

Research on the Phenomenon of Chinglish in Writing based on MOOC platform

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Published: 31 March 2021

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Abstract:

The sudden onset of COVID-19 has led schools and institutions to adopt a relatively safe mode of online education. As a result, various online education models, including Moodle, SPOC and MOOC, have also received increasing attention. MOOC is widely used in China. This paper analyzes the phenomenon of Chinglish in the essays submitted by a class of students in Northwestern Polytechnical University based on the MOOC platform. Finally, based on the analysis results, some enlightenments on English writing teaching are proposed.

Key words: MOOC, Chinglish, some enlightenments

1 Introduction

1.1 Chinglish

English and Chinese are two different languages. Although they have similarities, they are very different in the internal structure and external form of the language. Similarities reinforce each other, while differences can lead to problems. If learners are not carefully differentiated, it is easy to mislead them and transfer the internalized knowledge and rules of their mother tongue into the second language learning, resulting in language errors. Language transfer can be manifested in many aspects, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and so on. As far as English writing is concerned, these mistakes will be transferred to English writing and expressed as Chinglish.

Chinglish is defined by Pinkham as “it is known for the Han. The expression refers to the Chinese habit of thinking. It is non-standard English and does not comply with English culture and customs of English. Chinglish is a negative aspect of language variation”.

To sum up, Chinese expressions often appear in English writing for Chinese English learners. Therefore, in order to improve the written English level of Chinese students, it is necessary to solve the Chinglish errors in English.

1.2 Discussion board in MOOC platform

Online education plays an important role during the COVID-19 period. When it comes to online education, Chinese students are most familiar with the MOOC platform. In order to better implement teaching activities, the MOOC platform realizes the further interaction between students and teachers through the “discussion board”. Teachers can post writing assignments in the discussion board and ask students to submit them online. In this way, students and teachers can communicate closely with each other. At the same time, through the interaction of the network platform, the difficulties for students to study at home are alleviated. From this it is not difficult to see, the future development trend of online platform learning network is not to be underestimated.

2 An Empirical Study of Chinglish in Writing

2.1 Research question

(1) How do science and engineering students express Chinglish in composition writing on a given topic?

(2) How to better avoid Chinglish expressions?

2.2 Research subject

Students from Intercultural Communication Language Class 1 and there are 48 students in it. They are all from Northwestern Polytechnical University, mainly freshman and sophomore students of science and engineering.

The paper will analyze students’ writing assignment to the topic of “wedding customs in my hometown” in MOOC discussion board.

2.3 Research Design

This paper adopts text analysis method to study English writing, and the MOOC discussion board shows that the total number of submitted texts is 48. The essay should be submitted within one week with no limit on the number of words. Students should write an essay with the theme “wedding customs in my hometown”. Then trying to find out the Chinglish expression and analyze its reasons.

2.4 The error distribution in the writing samples

According to the previous artificial screening, all errors totaled 432. In terms of the overall error distribution, spelling errors are the highest in this class, and the error rate is also the most obvious compared with other aspects. However, spelling errors can be subjective because of a variety of factors, such as mistyping letters and a lack of checking when students write online. Through the observation of collocation errors, subject-predicate consistency, sentence components, article errors, and part of speech misuse, the author finds that there are more or less related to the misexpression of Chinglish. Therefore, the author believes that Chinglish phenomenon runs through every aspect of the wrong distribution, and studying Chinglish phenomenon can help students better understand the difference between Chinese and English, and correct the wrong expression, in order to improve their English writing level.

2.5 Error analysis of Chinglish in writing samples

Before doing the error analysis of the writing sample, it is necessary to be clear about the method adopted by the study. In this study, the classification method summarized by Dulay & Burt and Krashen (1982) was mainly used to analyze sample errors from four aspects, namely vocabulary, morphology, syntax and discourse. According to the above classification, the author summarizes the errors of 48 compositions in Chinglish as follows. The type and proportion of error was shown in Table 1.

2.5.1 Vocabulary

The lexical aspect mainly derives from the incorrect transfer of the meaning of the mother tongue, which is manifested as improper collocation, fixed collocation error, and part of speech misuse. This aspect is extremely confusing to Chinese English learners, and the following examples are students' frequent mistakes.

(1) Improper collocation: Through attending the wedding in my hometown, I also learn (Correct: acquire) the knowledge of wedding customs in my hometown. [In Chinese, when people want to express “Xue xi”, they can use “Zhi shi” followed by “Xue xi”. However, people can only use “acquire” to match with “knowledge” in English.]

(2) Fixed collocation: We can feel the influence of these traditional customs to (Correct: on) us. At the same time, when we enter another culture, we can also feel the cultural differences of different places. [This is due to the influence of prepositions in Chinese expressions that “duichan sheng ying xiang”. Chinese English learners will translate the word “dui” without thinking to indicate a direction, thus ignoring the fixed collocation problem in English.]

(3) Misuse: When there is a wedding, children will be more happy (Correct: change “more happy” to “happier”), because they may get a lot of red packets on that day. [This misexpression is influenced by the Chinese expression “geng + kai xin”. Therefore, it neglects the problem of form in English expression, which also reflects the feature that English emphasizes form.]

2.5.2 Morphology

Morphological errors are mainly manifested in the use of articles, number and tenses.

(1) Article: Traditional custom is a (Correct: an) important part of our life. At the same time, its position is becoming more and more important in today’s society. [Obviously, this is a error in the use of articles. This is also because there is no article in Chinese. Therefore, it can be seen that there are great differences between Chinese and English in articles.]

(2) Number: Through attending the wedding in my hometown, I also acquire the knowledges (Correct: knowledge) of wedding customs in my hometown. [There are many modifiers before the noun in Chinese, and through these modifiers to express the number of relations. In Chinese, the singular and plural changes of a noun are not reflected in the noun itself.]

(3) Tense: It is said that newlyweds cannot met (Correct: meet) each other until the day before the wedding. [This sentence reflects the tense error. Chinese English learners are affected by the tense of fixed sentence pattern “It is said that...” and mistakenly assume it is in the past tense. Meanwhile, in Chinese, the description of what happened in the past is not reflected in the verb formation, but some marked time words are used to express.]

2.5.3 Syntax

From the perspective of Chinglish, syntactic errors are mainly manifested in word order and other aspects. Here are some examples:

(1) I very like watching documentaries about traditional customs. From these documentaries, I can feel the human of each region and its rich social connotation. (Correct: change “I very like...” to “I like...very much”) [“I very like...” is a typical Chinglish expression, literally translated through “word to word”. And it is a very common expression with a high error rate.]

(2) By understanding traditional customs, people can better feel the flavor of local culture and people also can (Correct: change “also can” to “can also”) better integrate into local life. [The correct word order in Chinese is “ye neng”. However, due to the influence of Chinese word order, Chinese English learners often make mistakes in literal translation. Sometimes the literal translation of “ye neng” is “also can”. This is obviously a mistake that Chinese students often make when learning English.]

(3) As we all know, the marriage play an important role in human life, and it also will (Correct: change “also will” to “will also”) change people’s life. So marriage is a big deal. The customs of marriage are even more complicated. [The types of errors made in this sentence are consistent with the second example above, and are all due to the influence of the Chinese word order. Through examples, we can also feel the differences in word order between Chinese and English.]

2.5.4 Discourse

The discourse aspect mainly involves the cohesion and coherence of sentences. The following is an excerpt from a student:

The wedding itself is simple. The bride and groom were taken to the family altar to pay tribute to the heaven and earth, and the family ancestors. The bride and groom's parents gave them tea. There were two lotus seeds or two red dates in the tea. The bride and groom bow to each other and the wedding ceremony is complete. In some areas, two people drink from the same glass, eat sugar molded in the form of roosters, and share a wedding dinner.

From the excerpts, we can see that the structure of the article is very loose. On the one hand, from the surface level of the text, there are no cohesive words, so that the reader can't find the logical relationship after reading it. On the other hand, from the perspective of internal composition, the article is not compact. Because of not use any cohesive methods, it lacks coherence and has a loose frame. In addition, the whole article takes "bride and groom" as the subject, which shows that the article is very boring and lack of aesthetics. On the whole, the article also reflects a certain degree of Chinese thinking, which is also a difficult aspect for Chinese English learners to avoid

3. Conclusion

From the statistics of Chinglish error distribution in Table 1, Chinglish phenomenon accounts for a large proportion of the errors of science and engineering college students. Almost every student has more or less wrong expressions in his composition. At the same time, the author found that the length of the text also reflects a certain degree of English ability when analyzing the text. The shorter the text, the worse the ability of cohesion and coherence, and the more inclined to write in a randomly way. However, this research also has some shortcomings, and it cannot fully summarize the situation of science and engineering students in expressing Chinglish. But we can be clear that the Chinglish phenomenon does affect the second language acquisition, and it is extremely important to effectively avoid the expression of Chinglish. At the same time, how to better avoid Chinglish is also where teachers and students need to work together.

4. Implications to English writing teaching and learning

4.1 For teachers

(1) Help learners learn English language knowledge

From the error distribution in Table 1, Chinglish at the vocabulary level accounts for the highest proportion of English writing. Vocabulary teaching should focus on the use of vocabulary, such as general vocabulary usage, syntax and context restrictions, and collocation usage. More importantly, vocabulary teaching should focus on the development of learners' English skills.

(2) Use comparative analysis in English teaching

Apply comparative analysis to English teaching to improve learners' understanding of the differences between English and Chinese. Because Chinese and English belong to two different language families, there will naturally be great differences. English learners whose mother tongue is Chinese have been influenced by the Chinese language environment for a long time, and they will

experience negative transfer unconsciously in the process of English learning. Comparative analysis allows Chinese English learners to clarify the differences between Chinese and English. Meanwhile, through effective avoidance, it will achieve the effect of reducing the Chinglish expression.

(3) Provide more opportunities for English writing practice

English writing can fully demonstrate the learner's English knowledge, accurate observation, systematic logic and deep thinking. The cultivation of writing ability is difficult for learners because it involves language knowledge, background knowledge and writing skills. In the process of improving English proficiency, the cultivation of writing ability is very necessary. However, insufficient teaching time for English writing may be the reason why Chinglish appears in the English writing of non-English majors. Therefore, teachers should provide learners with more English writing practice opportunities to help eliminate the errors.

4.2 For students

(1) Develop good habits to learn English

Good English learning habits will promote effective English input. Therefore, it is very important for non-English majors to develop a series of habits. This is reflected in the fact that when learners learning a new word, they should consult the English-English dictionary. In this process, learners need to pay attention to the broader meaning of words, rather than just the single Chinese meaning given in certain places. At the same time, they should pay attention to how to use it correctly

(2) Pay attention to the differences between English and Chinese at all levels

In the process of English learning, one should consciously pay attention to the differences between English and Chinese in vocabulary, syntax, and discourse. Learners can experience the differences between English and Chinese through continuous translation practice. Only with the awareness of recognizing the differences between English and Chinese can they be expressed correctly, otherwise they will make frequent mistakes. Only with the awareness of recognizing the differences between English and Chinese can they be expressed correctly. Otherwise, errors will be made frequently.

(3) Pay attention to common Chinglish expressions

In the process of English learning, English learners will inevitably output Chinglish. However, mistakes can be avoided, which requires learners to train themselves repeatedly. Keep training in error-prone areas. The next time learners come across the same expression, they can apply it exactly.

Table 1 Error analysis (included when the same error occurs)

proportion type	vocabulary	morphology	syntax	discourse	total
error number	188	160	50	32	432
percentage	43.6%	37.0%	11.6%	7.4%	≈100%

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