

Error Analysis on Writing Chinese Essay: A Case Study of Chinese Major Students of UBRU

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Abstract

In this research study, the researcher attempted to indicate errors in Chinese writing skills made by 25 third year Chinese major students of UBRU during the 2017 academic year in order to improve the ability of Chinese writing. The instrument of this study was an essay--a set topic for free writing, 'My Future Career' (我未来的事业). These third year Chinese major students were assigned to write this essay of at least 350 Chinese characters within 30 minutes. All of the errors taken from data collection were analyzed, identified and classified into various categorizations. After data analysis, the results of the study indicated that most students had six errors on Chinese writing: 1) word choice, 2) word order, 3) punctuation, 4) wrong Chinese character, 5) conjunction, and 6) classifier.

This study has enhanced on the manner in which students can be internalized the rules of targeted language, which is Chinese. The results of this study provided information on common trouble-spots in Chinese language learning which can be used in the preparation of effective teaching materials.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Chinese Essay, Writing Skill, Problem, UBRU Chinese Major Students

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Introduction

It is realized that Chinese has become one of the important languages used around the world because of its economic growth. In term of relations between Thailand and China, there have been various collaborations for many decades. Besides the economics aspect, the academic exchange and collaboration between Thailand and China has also been strengthened consistently. Schools and universities in Thailand have started to open teaching Chinese increasingly. This phenomenon, “Chinese fever”, has been met among all education levels to meet the current demand.

According to Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University (UBRU), Thailand, it has opened Chinese courses for undergraduate students for more than a decade. Most Thai students majoring in Chinese are from remote areas and have no background in Chinese. In addition, the similarities and differences of grammar rules of Thai and Chinese might get these Thai students confused on learning Chinese. Therefore, their Chinese language skills need to be improved by basing on the requirements of the Chinese curriculum of UBRU.

Based on the basic requirements of the Chinese curriculum of Chinese department, UBRU, the third year Chinese major students should be able to complete writing tasks for general purposes, e.g., describing personal experiences, impressions, feelings, or some events, and to undertake practical writing. They should be able to write within 30 minutes a short essay or composition of no less than 350 Chinese characters on a general topic, or an outline. The essay/composition should be basically complete in content, clear in the main idea, appropriate in diction and coherent in discourse. Students are expected to be able to have a command of basic writing strategies. Moreover, before their graduation, these students should be able to express, by and large, personal views on general topics and write short Chinese papers on given topics. They should be able to describe charts and graphs, brief reports and papers in their areas of specialty, to express their opinions freely and to complete within 30 minutes a short essay/composition of no less than 600 words. The essay/composition should be complete in content, clear expression of ideas, rich content, neat structure, and good logic.

Therefore, one of the challenges of UBRU lecturers of Chinese is how to improve Chinese language skills for their students. In this research study, the researcher attempted to indicate errors in writing skill made by 25 third year Chinese major students of UBRU in order to improve their written Chinese ability in order to be able to compete with others in the real world after their graduation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find an error in Chinese writing for students in order to improve the ability of Chinese writing
2. To propose the results of this study to relevant stakeholders for solving and improving Chinese writing ability for students

Scope of the Study

The research focused on a group of 25 third year students majoring in Chinese language of UBRU during the 2017 academic year.

Literature Review

In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), error analysis focuses on studying the types and causes of language errors. Many linguists in the fields of SLA (e.g., Corder, Pit., 1967; Norrish, J., 1983; Hendrickson, J.M., 1987; Prabhu N., 1987; Ellis, Rod, 1997; Loewen, Shawn & Reinders, Hayo, 2011; Chang, Charles B., 2012; and Cook, Vivian, 2016) agree with the classification of language errors. These errors are mainly classified as follows: 1) modality (i.e., level of proficiency in speaking, writing, reading, and listening); 2) linguistic levels (i.e., pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and style); 3) form (e.g., omission, insertion, and substitution); 4) type (systematic errors/errors in competence vs. occasional errors/errors in performance); 5) cause (e.g., interference, interlanguage); and 6) norm vs. system.

J. Richard et al. (2002) pointed out that errors on using language are related to using word, speech act or grammatical items incorrectly. Moreover, Hendrickson (1987) stated that these errors are incomplete 'Signals' made by learners who have not yet mastered or reflected imperfect structured competence in the target language. The occurrence of errors on using the target language is relevant to both the learner who has not learned something yet, and selection of teaching methods made by language teachers (Anefnaf, 2017).

According to Corder (1967 & 1981), there are three aspects relating to errors on language learning: 1) the ability of language teachers to convey language knowledge clearly and correctly to their students; 2) the ways/procedures of acquiring target language made by students; and 3) students' behavior on learning the target language by themselves. Thus, the main cause of these errors on using the target language (second / foreign language) is concerned with L1 interference (X. Fang and J. Xue-mei, 2007; Anefnaf Z., 2017). In addition, Hashim, A. (1999) pointed out that the language effect is more complex and the cause of these errors can be from the target language itself and from the applied communicative strategies including the type and quality of the second/foreign instructions.

In term of errors types, J. Richard et al. (2002) classified into two main categories: 1) the Interlingual error that is caused by the interference of both the native language of the speaker, and the target language itself; and 2) the Intralingual error that takes place due to misuse of a particular rule of the target language. The Intralingual error is classified as follow: 1) Overgenerations; 2) Simplifications; 3) Induced errors; Errors of avoidance; and 4) Errors of overproduction. (see more in Corder, 1976; J. Richard et al.,2002).

In addition, James (1998) pointed out that the major category of errors consists of: 1) errors in spelling (violations of conventions for representing phonemes by means of graphemes); 2) errors in capitalization (omission & addition); and 3) errors in punctuation (omission, addition, and misselection). The parent category of grammar is largely based on the Louvain system, but some changes have been made to make the subsystem more systematic, efficient and inclusive. (see more in James (1998) and Gower (1995).

Because of time constraint and financial support, this research study focused solely on the occurrence of errors in Chinese essay writing made by UBRU Chinese major students.

Related Studies

The study of Marites (2016) concerning an investigation on the frequency and the types of sentence errors made by the students of College of Business, Entrepreneurship Accountancy in English writing sentences by using the audio-visual prompt titled “Rabbit and Turtle Story (the amazing version) for research tool revealed that the most common errors committed by students in the mechanical category is the wrong use of punctuation; wrong use of verb tense for grammatical category and the use of sentence fragments in the structural category.

According to Meruyert (2016), this researcher investigated English writing errors made by Kazakh and Russian First Language speakers. The samples of this study were 32 students studying at Grade 6. The study examined errors in a corpus of 32 compositions and 32 translations written by these participants. Errors were identified and classified into some categories. The findings indicated that there were seven most common errors committed by the participants as follows: 1) pluralization, 2) subject-verb agreement, 3) omission or misuse of articles, 4) wrong choice of words, 5) mission or misuse of prepositions, 6) spelling, and 7) misuse of like+Ving form.

Sittisak (2012) studied error analysis of English compositions written by English major students of Buriram Rajabhat University, Thailand was also related to this research study. In his study, 38 English major students were purposively

selected for data analysis. The method for data collection was a composition—a set topic for free writing, ‘A Memorable Incident of My Life’. These students were assigned to write one essay consisting of 140-200 words within 60 minutes. The scheme of error classification adapted from Dulay et al. (1982). The findings of this research indicated that these students made the errors in all three main categories: 1) errors in grammar that were most frequently found; 2) errors in lexicon; and 3) errors in syntax were followed respectively.

The results from the above research studies revealed errors in English writing that were made by students. The common errors e.g. subject-verb agreement, omission or misuse of articles, wrong choice of words, mission or misuse of prepositions, spelling, etc. were found in their writing. Following these related studies, the researcher would like to apply the procedure of error analysis (Corder, 1981; Dulay et al., 1982; Ellis, 1994; and Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) to improve the Chinese writing ability of the UBRU Chinese major students.

Research Methodology

Sample Group

This quality research mainly focused on the errors taken from the Chinese essay written by the target students, 25 third year students majoring in Chinese of UBRU who have studied Chinese in academic year 2017.

Research Tool and Data Collection

The given essay entitled: “My Future Career” () was used as the research tool. These third year Chinese major students were assigned to write this essay of at least 350 Chinese characters within 30 minutes. They were expected to complete this writing task by describing personal background and learning experiences, impressions, feelings, expectations, or some events related to the given topic. The essay should be basically complete in content, clear in the main idea, appropriate in diction and coherent in discourse. All their essays were sent back to the Chinese lecturer for data analysis after time was over.

It was expected that the procedure of error analysis proposed by Corder, 1981; Dulay et al., 1982; Ellis, 1994; and Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005 would help the researcher find out the errors in the students’ Chinese writing such as errors in subject-verb agreement, omission or misuse of articles, wrong choice of words and punctuations, mission or misuse of prepositions, spelling, etc. All findings would be presented in the results of the study section.

Data Analysis

This study applied the procedure of error analysis (Corder, 1981; Dulay et al., 1982; Ellis, 1994; and Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) as the main criteria for data analysis. The set of procedure was as follows: 1) Collection of a sample of learner language; 2) Identification of errors; 3) Description of errors; and 4) Explanation of errors.

Results of the study

Before presenting the results of data analysis, it is noted that translating English into Chinese is not completely and exactly the same in terms of the differences of structures and grammars of these two languages. The English translation in all tables below is emphasized only on the same meaning between both languages.

As data analysis, the results indicated six errors in Chinese writing were made by students: 1) word choice, 2) word order, 3) punctuation, 4) wrong Chinese character, 5) conjunction, and 6) classifier. The errors which were made by students in Chinese writing were classified as follows.

Word choice errors

The examples of word choice errors made by the UBRU Chinese major students were as below.

Table 1 Examples of word choice errors

No.	Error	Correction
1	如果毕业了，我想 <u>做</u> 导游的工作，不想 <u>做</u> 老师，因为老师太累了。	如果毕业了，我想 <u>当</u> 导游，不想 <u>当</u> 老师，因为 <u>当</u> 老师太累了。 If I graduate, I want to be a tour guide. I do not want to be a teacher because being teacher is very hard working career. (做——当)
2	我很喜欢小孩子，他们既可爱 <u>但是</u> 活泼，我想教他们说汉语。	我很喜欢小孩子，他们既可爱 <u>又</u> 活泼，我想教他们说汉语。 I really love my children. They are not only lovely, but also vivid. I want to teach them speak Chinese. (但是——又)

Table 1 (cont.)

No.	Error	Correction
3	去普吉岛工作可以遇到很多外国人，还有很多中国人，可以和他们谈话。	去普吉岛工作可以遇到很多外国人，还有很多中国人，可以和他们聊天。 Working in Phuket island, we can find foreign tourists easily. We also have many opportunities talking Chinese with Chinese tourists over there. (谈话——聊天)
4	我觉得汉语很难，但是我很爱。	我觉得汉语很难，但是我很喜欢。 I feel that Chinese is very difficult, but I really like to learn it. (爱——喜欢)
5	我找到好工作以后，想存钱买车。	我找到好工作以后，想赚钱买车。 After I get a job, I would like to collect money for buying a car. (存——赚)

The examples of word choice errors above revealed that the UBRU Chinese major students were confused about selecting appropriate / correct words to complete the sentences. These errors were related to selection on lexical errors--wrong denotation and collocation of words (see more in James, 1998; Gower, 1995; and J. Richard et al. (2002).

Errors in word order

The examples of errors in word order made by the UBRU Chinese major students were as below.

Table 2 Examples of errors in word order

No.	Error	Correction
1	我喜欢中国文化，想学习书法在中国，毕业之后教学生写书法。	我喜欢中国文化，想在中国学习书法，毕业之后教学生写书法。 I like Chinese cultures and I want to learn Chinese calligraphy in China. After my graduation, I want to be a teacher teaching Chinese calligraphy for my students.

Table 2 (cont.)

No.	Error	Correction
2	因为爸爸妈妈是老师，所以他们让我想也成为老师。	因为爸爸妈妈是老师，所以他们也想让我成为老师。 Because my parents are teachers, so they want me to be a teacher.
3	我还想在中国发展等毕业之后。	等毕业之后，我还想在中国发展。 After my graduation, I will further my study in China.
4	我的家在乌汶，那里很多汉语老师教中文给学生。	我的家在乌汶，那里有很多给学生教中文的汉语老师。 Ubon is my hometown. There are many Chinese teachers teaching Chinese for Thai students in there.
5	以后在未来，我还要继续学习汉语。	以后，我还要继续学习汉语。 I will restart learning Chinese.

The examples of errors in word order (wrong part of speech and word repetition were included) above revealed that the UBRU Chinese major students were confused on the differences of language structure of Thai (L1) and Chinese (L2). These errors might be from both the inter lingual errors, and the intralingual errors (Corder, 1976; Hashim, A., 1999; J. Richard et al., 2002; X. Fang and J. Xue-mei, 2007; Anefnaf Z., 2017). In addition, it was related to the errors on the structural elements of a sentence and their order (James, 1998 & Gower, 1995).

Errors in using punctuation

The examples of errors in using punctuation made by the UBRU Chinese major students were as below.

Table 3 Examples of errors in using punctuation

No.	Error	Correction
1	那个小学离家很近。而且学生很可爱、他们都喜欢说汉语。	那个小学离家很近，而且学生很可爱，他们都喜欢说汉语。 That primary school is not too far from their homes. Besides, the students at that school are very lovely, and they like to speak Chinese very much.

Table 3 (cont.)

No.	Error	Correction
2	当老师，医生，导游，翻译，我最喜欢当老师。	当老师、医生、导游、翻译，我最喜欢当老师。 I like to be a teacher the most comparing to being a doctor, a tour guide, or an interpreter.
3	我的朋友在清迈当导游，他说：很累，一点也不轻松。	我的朋友在清迈当导游，他说：“很累，一点也不轻松。” My friend is a tour guide working in Chiangmai. He said: “I am very tired of work, unhappy at all”.
4	当上导游之后：我要去买摩托车。	当上导游之后，我要去买摩托车。 After working as a tour guide, I will buy a motorcycle.
5	我学汉语的时候，经常看<翻译官>这个电视剧，所以我想当翻译。	我学汉语的时候，经常看《翻译官》这个电视剧，所以我想当翻译。 When I studied Chinese, I always watched TV Drama—‘翻译官’. This TV Drama made me want to be an interpreter.

The examples above revealed that the student used wrong punctuation in sentences. These errors might be from both the inter lingual errors, and the intralingual errors (Corder, 1976; Hashim, A., 1999; J. Richard et al., 2002; X. Fang and J. Xue-mei, 2007; Anefnaf Z., 2017). In addition, it was related to the errors in the structural elements of a sentence and their order (James, 1998 & Gower, 1995).

Errors in writing Chinese character

The examples of errors in writing Chinese character made by the UBRU Chinese major students were as below.

Table 4 Examples of errors in writing chinese character

No.	Error	Correction
1	汉语语法太难了，发音简单点。	汉语语法太难了，发音简单点。 Chinese grammar rules are very difficult, but Chinese pronunciation seems easier.

Table 4 (cont.)

No.	Error	Correction
2	我想在 <u>酒店</u> 工作。	我想在 <u>酒店</u> 工作。 I want to work in the field of hotel and hospitality.
3	奇 <u>摩托</u> 车上班，大概二十分钟。	<u>骑</u> 摩托车上上班，大概二十分钟。 It takes around 20 minutes by riding motorbike to my workplace.
4	在 <u>未来</u> ，找工作很不容易。	在 <u>未来</u> ，找工作很不容易。 It is not easy to look for a good job in the future.
5	我想教小 <u>孩</u> 子说中文。	我想教小 <u>孩</u> 子说中文。 I want to teach my kids speak Chinese.

The examples above revealed that the student wrote wrong Chinese characters (lexical errors) in sentences. Due to the similarity of many Chinese characters, misunderstanding and confusion on writing Chinese characters might occur.

Errors in using conjunction

The examples of errors in using conjunction made by the UBRU Chinese major students were as below.

Table 5 Examples of errors in using conjunction

No.	Error	Correction
1	在酒店工作，可以和客人说汉语， <u>然后</u> 可以提高我的口语。	在酒店工作，可以和客人说汉语， <u>而且</u> 可以提高我的口语。 Working at a hotel, I have many opportunities talking Chinese with Chinese tourists. It can make me improve my spoken Chinese.
2	姐姐的汉语比我好， <u>而且</u> 她的工作和汉语没有关系。	姐姐的汉语比我好， <u>但是</u> 她的工作和汉语没有关系。 My elder sister's Chinese is better than mine, but her working field does not relate to using Chinese for communication.
3	<u>不管</u> 工资高， <u>而且</u> 也不累。	<u>不仅</u> 工资高， <u>而且</u> 也不累。 It is not only getting high salary, but also not too tired.

Table 5 (cont.)

No.	Error	Correction
4	可是不能找到老师的工作，我就在饭馆给妈妈帮忙。	如果不能找到老师的工作，我就在饭馆给妈妈帮忙。 If I cannot be a teacher, I will help my mother work at this restaurant.
5	我想当翻译还是导游。	我想当翻译或者导游。 I want to be an interpreter or a tour guide.

The examples of errors in using conjunctions above were related to selection on lexical errors--wrong denotation and collocation of words (see more in James, 1998; Gower, 1995; and J. Richard et al. (2002).

Errors in using classifier

The examples of errors in using classifier made by the UBRU Chinese major students were as below.

Table 6 Examples of errors in using classifier

No.	Error	Correction
1	我想当一位优秀的老师。	我想当一名优秀的老师。 I want to be a famous teacher.
2	等有了工作，我可以买一个新的摩托车。	等有了工作，我可以买一辆新的摩托车。 After getting this job, I can buy a new motorcycle.
3	在中国买了一个汉语词典，以后还会用到的。	在中国买了一本汉语词典，以后还会用到的。 I bought a Chinese dictionary from China already, but I will use it later.
4	我还想在那个公司工作。	我还想在那家公司工作。 I still hope to work for that company.
5	对我来说，第一次工作的薪水不重要。	对我来说，第一份工作的薪水不重要。 In my opinion, the amount of the first income is not more important than working experiences I will get from.

The examples above revealed that the student selected wrong Chinese classifiers (lexical errors) in sentences. Due to the varieties of Chinese classifiers, misunderstanding and confusing on writing Chinese characters might occur.

Conclusion and Discussion

After data analysis, the results of the study indicated that most students had six errors in Chinese writing: 1) word choice, 2) word order, 3) punctuation, 4) wrong Chinese character, 5) conjunction, and 6) classifier. These findings of this study supported many theories/concepts of linguists (e.g., Corder, 1976 & 1981; Bachman, 1990; Ellis, 1994; Hendrickson, J.M., 1987; Prabhu N., 1987; Gower, 1995; Ellis, Rod, 1997; James, 1998; Connor & Mbaye, 2002; J. Richard et al., 2002; and Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

In general perception, writing Chinese seems difficult for non-native speakers of Chinese. For Thai students, the hardest part of learning Chinese is writing Chinese characters. The Chinese character evolved from the hieroglyphics, while the Thai language is a phonogram. Although there are currently 3,500 commonly used Chinese characters, there is not a single fixed sequence pattern and cut-off line for the development of Chinese characters. This particularity causes learners to face barriers in recognition, reading, and writing, leading to some students writing wrong characters. Based on the data collected, writing Chinese characters seemed the most difficult for UBRU Chinese major students to remember.

The results presented in the section of data analysis of this study revealed that the writing Chinese skill of UBRU Chinese major students needs to be improved systemically. Therefore, writing courses should be continued from the beginner to the upper grade consistently. Teachers teaching Chinese should adjust/adapt their own teaching philosophy, create a learning environment for Chinese language teaching, adjust the progress of teaching materials, and help students improve their learning methods. The important things that teachers who teach Chinese need to keep in mind is whenever they teach Chinese to foreign students, especially writing part, they need to integrate all skills including vocabulary and techniques of writing Chinese characters into their teaching method properly to enable students to remember Chinese characters more effectively (Rivers, 1970).

As the results of the study mentioned earlier, Chinese writing has been an emphasis and difficulty of the second/foreign language acquisition for language learners. Many students, especially the UBRU Chinese major students, have difficulties in Chinese writing. Most of the UBRU students' Chinese is poor because they have learned little Chinese (or no Chinese background) before they come to the

university. Due to lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and the influence of their native language transfer, these UBRU students encounter many problems in their writing. They sometimes are confused of the differences between the Chinese language structures and those of Thai as well. There are some problems in students' linguistic competence in addition to their lack of knowledge in writing techniques (Du, 2001). It is a fact that even if they have acquired a certain amount of vocabulary and have learned much about Chinese grammar, they are still poor at writing. They cannot transfer what they have learned in the target language, thus failing to express their ideas freely. In addition, they are not very good at organizing a discourse. Some writings are just piles of words or expressions, which do not make any sense to the reader. Another weakness of their writing is that it lacks unity and coherence. At times it is difficult to find a topic sentence in their essay. Even though a topic sentence does exist in their composition, the supporting details branch off from it in the course of writing. Writing is a reflection of thinking. The mother language transfer affects a student's thought. However, these students, as foreign students who study Chinese, need to pay more attention to writing Chinese correctly and grammatically.

This study attempted to shed light on the manner in which students internalized the rules of the target language, which is Chinese. The results of this study provided information on common trouble-spots in Chinese language learning, especially Chinese writing skill which can be used in the preparation of effective teaching materials.

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