.4%

Modal (Semi-modal) Verbs	9	10	8	0.9%
Collocations	6	3	9	0.6%
Prepositions	11	9	20	1.3%
Active and Passive Voice Errors	17	8	11	1.2%
Adjectives: Comparative and Superlative Degrees	14	22	3	1.3%
Punctuation	10	14	19	1.4%
Logical Order of Sentence Structure	23	32	19	2.4%
Semantic Coherence and Clearance	32	28	44	3.4%
There is- Construction	19	22	17	1.9%

Grammar is a system of language that teaches a learner to speak, to read and to write correctly. It can help the students to learn language more quickly and more efficiently. English grammar discusses several aspects, such as tense, word order, conditional sentence, modal auxiliary, etc. (Edwin, 2018, p. 6).

When second language learners understand the grammar of the target language, they can deal with many aspects of language: speaking, writing and so forth.

Grammatically, a verb is defined as a word that indicates an action, or a mental or physical state (Russel, 1993). Errors in verb tense and form ranks the first place. Tense errors mean writing or selecting the wrong tense which in turn does not correspond with the context.

The tendency to omit the third person “s” among Chinese learners is an overgeneralization, as it mainly removes the necessity of agreement, which relieves the learners’ effort considerably. Instead of selecting the singular and plural form, Chinese students focus on the verb stem which actually holds the main meaning. The stem form has the most probability to be retrieved when a verb is needed which in turns leads to tense agreement errors:

...but my grandpa was not make the breakfast. (did)

We should go back, it had late. (is)

She like to play football. (likes)

At the same time Chinese learners display confusion regarding auxiliaries. In some writing samples students expressed no frame of reference:

When we were went to Sanya...(insertion of be)

Mr. George was told me...(insertion of be)

“Be” insertion errors as stated above illustrate that learners have hypothesized false concepts regarding certain rules for forming the simple past tense. Furthermore, their errors show that students have not mastered features of passive voice structures.

The data collected from the writing samples, on the whole, shows that many Chinese learners perceive and over-generalize the simple past tense, past progressive, past perfect and present perfect tenses as a single group which can be used in regard to past actions:

I forgot brought my sweater and it was cold. (to bring)

My parents had went out early in the morning. (gone)

He did not brought his homework. (bring)

She was work on her ppt. (working)

I must did it earlier. (do)

Another category of errors is the incomplete application of grammatical rules. Most Chinese students are not aware that the basic form of the verb is the infinitive. Apparently Chinese students find it stressful to remember the proper application of infinitive forms with or without “to” structures. As a result, they forget to apply the rules as required:

I go to wrong bus place and a bit later I realized that...(went)

That day I was pretty late. I immediately wear my clothes and left...(wore)

Below are some other examples:

I writed it. (wrote)

I have chose this profession because I like it. (chosen)

I should not ate too much, I'm haveing a diet. (eat)
 She think it's good for her health and body. (thinks)
 I did not went to another country. (go)
 I'm think travelling is very enjoyable. (thinking)
 I able not to go travelling because the virus. (am not able to)

Chinese students make errors frequently in such words as make, let, like, think, stand, to be afraid of, lack of. These examples mainly deal with infinitives and gerunds. Students are not clear when to use an infinitive, when to use a gerund.

I made her to cry for her homework. (made her cry)
 Let me to persuade her and take with us. (Let me persuade)
 The college just like my second home. (The college is just like)
 Till now I still thank for her help to me. (I am still grateful to her for her help)

Chinese students have difficulties in choosing the appropriate tense form. One of the key reasons of the confusion is that Chinese lacks this kind of tense forms and conjugation.

Verb form errors can be divided into different categories: a) distortion in subject-verb 3rd person singular agreement, b) confusion and uncertainty about the formation of past tense and past participle, c) omission of the auxiliary verb, d) creation of non-existent past form according to general rule.

Among the above mentioned categories S-V agreement of the 3rd person singular errors dominate in our data. The reason for this type of errors is undoubtedly mother language interference.

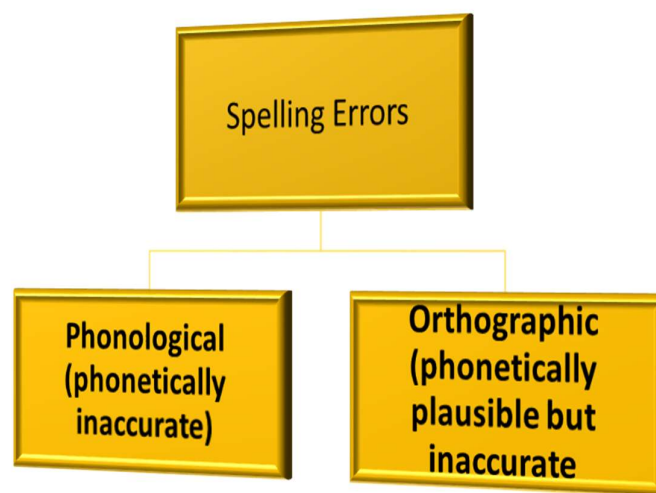
For Chinese students, verb conjugation is actually one of the most complicated parts of the English grammar to comprehend. In modern English, there are verb tenses that require specific usage and deep knowledge. Whereas, in Chinese grammar, the actual context is mainly used to differentiate and mark all the tenses. For example: 我今天要跑步(I am going to run today), 我明天要跑步(I will run tomorrow) (今天 today, 明天-tomorrow). Henceforth their attempts at switching up to different tenses lead to incorrect sentences. Here are some sentences-examples that illustrate mistakes of the above-mentioned type:

Yesterday I go to market to buy three ducks. (went)
 Mary like to eat meat, she (is) definitely not (a) vegetarian. (likes)
 Last week Candy get good work at big city near Beijing. (got)

Spelling errors rank the second among all the errors. Spelling errors are the most frequent type of errors that we have come across in all essays and passages. Misspelling is a common and serious error in writing. Spelling is defined as the action

or process of forming words correctly from individual letters (Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary). The latter emphasizes the fact that the basic foundation of English is not good. Some common misspellings are: contry-country, thogh-though, thought-thoght, than-then, nowadays-nowadays, talktive-talkative, expect-except, dall-doll, beside-besides, grammer-grammar, quite-quiet, choise-choice, beatiful-beautiful, latter-later, planning-planing, fater-fatter, ourself, yourself etc.

Based on the topic-based writings conducted in the college, all types of spelling errors can be divided into two categories: phonological and orthographic.



These errors highlight that Chinese students mainly confuse word-parts like stem, and affix due to their mispronunciation or accent: students omit and reverse the letters, they mischoose letters that can present the same or similar sound or two homophones. However, overgeneralizing these mistake-patterns as common mistakes made by Chinese students is not the case as well.

Chinese-English expressions are the third most frequently occurring errors in students' writings.

Su Dingfang defines: "Chinglish expressions are fixed collocation, superfluous words and thought pattern misplacing. Chinglish sentence patterns are topic-prominent sentences, multi-predicate sentences and para tactic sentences. According to Dingfang (1996) the phenomenon of Chinglish is mainly caused by some factors, such as individual characters, thinking logic, economic influence and cultural differences which can be served as examples here" (Song, 2020, p. 4).

By mentioning Chinese-English expressions we actually mean that students resort Chinese sentence structure while writing English, they try to maintain the same word order, use direct literal translation. This kind of errors mostly happen because of mother language interference:

- I ate some painkillers. (Direct translation-took)
- There have trees, so we played hide-and seek. (There are...)
- I have many foreign friends. Among them I like my Russian friends much better than others. (the most)
- How many money do you have now? (much)
- I write over my homework. (wrote)

According to Chinese word order these sentences are well-formed and understandable but they are not grammatical and idiomatic in English. From the above mentioned examples it is obvious that Chinese students have not mastered grammar rules properly, that is why they turn to their mother language.

Many writing samples lack plural-singular markers and subject-verb agreement. It is well known that the Chinese language does not have inflections, so it is normal and natural that Chinese students forget the marker *a/an* for singular form and sometimes irregular plural forms. Besides, in regard to this, it is worth mentioning that in English nouns are also categorized into different types such as: countable and uncountable, regular and irregular plural forms. These grammatical categories may confuse the learners.

- During Summer holidays we have many free time. (much free time)
- There is many persons in Tokyo. (there are many people)
- It is really hard task to complete. (a hard task)
- Last year I learnt lots of knowledges from my college. (knowledge)
- I don't have many money to go to another country. (much money)
- Childs are not allowed to sit the front seat of the car. (children)
- Many bus are going there. (buses)
- It will take 20 minute (minutes).

While forming the plural countable noun forms some Chinese students are inclined to leave out the “s” morpheme, whereas others tend to insert “s” morpheme in singular forms as well as uncountable noun forms. The reason why pupils struggle to write correctly is due to inter- and an intralingual mistakes. It causes omission, insertion, and misformation problems in their surface taxonomy (Krashen, 2013).

Errors in parts of speech

The data collected from the writing samples indicates that Chinese students also confuse different forms of the word.

I discrimination you. (discriminate against)
Keep silence when I am speaking. (silent)
We become more confidence when we got our certificates. (confident)
I successful in my career, get high salary. (succeed)
This is their own choose. (choice)

Chinese students of English have absolutely no frame of reference for English definite and indefinite articles. Articles do not exist in Chinese grammar system, so it directly and indirectly impacts Chinese students to commit grammatical errors while using definite and indefinite articles in different contexts. The survey clearly manifests that Chinese students are unaware of the basic grammar rules of articles.

In addition to the above mention, it is worth mentioning that a lot of Chinese students are inclined to insert definite or indefinite article with structures requiring zero article. For instance:

I want to buy a chocolate. (chocolate)
I asked my father to buy a rice for me. (rice)

Meanwhile, in the writings of some Chinese students we found cases when students omitted the implementation of definite article. One of the reasons for omission of a definite article could be the result of incomplete application of rules. It is also possible that Chinese students presume that it is unnecessary to use definite article.

Another common grammatical error that we have noticed in students' writings are modal verb errors.

Modal verb errors constitute a challenging part of English grammar for Chinese students. The writings conducted in Tellhow College lead us to the conclusion that modal verbs are still confusing for Chinese students.

The study of modality in the English language is regarded as the most persistent and fascinating area of philosophical and linguistic inquiry (Hoye, 1997).

The grammatical category of modality becomes more complicated when students have to deal with semi-modals (need, need not, don't need).

I could did it...(I could do it)
I don't can't go to the museum.(I can't go to the museum)
I may to move to Australia this year.(I may move to Australia this year)
I caned ride an e-bike (I could ride an e-bike)

Another reason for the above-mentioned error can also be the lack of this category in Chinese.

Adjectives are defined as words that describe or give information about nouns or pronouns. Adjectives are usually easy to recognize in a sentence, often describing or modifying an object's size, colour or amount (Jarvie, 2008).

The above-mentioned errors are mainly because of ignorance and lack of grammatical rule restrictions. The common errors of adjectives especially those of degrees of comparison are mainly as follows:

Usage of double comparative or superlative degrees (Today's English homework is more easier than yesterday's-Today's English homework is easier than yesterday's).

Usage of different adjectives with different levels to refer to the same person: Ms. Ashleigh is the best and funny teacher in our college. (Ms. Ashleigh is the best and the funniest teacher in our college).

Wrong sequence of adjectives in a sentence: Jacob is the more hard-working and smarter than Rick (Jacob is smarter and more hard-working than Rick).

Omission of definite article: Jay Chou is best singer in China - (Jay Chou is the best singer in China).

Sentences with one of the...constructive structure: Yuan is one of talented friend I have - (Yuan is one of the talented friends I have).

Improper implementation of gradual increase and decrease in comparative degree: You study harder, your future is brighter - (The harder you study, the brighter your future is).

Other mistakes are mainly related to irregular forms of degrees because it requires special attention and knowledge.

Other error types include different segments and parts of grammar: finite and non-finite verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, clauses, articles and so on.

Take care of parents is a very good thing.

I ate she's dish, which was not yummy.

I am biggest in our family.

I hope I will be able to past my test next year.

I did not decide if I should go or stay in China.

As what I am telling she is coming back.

This was my first time I saw a foreign country.

Limitations

The outcomes of the current article are basically determined by a number of determinants which in turn may cause a hinder in the process of result-generalization.

Objective limits: Current research was bound to studying the grammatical mistakes in English topic-based writings.

Place of Implementation: The following study was applied and conducted in Jiangxi Tellhow Vocational Animation College, in People's Republic of China.

Time Limitation: Current study was mainly applied in the fall and spring semesters of the academic year 2021-2022.

Writing Sample Size Limits: The research was applied on Tellhow college students taking writing during the application of their foreign language studies.

Implication

The following research aimed to study the grammatical errors of Chinese students' writings in English in Tellhow Animation college by identifying, categorizing and ameliorating the grammatical errors in English essay writings among these students. The outcomes clearly demonstrate that the senior students of the college, on the grammar questionnaire did better than the freshmen and juniors. From the current study and the many studies conducted on the grammatical and written errors among students it become obvious that developing writing skills in a foreign language is not an easy task for either college students or language teachers. In order to achieve the desired outcomes in the foreign language writing classrooms, both the teachers and the students should be aware of the possible difficulties they could face in the process of foreign language acquisition. In order to help students to develop their writing skills, language teachers should prepare themselves well enough to overcome the above-mentioned difficulties by means of effective and innovative methodology, as well as planned instructional strategical approach.

The following article mainly seeks to study Chinese EFL learner's most common errors in the writing spectrum. According to the survey carried out in Tellhow Animation College, the main reasons of the above-mentioned errors are mainly two: linguistic ignorance of the target language and misapplying avoidance. Chinese students try to find alternative ways and means to reflect their ideas in the target language. The latter causes inappropriate and negative L1 transfer. In some context learners find out that L1 cannot help them, moreover numerous cases L1 does not provide equivalents. For this reason, learners automatically switch to what is called communication strategy i.e. paraphrase. After the current survey, students were informed about the main findings in order to raise their awareness of their grammatical errors. It is believed that grammatical errors can be improved after students have a

clear awareness of their causes. It is necessary for language teachers to regard error correction instruction as a long-term project.

Recommendations

Finalizing the following study, a number of effective recommendations have been marked by different prominent researchers, in particularly: first college students should be advocated to pay more attention to their grammatical errors. The latter is possible to achieve through enriching their knowledge of English and differentiating between English and their mother language's grammatical rules. At the same time, students should be encouraged to spend more time on reading books because that will enable them to be accustomed with more grammar rules, which in turn will be reflected in reducing the amount of grammatical mistakes. The last recommendation stresses the fact that students should be more encouraged to thoroughly examine their written texts and try by themselves to figure out the grammatical errors and correct them.

Future research

The following study could be conducted on larger group of students and at different higher educational institutions within China in order to better examine the external and internal factors which have the possibility to influence learners' language performances. Besides, it is highly suggested to conduct this kind of research on determinants of different ages. That will provide an opportunity to thoroughly and accurately compare grammatical mistakes in writings committed by Chinese learners of English of different ages.

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Գ. ԳՐԻԳՈՐՅԱՆ, Ն. ՀՈՒԵՅՉՈՒՆ – Չինացի ուսանողների գրավոր խոսքի հմտություններ՝ անգլերենի հաճախակի հանդիպող քերականական սխալներ. – Սույն հոդվածը նվիրված է չինացի ուսանողների կողմից կատարվող քերականական սխալների ուսումնասիրությանը և այդ սխալների պատճառների բացահայտմանը: Չինացի ուսանողները մայրենի լեզվի ազդեցությամբ պայմանավորված հակված են կատարելու մի շարք քերականական սխալներ գրավոր խոսքում, որոնց շարքում թերևս մեծ թիվ են կազմում ժամանակաձևերի, մոդալ բայերի, եզակի և հոգնակի թվի, որոշյալ և անորոշ հոդերի ոչ ճշգրիտ կիրառումը: Չինացի ուսանողների կողմից քերականական սխալները կարող են շտկվել միմիայն այդ սխալների կանոնավոր մեկնաբանման շնորհիվ:

Բանալի բառեր. տարածված քերականական սխալներ, գրելու հմտություններ, անգլերենը որպես երկրորդ լեզու ուսումնասիրող, անգլերեն, թեմատիկ գրավոր աշխատանք, չինարեն-անգլերեն արտահայտություններ, գերընդհանրացում, մայրենի լեզվի ազդեցություն

Г. ГРИГОРЯН, Н. ХУЙЧУНЬ – О наиболее распространенных грамматических ошибках в письменной речи китайских студентов, изучающих английский язык. – Данная статья посвящена изучению грамматических ошибок, наиболее часто допускаемых китайскими студентами, и выявлению причин их возникновения. Среди грамматических ошибок, совершаемых под влиянием родного языка, наиболее часто встречаются, неточности в употреблении времен глагола, единственного и множественного числа существительных, а также определенного и неопределенного артиклей. Грамматические ошибки китайских студентов можно исправить только путем регулярного комментирования этих ошибок.

Ключевые слова: распространенные грамматические ошибки, навыки письма, изучающий второй язык, английский язык, тематическое письмо, китайско-английские выражения, чрезмерное обобщение, интерференция родного языка