

Error Analysis in English Writing by Chinese Graduate Students with Non-English Majors Pursuing Master's Degrees: Insights from a Descriptive Linguistics

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Abstract

Based on quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study explores the types of errors in English writing for non-English major graduate students in the Chinese context and the intervention in English writing teaching from the perspective of descriptive linguistics. To be specific, 59 non-English major graduate students from a university in eastern China were randomly selected for two writing samples, which were reviewed by 4 professional teachers. The consistency and difference of grading results were tested by different teachers to the same sample. Based on the mean value, the types of high frequency errors were obtained, and the teaching intervention was proposed from the perspective of descriptive linguistics. The results show that: (1) There is little difference in the grading results of the same sample, and there is a high consistency; (2) In the results of consistency testing and differential analysis of the two samples, Lexical Errors and Discourse Errors may occur more frequently, but after considering the Arithmetic Means and the above analysis results, Discourse Errors rate is the highest in the grading results; (3) The genre-based process English writing teaching intervention has benefited the non-English major graduate students greatly in English writing in the Chinese context.

Keywords: English writing, error analysis, descriptive linguistics, insight, teaching intervention

Introduction

The pursuit of writing proficiency in English in the past demanded extensive dedication and perseverance. Despite earnest efforts, errors were common among English language learners. Errors, considered intrinsic to language acquisition by educational experts and researchers, were deemed crucial for learning. According to Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" (1982), making and rectifying mistakes aided learners in understanding language rules, a widely accepted belief in second language acquisition literature. Early studies, notably by Truscott (1996) and Ferris (2001), delved into the efficacy of error feedback, emphasizing its role in aiding comprehension and rectification of mistakes. However, an alternative perspective emerged suggesting that errors might not always hinder communication's core message. Kroll's (1990) "communication strategies" and Canale and Swain's (1980) "communicative competence" supported this view, hinting at the acceptability of certain errors in diverse cultural language contexts. Cultural factors indeed influenced the definition of errors, as highlighted by Gu, Q., & Schweisfurth, M. (2006) and Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (2005). Connors and Lunsford's (1988) historical study on rater responses toward errors revealed a shift in educators' concerns from the early 20th century to contemporary times. This shift correlated with the emergence and adoption of process writing pedagogies, wherein errors were viewed as a part of

the learning process rather than the ultimate goal.

Moving into the present, recent studies have observed a growing interest in utilizing multi-media technology for English writing instruction. Alobaid (2021) highlighted the potential of YouTube as a powerful tool for enhancing teaching interventions. Similarly, Kim et al. (2023) implemented the digital multimodal composing (DMC) approach, demonstrating significant improvements in writing skills among students. Moreover, interventions like Dynamic Assessment (DA) in English writing instruction, as explored by Yu et al. (2023), showcased promising results in enhancing academic writing development for second language learners. Tardy et al.'s (2022) year-long qualitative study on genre-based pedagogy (GBP) outlined both challenges and successes faced by writing instructors, emphasizing the need for continuous teacher training and tailored support. Within specialized fields like English for Specific Purposes (ESP), researchers like Cheng (2021) have meticulously examined how lexico-grammatical features are addressed in theoretical frameworks and classroom methodologies, appealing to both writing instructors and ESP practitioners.

Understanding errors in English writing has gained particular importance due to the language's global prominence. Apse and Farneste (2018) conducted error analysis on tertiary-level essays, demonstrating its significance in identifying learners' writing pitfalls. However, despite these advancements, there's a notable gap in research concerning error types among non-English major graduate students. Bao's (2015) study on discourse errors among English majors underscores the necessity for a comprehensive exploration of error types specific to this group.

Background of the Study

In our increasingly interconnected world, English writing proficiency holds substantial significance, acknowledged by educational institutions, employers, and professionals alike. Despite years of learning, Chinese non-English major graduate students encounter formidable challenges in mastering English writing, as observed by James (1998). The prevalent errors in English writing among Chinese students, similar to learners globally, have conventionally been addressed by focusing primarily on correcting grammar and syntax. However, a critical research gap persists in understanding broader aspects of writing, particularly in exploring discourse knowledge. Remarkably, there has been limited attention given to the struggles faced by non-English major graduate students in China, despite their extensive exposure to English spanning over a decade and persistent difficulties, especially in English writing.

Recognizing the pivotal role of writing proficiency for non-English major graduate students, both in academia and the professional sphere, necessitates a comprehensive understanding of prevalent errors encompassing macro-structure (Fairouz, 2023) and micro-structure issues (Alnasser & Alyousef, 2015). There is a pressing need to systematically dissect these errors to formulate effective corrective measures and tailored teaching strategies. This study aims to bridge this research gap by analyzing errors in English writing among non-English major graduate students within the Chinese context. Embracing a descriptive linguistics perspective, the study seeks to identify high-frequency errors and propose targeted teaching interventions to enhance their writing proficiency.

Significance of the Study

From the perspective of descriptive linguistics, this study makes an in-depth analysis of the frequent errors by non-English major graduate students in English writing in the Chinese context. In that case, there is a comprehensive understanding of error types, the errors with higher frequency and teaching intervention, which provides more powerful learning support for students, and promotes the improvement of teachers' teaching practice. The results of this study not only provide theoretical supports for English teaching reform, but also promote the discussion and communica-

tion of English writing teaching in academic circles.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is threefold. First, this study conducts a quantitative study on the results of four raters using the error types proposed by James to evaluate the same writing sample of the non-English major graduate students in the Chinese context. Then, it further analyzes and describes the characteristics of the error type with higher frequency in the English writing of the non-English major graduate students in the Chinese context. Finally, based on the principles of descriptive linguistics, this study proposes classroom teaching intervention for the errors with higher frequency in the English writing of the non-English major graduate students in the Chinese context. Consequently, embracing a descriptive linguistics perspective, the study seeks to identify high-frequency errors and propose targeted teaching interventions to enhance their writing proficiency.

Questions of the Study

To advance the research on the Analysis of Errors in English Writing for non-English major graduate students in the Chinese Context: Insights and Interventions from Descriptive Linguistics, the following research questions will be addressed:

1) Do four raters exhibit consistency in assessing the English writing of Chinese non-English major graduate students using James' error types? How does descriptive linguistics interpret these assessment results?

2) Based on the analysis and description of the assessment results, which type of errors in English writing by Chinese non-English major graduate students has a higher rate? Specifically, what are these errors?

3) Leveraging the principles of descriptive linguistics, what specific teaching intervention can be devised to tackle the common errors identified in the English writing of Chinese non-English major graduate students?

Methodology

Design of the Study

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods, aiming to delve into the errors present in English writing among Chinese non-English major graduate students and to propose corresponding interventions based on descriptive linguistics.

A total of 59 non-English major graduate students were randomly selected from a university in Eastern China to participate in this study. Each student submitted two writing samples, which were assessed by four professional teachers to ensure the reliability and consistency of the grading results.

Data Collection Method

The English writing samples were derived from two writing prompts: one involving composing a suggestion letter to the university president, and the other describing recent changes in participants' hometowns to illustrate globalization's impact on individuals.

Participants completed time-constrained writing tasks in a controlled environment, producing approximately 250 words within a 45-minute timeframe for each piece. Data collection occurred at regular intervals, with two random samples selected for analysis.

Data Analysis Method

Following the collection of 118 samples, a team consisting of one professor (Rater A), one associate professor (Rater B), and two doctoral students (Rater C and Rater D) conducted a review.

They retrieved and revised error types based on "Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis" (James, 2013), establishing assessment criteria and calculating errors within the samples.

According to the types of errorsⁱ, the levels of errors and detailed features of the writing section were picked out as assessment rubrics of grading samples. The revised assessment indexes can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The Revised Assessment Indexes

Error Level	Error Type	Details	
1	Substance Errors	Punctuation errors	
		Typographic errors	
		Dyslexic errors	
		Confusions	
2	Lexical Errors	Formal errors of lexis	Formal misselection; Misformations; Distortions
		Semantic errors in lexis	Confusion of sense relations; Collocational errors
		Grammar errors	Morphology errors; Syntax errors (phrase structure errors; Clause errors; Sentence errors; Intersentence errors(cohesion)
3	Discourse Errors	Coherence	Topical coherence; Relational coherence; Sequential coherence
		Pragmatic errors	Taboos; Size of the imposition; Values; Power and social distance; Receptive errors;

Error Analysis

Through in-depth analysis and description of the assessment results, prevalent error types within the English writing of non-English major graduate students were identified and comprehensively described.

Teaching Intervention Measures

Interventions Based on Descriptive Linguistics: In response to the identified error types, specific teaching intervention measures were formulated from the perspective of descriptive linguistics. The aim is to effectively address these errors in English writing among non-English major graduate students.

Results

Using statistical methods (such as correlation coefficients, kappa consistency tests, etc.) to assess the consistency among different raters' grading of various error types in the same essay, comparing their results to determine if there is a high level of agreement among them.

Consistency Test

Consistency Test for Sample 1

Table 2. Kappa Coefficient Results

Name	Kappa value	Standard error (Assuming the null hypothesis)	Z-value	P-value	Standard error	95% CI
Substance Errors- Rater A & Substance Errors- Rater B	1.000	0.119	8.425	0.000***	null	null ~ null
Substance Errors-Rater A & Substance Errors-Rater C	1.000	0.119	8.425	0.000***	null	null ~ null
Substance Errors-Rater A & Substance Errors-Rater D	0.935	0.124	7.559	0.000***	0.061	0.816 ~ 1.054
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$						

At the level of Substance Errors in Table 2, through the analysis of the Kappa coefficient, the Kappa value between Rater A and Rater B is 1.000, and the Kappa value between Rater A and Rater C is also 1.000, whereas the Kappa value between Rater A and Rater D is 0.935. In assessing Substance Errors, Rater A demonstrates perfect consistency with Rater B and Rater C. Even between Rater A and Rater D, the level of consistency is notably high (Kappa value of 0.935). This high level of consistency is statistically significant, with a P-value of 0.000, significantly lower than the typical significance level of 0.05. In terms of Substance Errors, the consistency of the four raters' grading is significant, showing a high level of agreement in their evaluations, whether in cases of complete agreement or slight variations.

Table 3. Kappa Coefficient Results

Name	Kappa value	Standard error (Assuming the null hypothesis)	Z-value	P-value	Standard error	95% CI
Lexical Errors- Rater A & Lexical Errors-Rater B	0.842	0.116	7.273	0.000* **	0.072	0.700 ~ 0.983
Lexical Errors- Rater A & Lexical Errors-Rater C	0.718	0.122	5.875	0.000* **	0.096	0.530 ~ 0.905
Lexical Errors-Rater A & Lexical Errors-Rater D	0.662	0.118	5.624	0.000* **	0.099	0.468 ~ 0.855
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$						

At the level of Lexical Errors in Table 3, the level of consistency between Rater A and Rater B is 0.842, between Rater A and Rater C is 0.718, and between Rater A and Rater D is 0.662. When evaluating lexical errors, the highest level of consistency is observed between Rater A and Rater B,

followed by Rater A and Rater C, and lastly between Rater A and Rater D. All three comparisons of Kappa values exhibit statistical significance, with P-values of 0.000, significantly lower than the usual significance level of 0.05. Overall, the grading consistency among these four teachers in terms of Lexical Errors is statistically significant.

Table 4. Kappa Coefficient Results

Name	Kappa value	Standard error (Assuming the null hypothesis)	Z-value	P-value	Standard error	95% CI
Discourse Errors-Rater A & Discourse Errors-Rater B	0.770	0.114	6.744	0.000***	0.077	0.620 ~ 0.921
Discourse Errors-Rater A & Discourse Errors-Rater C	0.527	0.115	4.590	0.000***	0.101	0.329 ~ 0.725
Discourse Errors-Rater A & Discourse Errors-Rater D	0.797	0.117	6.844	0.000***	0.071	0.657 ~ 0.938
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$						

At the Discourse Errors level in Table 4, the results of the Kappa coefficient indicate a consistency level of 0.770 between Rater A and Rater B, 0.527 between Rater A and Rater C, and 0.797 between Rater A and Rater D. When assessing discourse errors, the highest level of consistency is observed between Rater A and Rater D, followed by Rater A and Rater B, and finally between Rater A and Rater C. All three comparisons of Kappa values demonstrate statistical significance.

Consistency Test for Sample 2

Table 5. Kappa Coefficient Results

Name	Kappa value	Standard error (Assuming the null hypothesis)	Z-value	P-value	Standard error	95% CI
Substance Errors-Rater A & Substance Errors-Rater B	0.942	0.130	7.249	0.000***	0.057	0.830 ~ 1.054
Substance Errors-Rater A & Substance Errors-Rater C	1.000	0.130	7.681	0.000***	0.000	1.000 ~ 1.000
Substance Errors-Rater A & Substance Errors-Rater D	1.000	0.130	7.681	0.000***	0.000	1.000 ~ 1.000
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$						

The results of the Kappa coefficient in Table 5 indicate a consistency level of 0.942 between Rater A and Rater B, and perfect consistency of 1.000 between both Rater A and Rater C, as well as

Rater A and Rater D. This suggests a high level of agreement between Rater A and the other three raters when assessing Substance Errors. All the compared Kappa values demonstrate statistical significance, showing remarkably high grading consistency among the four raters in terms of Substance Errors, thereby reaching a high level of consensus in evaluating tasks at this level.

Table 6. Kappa Coefficient Results

Name	Kappa value	Standard error (Assuming the null hypothesis)	Z-value	P-value	Standard error	95% CI
Lexical Errors-Rater A & Lexical Errors-Rater B	0.889	0.111	8.017	0.000***	0.062	0.767 ~ 1.012
Lexical Errors-Rater A & Lexical Errors-Rater C	0.812	0.116	6.984	0.000***	0.076	0.662 ~ 0.962
Lexical Errors-Rater A & Lexical Errors-Rater D	0.738	0.119	6.192	0.000***	0.085	0.571 ~ 0.905

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

At the Lexical Errors level in Table 6, the results of the Kappa coefficient reveal a consistency level of 0.889 between Rater A and Rater B, 0.812 between Rater A and Rater C, and 0.738 between Rater A and Rater D. When assessing lexical errors, there is a relatively high level of consistency among these four raters. All three sets of compared Kappa values demonstrate statistical significance, indicating significant grading consistency among the four raters in terms of Lexical Errors. They achieved a relatively high level of agreement in evaluating tasks at this level.

Table 7. Kappa Coefficient Results

Name	Kappa value	Standard error (Assuming the null hypothesis)	Z-value	P-value	Standard error	95% CI
Discourse Errors-Rater A & Discourse Errors-Rater B	0.829	0.112	7.390	0.000***	0.070	0.691 ~ 0.967
Discourse Errors-Rater A & Discourse Errors-Rater C	0.680	0.116	5.859	0.000***	0.088	0.507 ~ 0.853
Discourse Errors-Rater A & Discourse Errors-Rater D	0.749	0.112	6.711	0.000***	0.081	0.590 ~ 0.907

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

At the Discourse Errors level in Table 7, the results of the Kappa coefficient reveal a consistency level of 0.829 between Rater A and Rater B, 0.680 between Rater A and Rater C, and 0.749

between Rater A and Rater D. This indicates a relatively high level of consistency among these four raters when evaluating discourse errors. All three sets of compared Kappa values demonstrate statistical significance, with P-values of 0.000, significantly lower than the usual significance level of 0.05. They achieved a relatively high level of consistency in evaluating tasks at this level.

Differential Analysis

Utilizing statistical methods such as analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine the differences in grading among different raters regarding error types can help determine if there are significant variations among raters.

Table 8. ANOVA Test for Sample 1

ANOVA						
	Rater (Mean±Std. Deviation)				F	p
	Rater A (n=59)	Rater B (n=59)	Rater C (n=59)	Rater D (n=59)		
Substance Errors	0.17±0.42	0.17±0.42	0.17±0.42	0.15±0.36	0.026	0.994
Lexical Errors	0.34±0.60	0.32±0.54	0.29±0.46	0.25±0.48	0.305	0.822
Discourse Errors	0.46±0.62	0.44±0.53	0.39±0.53	0.39±0.49	0.241	0.867
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001						

In assessing Sample 2, the average scores among the four raters for Substance Errors in Table 8 were very close, respectively being 0.17±0.42, 0.17±0.42, 0.17±0.42, and 0.15±0.36, showing no significant differences (F=0.026, p=0.994). Similarly, for evaluations related to Lexical Errors and Discourse Errors, the average scores among the four raters were also close and statistically not significantly different. This indicates that across these three aspects, the four raters exhibited similar grading trends and consistent scoring levels.

Table 9. ANOVA Test for Sample 2

ANOVA						
	Rater (Mean±Std. Deviation)				F	P
	Rater A (n=59)	Rater B (n=59)	Rater C (n=59)	Rater D (n=59)		
Substance Errors	0.17±0.38	0.19±0.39	0.17±0.38	0.17±0.38	0.029	0.993
Lexical Errors	0.39±0.59	0.34±0.58	0.31±0.50	0.31±0.46	0.331	0.803
Discourse Errors	0.42±0.62	0.41±0.56	0.34±0.48	0.34±0.54	0.383	0.766
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001						

In terms of Substance Errors in Table 9, the mean scores among the four raters were

0.17±0.38, 0.19±0.39, 0.17±0.38, and 0.17±0.38, with an F-value of 0.029 and P-value of 0.993, indicating no significant differences in the grading among the four raters in this aspect. There were no observed significant differences in the evaluations related to Lexical Errors and Discourse Errors either, suggesting a similar trend in grading across these three aspects among the four raters, demonstrating relatively consistent grading levels.

Table 10. Analysis of Overall Differences in Grading Between Two Samples

	Sample (Mean±Std. Deviation)		t	p
	Sample 1 (n=236)	Sample 2 (n=236)		
Substance Errors	0.17±0.41	0.17±0.38	-0.234	0.815
Lexical Errors	0.30±0.52	0.33±0.53	-0.700	0.485
Discourse Errors	0.42±0.54	0.38±0.55	0.841	0.401
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001				

Analysis of the overall differences in grading between the two samples in Table 10 indicates that there are no significant differences in the scores for Substance Errors, Lexical Errors, and Discourse Errors ($p > 0.05$). Students' performances in these three aspects remained consistent across the two samples, and the differences in grading were not statistically significant.

Arithmetic Mean

Based on the above-revised assessment indexes, members of the research team submitted the data obtained after their own reviews. The data obtained are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Data Obtained after the Reviews

Sample	Error Type	Rater A	Rater B	Rater C	Rater D	Arithmetic Mean
1	Substance Errors	10	10	10	9	9.75
	Lexical Errors	20	19	17	15	17.75
	Discourse Errors	27	26	23	23	24.75
2	Substance Errors	10	11	10	10	10.25
	Lexical Errors	23	20	18	18	19.75
	Discourse Errors	25	24	20	20	22.25

The arithmetic mean obtained by the research team in Table 11 provides the basis for discussion for data integration and analysis below. The reason why four members of the research team were selected as raters was that the validity and reliability of the assessment results could be strengthened, which made the assessment results more scientific and objective.

Discussion

Rater Consistency in Assessing English Writing of Chinese Non-English Major Graduate Students Using James' Error Types

The study employed statistical methods to assess the consistency among four raters in grading various error types present in English writing by Chinese non-English major graduate students. Kappa coefficients were computed to evaluate the agreement among the raters for Substance Errors, Lexical Errors, and Discourse Errors. The results provide insights into the level of consistency and the interpretations of these assessment findings using descriptive linguistics.

Firstly, through the results of Consistency Test for Sample 1, in terms of Substance Errors, Rater A demonstrated perfect consistency with Rater B and Rater C for Substance Errors (Kappa value = 1.000). Even between Rater A and Rater D, the level of consistency was notably high (Kappa value of 0.935). The statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) indicates a high level of agreement among the four raters in evaluating Substance Errors. As for Lexical Errors, Rater A exhibited relatively higher consistency with Rater B (Kappa value = 0.842), followed by Rater A and Rater C (Kappa value = 0.718), and lastly, Rater A and Rater D (Kappa value = 0.662). All three comparisons of Kappa values were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating notable grading consistency among the four raters regarding Lexical Errors. Considering Discourse Errors, Rater A showed a consistency level of 0.770 with Rater B, 0.527 with Rater C, and 0.797 with Rater D concerning Discourse Errors. All three comparisons of Kappa values demonstrated statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), indicating a relatively high level of grading consistency among the four raters for Discourse Errors.

Secondly, the results of Consistency Test for Sample 2 have shown that the Kappa coefficients revealed high consistency among the four raters for Substance Errors, Lexical Errors, and Discourse Errors. Statistical tests indicated significant agreement among the raters across various error types ($p < 0.001$).

Thirdly, according to Differential Analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA) did not show significant differences in grading among the four raters regarding Substance Errors, Lexical Errors, and Discourse Errors for both samples. With overall Differences in Grading Between Two Samples, there were no statistically significant differences in grading for Substance Errors, Lexical Errors, and Discourse Errors between the two samples ($p > 0.05$).

Consequently, these results indicate a high level of consistency among the four raters in evaluating English writing errors among Chinese non-English major graduate students, supported by statistical significance and negligible differences observed across error types and samples.

The High Proportion Distribution of Three Error Types and Their Characteristics

The High Proportion Distribution of Three Error Types

The results derived from the Consistency Test and Differential Analysis illuminate the distinct characteristics of error types. In Sample 1, the Consistency Test reveals substantial agreement among raters in identifying Substance Errors, with Kappa values ranging from 0.935 to 1.000. For Lexical Errors, raters demonstrate relatively high consistency, slightly lower than that observed for Substance Errors, with Kappa values ranging from 0.662 to 0.842. Similarly, the analysis of Discourse Errors displays relatively high consistency, though slightly lower than other error types, with Kappa values ranging from 0.527 to 0.797. In Sample 2, the Consistency Test indicates a high level of agreement among raters regarding Substance Errors, with Kappa values between 0.942 and 1.000. While raters exhibit significantly high consistency for both Lexical Errors and Discourse Errors in Sample 2, it is marginally lower than that observed for Substance Errors, with Kappa values between 0.738 and 0.889, and 0.680 and 0.829, respectively. Even in Sample 2, Substance Errors demonstrate the highest consistency among raters. Conversely, the Differential Analysis in both samples indicates minimal variance among raters in grading Substance Errors. Similarly, the grading results for Lexical Errors and Discourse Errors show notable similarities in both Sample 1 and Sample 2. Overall, although Substance Errors display the highest consistency in the Consistency Test, their average frequency is lower compared to Lexical Errors and Discourse Errors. The latter two error types demonstrate a higher average occurrence across both samples, and the raters exhibit comparable grading tendencies for these errors. Consequently, in these two samples, it is likely that

Lexical Errors and Discourse Errors occur more frequently.

Furthermore, when considering the arithmetic means derived from the four raters' grading results, it is evident that in both Sample 1 and Sample 2, the average error counts for different error types follow a consistent pattern. In Sample 1, the average error counts are as follows: Substance Errors ($M = 9.75$), Lexical Errors ($M = 17.75$), and Discourse Errors ($M = 24.75$). Similarly, in Sample 2, the average error counts are Substance Errors ($M = 10.25$), Lexical Errors ($M = 19.75$), and Discourse Errors ($M = 22.25$).

The arithmetic means depict a consistent hierarchy of error types in both Sample 1 and Sample 2: Substance Errors exhibit the lowest average count, followed by Lexical Errors, with Discourse Errors displaying the highest average count. Hence, amalgamating both the arithmetic means and the earlier analysis strongly suggests that Discourse Errors are the most frequently occurring error type in these two samples.

Unveiling Common Discourse Pitfalls in Writing Among Chinese Non-English Major Graduate Students

The analysis focused on two facets: macro errors and Chinglish, defining discourse-related macro errors as lacking unity, coherence, emphasis, and conciseness. Additionally, Chinglish emerged from native language interference. To simplify analysis, errors were categorized into macro, micro, and Chinglish, where 'micro' pertains to lexical and syntactic grammar while 'macro' addresses discourse beyond grammar. Chinglish blends Chinese thought patterns with English, in contrast to authentic English. The study examined 118 English compositions from 59 Chinese non-English major graduate students, revealing their emphasis on macro errors and Chinglish due to stronger self-examination capabilities in micro errors but challenges in handling macro errors due to a lack of systematic discourse knowledge. Therefore, these two aspects are described, intending to classify and resolve prevalent macro errors and Chinglish within graduate English writing.

1) Lack of Unity

A particular essayⁱⁱ from Sample 2 was chosen at random for the analysis of discourse pitfalls. The narrative concerning "my hometown", Yuhuan City in Zhejiang Province, initially focuses on its coastal location and early involvement in foreign trade. However, as the narrative unfolds, the lack of coherence becomes evident. There's an abrupt shift from detailing the city's historical context to personal childhood memories. While traversing the city's developmental phases, from its relatively backward state to present globalization, the narration diverges into discussions about infrastructural changes, entertainment choices, availability of foreign products, and the rise of multinational enterprises.

This lack of unity is especially noticeable in students' compositions, notably in the concluding sections. Here, some students tend to introduce new ideas or citations, disrupting the coherence of the article. The narrative lacks a smooth transition between themes, hindering its cohesive flow. Consequently, this absence of unity disrupts the narrative's continuity and coherence, posing challenges for readers in following a consistent storyline or central theme.

2) Lack of Coherence.

Cohesion has been defined as continuity in word and sentence structure, and coherence as continuity in meaning and context (Louwerse & Graesser, 2005). In the writings from Chinese non-English major graduate students, cohesion is used better compared to coherence, and they have made more mistakes or errors in coherence. This is the incoherence of their writings. Incoherence refers to the lack of necessary connectives on the one hand, and unclear levels, chaotic layout, and logic on the other (Hu, 1994).

Although incoherence is diverse, logical errors are the most common ones in the data that researchers have collected. For example, writing whatever is thought of is a kind of logical error. The paragraph-developing patterns are vital factors in achieving coherence in the text. The means of developing paragraphs are as follows: chronological order, special order, process analysis, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, exemplification, classification and division, definition, etc. There are some signal words contributing to coherence. For example, firstly, secondly, and thirdly...are often used for orderly arrangement; same, similarly, different, and unlike are usually used for comparison and contrast; for example, such as and another example is often used for exemplification, and so on and so forth.

3) Lack of Emphasis

Unlike those of other sentences, the ideas or opinions expressed by some sentences in the article tend to be more important, which need to be emphasized. However, some important information which should be emphasized is not stressed because students employ too many simple sentences or compound sentences in their compositions, and they are not familiar with the means of emphasis, especially the emphasis produced by the position of the beginning and end of a sentence or a paragraph, and they know little about periodical sentences and rhetorical questions.

4) Lack of Conciseness

Conciseness means that sentences should not contain redundant words. If one's thought can be fully expressed, the less words the better (Ding et al., 1994). However, there are a lot of redundant words in students' compositions, such as: share the same umbrella, small in size, future hope, etc. To illustrate, the italic words are redundant because "share" contains the meaning of "same", "small" includes the meaning of "in size", and "hope" implies the meaning of "future". On the other hand, students tend to employ clauses inappropriately, instead of phrases or independent elements, which help achieve conciseness effectively.

5) Lack of Appropriateness

The authors refer to lacking appropriateness as the improper use of words and expressions, that is, improper text type and genre.

A text type refers to the language genre of an article, which is the sum of the characteristics of language materials and expression methods expressing content and communication needs. Text type focuses on the functional variation of language materials, which is the functional style of discourse (Zhang et al., 1995), such as "spoken" and "written", "scientific", "political", "business/document", and "prose", "formal" and "informal" etc. That is to say, based on different fields of communication, communicative purposes, and communicative media, text type is the organic unity of speech characteristics formed by the repeated use of different language materials, (Zeng, 1995). To be more specific, if diplomatic language is used in family conversations, it is inappropriate. It is also inappropriate to use informal language in formal situations. For example, personal letters are different in language use from scientific research papers. If a student writes "The result of the experiment is terrific" in his paper, it is inappropriate, because the research paper is in a formal style, while the word "terrific" belongs to an informal style (i.e., it is a colloquial word). Another example is that the better part of students tends to use "put forward" (suggestions or strategies), instead of "propose" in their abstracts. Similarly, they hardly know that "put forward" is an informal expression and "propose" is a formal word that is often used in academic writings.

Some scholars studying the Chinese language usually confine "genre" to the written language in the traditional sense. Zhang Huien et al. (1995) define genre as "the style and type of the article" such as narration, exposition, argumentation, lyric, etc., while western scholars give the

broader meaning of “genre”, which not only includes written language, but also extends to the scope of spoken language, emphasizing the communicative values in the social context. For example, Bhatia (2008) summarizes genres as “recognizable communicative events, characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which they regularly occur.” He points out that genre essentially refers to language use in a conventionalized communicative setting to give expression to a specific set of communicative goals of a disciplinary or social institution, which give rise to stable structural forms by imposing constraints on the use of lexico-grammatical as well as discoursal resources (ibid, 2008). Thus, genre plays a decisive role in the existence of discourse patterns, which is an important part of discourse features. When analyzing a text, if scholars only attach importance to the cohesion or inter-sentence relationship of the text and ignore the generic structure of the text, it is difficult for them to use English effectively and appropriately for communicative purposes (Qin, 2002).

6) Lack of Theme-Rheme Cohesion

It is a common scenario that the beginning of a sentence is the theme, and the end is the rheme. Moreover, some corresponding cohesive devices between the themes and the rhemes of the adjacent sentences after the segmentation of the themes and the rhemes in the continuous discourse are required. The corresponding cohesion constitutes the macro structure of a discourse, or the basic model of a discourse. Theme and rheme are not the same concepts as subject and predicate in the traditional grammar. Subject and predicate belong to the category of components in sentences, which are limited to a sentence level. On the other hand, theme and rheme exist in various types of sentences; however, they are at the textual level and reflect information function.

In fact, Hu Zhuanglin (1994) has pointed out the significance of theme-rheme cohesion, stating that “the repeated theme-rheme cohesion is one of the important means to realize cohesion and coherence in a discourse.” However, there is a frequent lack of theme-rheme cohesion between the sentences written by graduate students, that is, the theme or the rheme of the preceding sentence is not related to the theme of the latter sentence, which leads to the absence of coherence. For example,

Example 1: I eat a lot of vegetables and fresh fruit which are full of vitamins. *Taking exercise every day* helps us build a strong body.

The theme (the italic words) of the second sentence is not related to the first sentence.

Example 2: We should eat more vegetables and fruits in our daily diet and try not to eat junk food. *Life may have many difficulties*, but we should try our best to keep a good mood.

Similarly, the theme (the italic words) of the second sentence is not related to the first sentence.

7) Chinglish

Chinglish is a kind of mistake made by students based on thinking in Chinese pattern. The reason why the following items are classified into Chinese English in a typological sense, rather than a lexical or syntactic one, is because the cause of how psychological factors lead to errors – negative transfer of language. There are various forms of Chinglish. We list some as follows:

i. Mechanical correspondence of Chinese and English

Some students tend to equate Chinese with English, and transfer the meaning that need to be expressed into English in a word-for-word way, for example:

If you don't open the door, I'll give you a good face.

This is a typical sentence involving mechanical correspondence of Chinese and English. The pragmatic implications of the sentence should be: If you don't open the door, I'll teach you a lesson. In Chinese “gei ni yige haolian” (give you a good face) implies “I'll teach you a lesson,” while in

English “give you a good face” has not the meaning of “I’ll teach you a lesson.”

ii. Lack of analysis of connotations of words

Except for a small number of nouns, there is usually no one-to-one correspondence between English and Chinese. Learning English words and phrases, however, students often inevitably depend on Chinese interpretation. For example:

First, you should bring your effective certificates.

“Effective” in Chinese means “having effect” (youxiao), while in English “effective” implies “with expected effect and good effect”. Therefore, effective certificates in the sentence above should be changed into valid certificates, because “valid” implies “having legal force” in English. In Chinese, whether “Effective” or “valid”, has the same pronunciation, namely “youxiao”, which are easy to be confused. What’s more, however, the connotations of the two words are different, that is, the former means “with expected effect and good effect”, the latter means “having legal force”.

iii. Lack of understanding of the special meaning of certain words

The meanings of some English words are “special” or “inconsistent with Chinese expression”, so that Chinese students hardly use them. For example,

Since the boy is growing up quickly, the shoes now become too small for the boy.

This sentence is very consistent with Chinese thinking and expression, but incompatible with authentic English expression. Let us compare with the following sentence:

The boy has outgrown the shoes.

In this sentence, no Chinese thought pattern is revealed.

This kind of Chinglish is mainly caused by the absence of the equivalent of “outgrow” in Chinese.

iv. Rhetorical errors

Rhetorical errors are ones that Chinese non-English major graduates often make in their writing. For example,

The man was pulled out of the river as a drowned chicken.

“as a drowned chicken” is a typical Chinese metaphor. The authentic English statement should be:

The man was pulled out of the river as a drowned rat.

Although there is only one different word in the two sentences above, the former sentence has belonged to Chinglish.

v. Improper collocation

The ability of collocating words is often regarded as a mark of high ability of language use. However, Chinese non-English major graduate students often make collocation errors because of “borrowing” from Chinese, for example:

I am determined to raise the level of English knowledge.

In Chinese, “tigao” (raise) is often used with “shuipin” (level), while in English, the words “raise”, and “level” are never used in this way. Thus, people say, “to improve one’s English”, or “to increase one’s knowledge of English.”

Descriptive Linguistic Insights before Teaching Interventions

What effective corrective measures and teaching strategies can address common errors in English writing among Chinese non-English major graduate students? Let’s delve into the discussion. Following the classification of writing errors into macro, micro, and Chinglish, corrective measures and subsequent improvements were devised. The diverse causes leading to macro errors encompass students’ inadequate knowledge of English discourse and pragmatics, as well as differ-

ences in writing schema between English and Chinese native speakers, reflected in their distinct thinking patterns. From this analysis, pedagogical implications emerge.

1) Discourse Dimension

In English writing, we should use a variety of cohesive devices to promote coherence and reduce the difficulty of readers' understanding. As for coherence means, Hu Zhuanglin (1994) identifies at least nine cohesive means such as reference, structural cohesion, logical connection, lexical connection, phonetic system, theme and rheme, context and pragmatics, and structures of discourses.

Because of the limited space, here we illustrate the theme-rheme cohesion. Hu Zhuanglin (1994) sums up three basic theme-rheme cohesive models, namely:

(1) The theme of the preceding sentence continues to be the theme of the latter sentence, which can be expressed as "T1=T2".

(2) A certain content in the rheme of the preceding sentence becomes the theme of the latter sentence and can be expressed as "R1=T2".

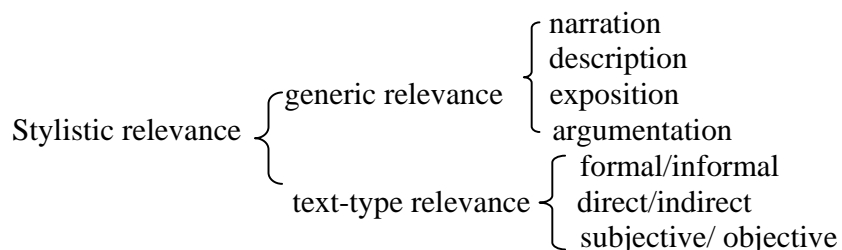
(3) The contents of the theme and rheme in the preceding sentence together become the theme of the latter sentence, which can be expressed as "T1+R1=T2".

The following three examples reflect exactly the three basic models of theme-rheme structure cohesion:

- I. Mr. Smith sent for the doctor. He listened anxiously for his arrival.
- II. Mr. Smith sent for the doctor. He diagnosed his complaint.
- III. Mr. Smith sent for the doctor. This is a unanimous family decision.

The theme of the latter sentence in Example i repeats the theme of the preceding sentence, namely, "T1=T2"; the content of the rheme of preceding sentence in Example ii becomes the theme of the latter sentence, namely, R1=T2; the whole content of the preceding sentence of Example iii becomes the new theme of the latter sentence, that is, the T1+R1=T2.

According to the previous conclusions, regarding the examination of topics and the planings, students must develop style consciousness, and achieve the stylistic coherence. Gao Fang (2002) summarizes the basic requirements of stylistic relevance as follows:



Therefore, stylistic relevance should be considered in terms of genre relevance and text-type relevance. Genre not only refers to the four types of articles but also includes the structural framework of each type, that is, generic structure. For example, the generic structure of Resume is *personal information*^ *objective*^ *education background*^ *work, or professional experience*^ *awards*^ *references (if the employer is thinking of accepting you)*. At the same time, the formal, direct, and subjective degrees of language should be considered. Compare:

- i. Nobody being in the room, I did not go in.
- ii. Because nobody was in the room, I didn't go in.

Sentence i is a more formal written language, while Sentence ii is a casual spoken language. Therefore, in writing teaching, students should be reminded to make appropriate generic and text-type choices according to the given content materials, to avoid errors in generic content and text-type features.

To clarify, the text-type relevance here refers to pragmatic appropriateness. Additionally, style and genre are similar terms, which, in some cases, overlap each other; however, they are different, just as Bhatia (2006) put it “genre focuses more on the communicative values, whereas style pays more attention to linguistic form, although both of them are crucial to our understanding of variation in language use”.

1) Chinglish Dimension

As we have pointed out before, Chinglish is the result of thinking in Chinese; therefore, it is necessary to find out the difference between English sentence patterns and Chinese sentence patterns as the main carrier of thinking by observing, examining, comparing, and contrasting Chinese and English, and take effective measures to correct students' writing mistakes. Mao Ronggui (1998) provides the following ways to avoid Chinglish:

- (1) Use more nouns than verbs.
- (2) Avoid using dangling modifiers.
- (3) Use more things as subjects and less people as subjects.
- (4) Pay attention to the use of words with special meanings in English.
- (5) Pay attention to the rhetorical usage of English.
- (6) Pay attention to the collocation of English words.

In English writing

It is of importance and effectiveness to increase the graduate students' ability of writing in terms of comparing English thought patterns with Chinese one (Luo, 2006).

Teaching Interventions

Based on the above corrective measures and driven by the aim to optimize the writing of such students and promote the overall improvement of writing teaching, we adopted the Genre-based Process Teaching Approach and constructed a way of promoting writing by evaluation to avoid the writing problems mentioned above. The follow-up improvements in our writing class have the following four features.

Computer-assisted Teaching Environment

This writing class is conducted in the computer room. The main computer in the room is controlled by the writing teacher. In the teacher's computer, we installed the teaching software, which has the functions of broadcasting, monitoring, group discussion, and electronic document. The teacher is in the charge of presenting teaching notes or slides to the class for discussion and analysis while the students write their drafts and revisions on the computer and distribute them for analysis, and students also write down their own ideas and modifications on their own computers.

The intention is that these students' mistakes in writing will be found in time and corrected by their classmates immediately.

Genre-based Discourse as a Teaching Unit

Unlike the traditional writing classes which start from sentence writing to paragraph writing, our writing classes take different genre-based discourses as the basic teaching units. Twenty kinds of genre-based discourses are covered in our writing classes. Those writing tasks can be classified as card, notice, note, personal letter, business letter, job application letter, resume, recommendation

letter, news report, summary and abstract, book report, description of a person, description of a place, the narration of an event, exemplification exposition, cause and effect exposition, process-analysis exposition, division and classification exposition, comparison and contrast exposition and augmentative essay. The intention is that students can effectively achieve accurate vocabulary and sentence selection, reasonable paragraph arrangement and development, cohesion and coherence of discourse, clear writing intention, and pragmatic purpose in writing.

Genre-based Process Teaching Approach

The computer-assisted genre-based process approach (Badger & White, 2000) is composed of seven teaching procedures. They are pre-writing, classroom discussion, sample commentary, guided writing, self-revision, group interaction, after-class practice, and teacher evaluation. In this way, these students are in the pre-writing stage given a proposition or a situation including the field, tenor, and mode and are required to write the genre which they are going to learn on a computer in any way they think appropriate in class within 10 to 15 minutes. The purpose of this teaching procedure is to let the students think about the organization, the content, and the developing patterns. Then through their classroom discussion, each other's sample commentary, the teacher's guided writing, their self-revision, and their group interaction, they are trying to discover the writing mistakes and correct them immediately. After they submit their productions, the teacher will give them a final evaluation and comments.

The way of Promoting Writing by Evaluation

This writing assessment places an emphasis on both form and content and focuses on the content and the order of the text. We believe that for a composition, the content and form are equally important. The two are indispensable only in the form, without the content, the text will appear empty and lack the soul of the composition. There is only content, but no form, which is just a disorderly pile of language and words, lacking the core element of English composition, namely language ability. Of course, the absolute balance between content and form is ideal. Therefore, in the evaluation, we specifically analyze according to different objects. The evaluation breaks the traditional grammar and sentence patterns, but on this basis, we evaluate and feedback on the integrity of the semantic components of the format standardization of the textual content organization structure, logical cohesion, and coherence.

We adopt the three-level modification mode which not only focuses on the modification of the text at the language level but also points out the reasons for the modification. More importantly, it has the evaluation and study method guidance at the discourse level, to provide effective feedback information and convenient means of modification for the student authors' rewriting and modification. At the same time, this mode also reflects the full participation of the students' fellow writers and teachers, and fully reflects the subjectivity and interaction of students in the evaluation process.

The so-called three-level modification mode is based on the modification comment function provided by Microsoft Office Word. The modifier can partially modify the text comment and the evaluation and suggestion at the end of the text. In other words, the first level of assessment is the local modification between the lines, involving the wording of the composition. The second level is the text annotation, its function lies in: modifying, questioning, and confirming, facilitating the interaction between teachers and students; the third level is the evaluation and suggestions at the end of the text. The purpose is to form personalized summary feedback, so that students can continue to improve our writing teaching process by using the computer platform, to establish a set of English composition digital evaluation systems suitable for students in our school, namely: the first is the draft by the individual (student's original)-revised by the group-revised by the teacher.

In view of this, we believe that the evaluation of experiential English writing texts based on the process genre teaching method should adopt the three-level evaluation model because it can best reflect the purpose of evaluation and achieve the purpose of evaluation. To sum up, after the authors adopted a genre-based process approach and constructed the way of promoting writing by evaluation, the most significant changes are the transformation from the initial exploration of the traditional teacher-student pen assessment to the application of technology (such as network, online, computer software, etc.) diversified grading, assessment, and evaluation. It can be inferred that (a) multiple English composition evaluation places more stress on the evaluation process and students' participation and cooperation; (b) more emphasis is placed on the change of diverse roles of teachers and students in the evaluation process; (c) instructors should be more aware of the timely and effective feedback of evaluation information.

Conclusion

In this study, we delved into the intricacies of English writing errors among Chinese non-English major graduate students from the vantage point of descriptive linguistics. Our comprehensive analysis and discussion have addressed the core questions at the heart of this study. As our investigation unfolded, it became evident that these errors are indeed diverse, shaped by both Chinese thought patterns and the intricate structural aspects of the English language.

This paper meticulously scrutinized the writing of 59 Chinese non-English major graduate students, aiming to uncover the underlying causes of these errors and develop effective strategies for English writing instruction. Our objectives are twofold: to enhance students' proficiency in error identification and prevention and to guide them toward embracing English thought patterns, thus fostering consistency with English writing schemas. Ultimately, this endeavor strives to elevate students' English language competence.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations within this research. Our methods of literature retrieval and data statistics may warrant refinement. Variability in sample sizes and potential misdiagnoses of errors could introduce deviations. Nonetheless, these limitations serve as motivation for future research endeavors.

Through this study, a significant step has been taken toward a deeper understanding of the multifaceted world of English writing errors among Chinese non-English major graduate students. It opens doors for further research and the development of more precise and targeted teaching strategies. Our hope is that this work contributes to the ongoing dialogue on improving English writing instruction for this specific demographic, fostering both language proficiency and cultural understanding.

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ⁱ The error types are retrieved and revised by the researchers from Chapter 5 of the book *Errors in Language Learning and Use --Exploring Errors Analysis* (James, 2013).

ⁱⁱ Sample 2 Describe the changes in your hometown in recent years to show how globalization influences every one of us.

My hometown is Yuhuan City, Zhejiang Province. Yuhuan is a coastal city. Therefore, they started business with foreign countries earlier. When I was a child, my hometown was still relatively backward. At that time, the roads in the center of the city were better built, and most of the rural areas were dirt roads. There are few cinemas, KTVs and other entertainment places in the whole city. Foreign products are hard to see. But over the years, with globalization, Yuhuan has become more and more closely connected with the world. Foreign brands can be seen everywhere in shopping malls, and there are more and more cinemas. The emergence of high-rise buildings in the city has given

birth to many multinational enterprises. People's clothes are becoming more and more fashionable, and every family is connected to the network. Walking on the road, you can sometimes see foreigners traveling here. Globalization makes cities develop faster and faster, and people's living standards are getting better and better.