

# An Empirical Study of Memetics in the Teaching of College English Writing----From the Perspective of Ideological and Political Elements in Curriculum

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**Abstract:** *Based on the theory of memetics, this paper explores the characteristics of the teaching of English writing for college students. A total of 77 sophomores in our school are selected to participate in the empirical research. The results show that the memetic teaching method can improve the writing level of college students in terms of words in short terms. It is proved that this teaching method of is an effective teaching method, which is worth popularizing in teaching college English writing. Meanwhile, ideological and political elements can be actively integrated into the teaching of college English writing.*

**Keywords:** *language memetics; revelation; imitation; college English writing; ideological and political elements*

## 1. Introduction to Memes

### 1.1 Meme

In 1976, Richard Dawkins, a zoologist at Oxford University, first proposed “meme” in *The Selfish Gene* (*Selfish Gene*) on the basis of discussing gene self replication and mutual competition to promote biological evolution. This word is derived from the imitation of biological genetic unit gene. <sup>[1]</sup> Any information that can be “copied” through “imitation” can be called meme. As far as language is concerned, we can think that “language itself is a meme, and memes are also embedded in language. Any word, phrase, sentence, paragraph or even text can become a meme only if it is copied and spread through imitation”. <sup>[2]</sup>

### 1.2 Characteristics, Propagation Cycle and Mode of Memes

Mememes have three characteristics: copying fidelity, fecundity and longevity. Dawkins believes that whether mememes can be copied successfully depends on the three elements of longevity, prolificacy and replication loyalty. <sup>[3]</sup>

The life cycle of mememes can be divided into four stages (Heylighen, 1998) <sup>[4]</sup>: assimilation, memory, expression and transmission. Memetic communication requires visible carriers or media, which should be stable to avoid distortion or deformation of the expression content in the transmission process. The above four stages go round and round, forming a replication loop, which just reflects the whole process of college English writing.

From the perspective of memetics, language mememes have genotypic mememes and expressive mememes (He Ziran, 2007). <sup>[5]</sup> Genotypic mememes refer to the reproduction and dissemination of information content from me in various ways. Expressive mememes refer to mememes in which the form of language is embedded in different information content and copied and disseminated.

## 2. Traditional Teaching Method for College English Writing and the Characteristics of College English Writing Class for Sophomores

In recent years, in order to improve the quality of talent training, many colleges and universities

have carried out teaching reform one after another, and constantly adjusted the time and class hours of courses to achieve the best teaching effect. No matter how the reform is carried out, the writing class has always retained a certain proportion, which shows the importance of the writing. Although the traditional teaching method is helpful to improve college students' writing ability, it cannot be applied to all students in a general way, regardless of the specific situation. Especially in the college---Hunan Institute of Technology where the author works, the foundation of college students is weak and their learning motivation is not strong. Therefore, it is urgent to find an effective teaching method to improve their learning interest and enhance the learning effect.

### **3. Enlightenment of Language Memes on College English Writing Teaching**

Linguistic memetics explains the law of discourse transmission and language transmission. Following the law of language transmission to carry out college English writing teaching is bound to improve the teaching effect. The following is the design of college English writing teaching link based on the laws and characteristics of language memes.

#### ***3.1 Enrich Assimilation Methods***

Assimilation is the first stage of meme transmission, which is the basis for effective use of memes. To complete the process of assimilation, individuals should be interested in assimilating memes to promote the effect of assimilation. In the teaching of college English writing, teachers can appropriately select English masterpieces or fairy tales that students like as teaching aids according to their hobbies and levels, so that students can actively participate in learning and enter the assimilation cycle independently.

#### ***3.2 Strengthen Long-term Memory***

After the assimilation cycle is completed, the memory cycle begins. The process of assimilation enables learners to recognize memes, while recitation enables learners to remember memes. According to the author's teaching practice for many years, the following methods can be used to strengthen students' memory and lay the foundation for better mastering and using memes.

Recitation is the basis of imitation. Only when input accumulates to a certain extent and certain words, phrases, sentences and even chapters are mastered, can we smoothly transition to the next expression and output link.

#### ***3.3 Repeated Expression and Enhanced Output***

Assimilation and memory are both for effective expression and output, because only when users complete the expression and output link and turn the assimilated materials into their own knowledge, can they truly master the language and complete the process of replication and transmission of language memes. This paper focuses on the ability of written expression.

There are two modes of replication and transmission of language memes, namely genotype and phenotype. These two ways provide new ideas for the teaching of college English writing, and inspire students to use the two ways of communication of language memes for reference to complete the output expression of language on the basis of previous accumulation.

#### ***3.4 From Imitation to Innovation***

Memetics believes that the expression and output of memes are particularly important, and any teaching method is based on repeated practice. Therefore, students should be encouraged to practice writing repeatedly on the basis of imitation. In the primary stage, students can be inspired to use the words they memorized in the assimilation stage to make sentences. In this stage, attention should be paid to the replacement of synonyms. When replacing synonyms, the context of synonyms should be clarified. Then the transition is to imitate sentences, paragraphs and chapters with the method of substitution, and create your own articles. While encouraging students to imitate and repeatedly express, we should pay attention to guiding students to innovate step by step, so as to complete the perfect process from copying the memes in a regular way to developing innovation.

## 4. Empirical Research

### 4.1 Experiment Design

This paper discusses the characteristics of memetics theory and college English writing course. The guiding role of memetics theory in college English writing teaching is reflected in teaching practice and must be proved through empirical research. This subject adopts the research design scheme of “pre-experiment (2022.09.10-2022.10.10) ---- while-experiment (2022.10.10-2022.11.10) ---- post-experiment (2022.11.10-2022.12.10)”. The subjects are the majors of Logistics Management from Hunan Institute of Technology. They are Logistics Management 2101 and 2102 classes and sophomores of the same age from the same college and class, which ensures that the subjects are homogeneous in terms of ability and level. The reason for choosing sophomores is that after more than a year of college English study, they have a certain understanding of college English writing teaching. In addition, they need to pass CET-4, so they have a good degree of cooperation. The research period is the first semester of the academic year from 2022 to 2023. After a semester of writing, students have a certain foundation. The specific time is from September to December. Logistics Management 2101 is an experimental class (a writing class under the guidance of memetics), with 40 students in total; Logistics Management 2102 is a control class (a writing class under the guidance of traditional methods), with 37 students in total. The teachers of the two classes are the same. The study lasted for 3 months, and 77 students were tested for their writing ability at different stages: before the experiment (1 month), during the experiment (2 months), and after the experiment (3 months). To ensure the accuracy and effectiveness of the test, each test has different topics, but the degree of difficulty is roughly the same. In addition, in order to specifically illustrate the guiding role of memetics in the teaching of college English writing, data indicators include synonym replacement rate, phrase usage rate, famous words and sentences usage rate, sentence error rate, etc.

### 4.2 Experimental Results

The experiment lasted three months and was successfully completed with the cooperation of teachers and students. It should be noted that the number of words required in writing tests is usually controlled within a certain range. For example, the number of words required in writing in CET-4 is over 120 words. This experiment requires an almost accurate statistics of the ratio of various indicators. Therefore, the range of the number of words required is narrowed, and the students are required to control the number of words in their compositions to about 100 words, so as to reduce the error caused by the different number of words in their compositions. At the same time, the composition style is limited to the argumentative composition commonly seen in CET-4, which will not affect students' preparation for CET-4 while ensuring the smooth progress of the experiment. The charts are as follows:

Table 1: Pre-experiment writing test

Group name	synonym replacement rate	Word group usage rate	Famous words and sentences usage rate	Sentence error rate
EG	5.67%	7.34%	3.23%	41.22%
CG	5.73%	7.23%	3.34%	40.27%

Table 2: While-experiment Writing test

Group name	synonym replacement rate	Word group usage rate	Famous words and sentences usage rate	Sentence error rate
EG	9.06%	8.07%	10.02%	37.12%
CG	6.67%	7.84%	4.86%	39.23%

Table 3: Post-experiment writing test

Group name	synonym replacement rate	Word group usage rate	Famous words and sentences usage rate	Sentence error rate
EG	12.35%	9.64%	14.65%	36.56%
CG	8.65%	7.94%	4.98%	39.33%

Note: Experimental group is abbreviated for EG and Control group for CG in the tables above.

### 4.3 Analysis of Experimental Results

All the data before, during and after the experiment were recorded truthfully. After the experiment, Excel was used to assist in the calculation, so the experimental results were true and correct.

From the four test indicators before the experiment, the students in the experimental class and the control class seldom use synonyms to avoid repetition, and seldom use phrases and famous sentences. The high rate of sentence errors appears mainly in spelling, grammar, vocabulary and other aspects. The experiment conducted for two months showed that the experimental class' synonym replacement rate and the use rate of famous words and sentences were significantly better than the control class. The improvement of phrase usage rate and sentence error rate is not obvious. The writing test after the experiment shows that the improvement of synonym replacement rate, phrase usage rate and famous sentence usage rate in the experimental class is still better than that in the control class, but the improvement of phrase usage rate is not significant. However, the improvement of sentence error rate in both classes is not obvious.

Through comprehensive analysis of the three test scores, the conclusion is drawn that: compared with the control class, the memetics based on college English writing teaching method used in the experimental class has achieved remarkable teaching results in terms of synonym replacement and the use of famous words and sentences in a short period of time; In terms of phrase use and sentence error rate, the effect is not as good as the former two.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper systematically expounds the guiding role of memetics in the teaching of writing for college students. From the theoretical basis to the teaching methods and then to the empirical research, we finally come to the conclusion that the teaching effect of memetic writing teaching method is better than that of traditional writing teaching method, and this method should be actively used in the college English writing class. Teachers should adjust teaching models and methods appropriately according to students' conditions and teaching conditions. Only by combining students' aptitudes and adding ideological and political elements reasonably can they achieve ideal teaching results.

## Acknowledgements

The research is supported by: Hunan Teaching Research and Teaching Reform Project: "Research on the Implementation Path of 'Curriculum Ideology and Politics' Integrating into College English Teaching" (Grant No. HNJG-2020-1087); The Scientific Research Project of the Education Department of Hunan Province (Grant No. 20C0577)

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