

A Study of Error-Prone Chinese Expressions in TCSOL

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Abstract: *Based on the data from inter language corpus, the paper conducts a study of foreign students' acquisition of complement of duration, adjective predict and separable verbs. It is found that the above three issues have a high frequency of error in Chinese learning. Based on the syntax theory in Chinese and English, the usages of the three kinds of grammar are discussed, and some learning strategies are provided in practice of TCSOL(Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages).*

KEYWORDS: *Complement of Duration; Adjectives Predict; Separable Verbs; Error Analysis; Teaching strategies*

1. Introduction

Vocabularies, as the basic unit of sentences, are classified into different categories in Chinese. From the surface point of view, each vocabulary is usually composed of more than two words; however, grammatically, each vocabulary represents one group of vocabularies with similar properties or functions. Complement of duration, adjective predict as well as separable verbs, as the special vocabularies, are critical issues in Chinese learning especially for International students whose first language is English. Based on these, linguistic experts have always been devoting to the usages of the three issues. This paper attempts to make a preliminary analysis for the three issues in order to put forward the teaching strategies in TCSOL (Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Language).

2. Usages of Complement of Duration

Complement, as a supplementary information, is usually followed with verbs and adjectives in Chinese sentences. Complements are classified into different groups to illustrate extent, possibility, tendency, quantity and time of period. The complement of duration indicates a period of time for an action or a state. This category of vocabulary plays the role of adverb in a Chinese sentence[1].

Examples of complement of duration in Chinese include: in a while (“yi hui er”), one minute (“yi fen zhong”), a quarter (“yi ke zhong”), an hour (“yi tian”) , one day (“yi tian”) and so on.

If the verb does not take an object, the complement of duration should be placed

after the verb.

This is the pattern:

(1)“Wo zai zhong guo sheng huo le yi nian”. I have been living in China for one year.

(2)“Wo mei tian jian chi xue han yu yi xiao shi”. I insist on learning Chinese for one hour everyday.

If the verb takes an object (or if the verb is a separable one), the verb can either be repeated or not. When it is repeated, the complement of duration is placed after the second one; when it is not, the complement of duration is placed between the verb and its object.

The patterns are:

Subject + Verb + Object + Verb(+了) + complement of duration

Subject + Verb(+了) + complement of duration + Object

Example: “liang nian” two years; “yi ge xiao shi” One hour “ban ge xiao shi” half an hour

“ma li xue shu fa xue le liang nian”= “ma li xue le liang nian de shu fa le” Marry has learned Chinese calligraphy for two years.

“zhang ping xie zuo ye xie le yi ge xiao shi”= “zhang ping xie le yi ge xiao shi zuo ye”Zhang ping has done his homework for one hour.

If the object is a personal pronoun, the complement of duration is placed after the object.

Example:

“wo men deng le ni ban ge xiao shi”.We have been waiting for you for half an hour.

If the object is not a personal pronoun, the complement of duration may be placed between the verb and the object, and”的”may be added between the complement and the object.

Example:

(1) “wo zuo le yi ge xiao shi zuo ye”. I have been doing my homework for an hour.

(2) “ta xue le liang nian han yu”. He has been learning Chinese for two Years.

If the verb is followed by “了”, and there is a modal particle “了” at the end of the sentence, it indicates that the action is still in progress.

Example:

(1) “taxueleyinianhanyu”. (He has learned Chinese for a year, but he doesn't

learn it.)

(2) “taxueleyinianhanyule”. (He has been learning Chinese for a year, and he goes on.)

Above examples specified the usages of complement of duration in different cases. Most of International students are confused to make up a sentence with complement of duration though they understand the meaning of complement of duration[2].

3. Usages for adjectives predict sentences

It is ideally to consider that a complete sentence includes but not limited to three element which are the subject, the verb, and the object. However, Chinese adjectives, in some cases, play the role of adverbs to predict a complete sentence as well. In this case, the adjective is called adjective predict[3].

There are some examples of Chinese in contrast with English.

(1) “wo hen mang”. I am very busy.

(2) “zai ma lai xi ya liu lian hen pian yi”. The durian is very cheap in Malaysia.

(3) “jiao shi hen gan jing”. The classroom is very clean.

For sentence (1), “wo” means I which is the noun and the subject of the sentence; “mang” means busy which is the adjective to modify the subject in the sentence; “hen” means very which is the adverb to modify the adjective in the sentence. It is obvious to know that sentence (1) lacks of a verb element. However, sentence (1) is a complete sentence in Chinese.

For sentence (2), “liu lian” means the durian which is the noun and the subject of the sentence; “pian yi” means cheap which is the adjective to modify the subject durian in the sentence; “hen” also means very which is the adverb to modify the adjective in the sentence. Sentence (2) also lacks of a verb element to be complete. However, sentence (2) is a complete sentence in Chinese.

For sentence (3), “jiao shi” means the classroom which is the noun and the subject of the sentence; “gan jing” means clean which is the adjective to modify the subject classroom in the sentence; “hen” also means very which is the adverb to modify the adjective in the sentence. Sentence (3) also lacks of a verb element to be complete. However, sentence (3) is a complete sentence in Chinese.

The above 3 examples illustrate that adjectives act as the verb to predict the sentence complete grammatically, but there should be a weakened-extent adverb in front of the adjective to make the sentence read smoothly.

4. Usages for separable verbs

Separable verbs is a kind of special vocabularies which are composed of verb-

word and noun-word. Examples such as “sanbu 、 bangmang 、 youyong 、 changge、 tiaowu...”. From the view of lexicology, separable verbs are complete vocabularies; from the view of grammar, separable verbs can be inserted in some elements between the two words. Most of separable verbs cannot be directly added with objects, and the specific usages are interpreted as follows[4].

In a Chinese sentence with separable verb, the object should be placed in the middle of the separable verb or placed in front of the separable verb with a preposition.

Example:

- (1) “wo bang ta de mang”. I help him.
- (2) “wo gen ma ma liao tian”. I chat with my mother.

There are special reduplication form for separable verbs which is AAB. This kind of expression are used for habitual behaviour or a relaxed tone.

Example:

- (1) “wo mei tian wan fan qu gong yuan san san bu”. I usually take a walk in the park after dinner.
- (2) “wo xi huan zhou mo youyouyong guangguangjie”. I like swimming and shopping on weekend.

Error Analysis of the two grammar issues for International students

The following form is based on the error rate in HSK Test for major Chinese Grammars.

Sample Size: 300 International students (English as the first language)

Period of Chinese Learning: One Year in China

Place: Wuxi Institute of Technology (One of the Technical Colleges in China)

Language Test: HSK Level 4 Prep Test Exercises

Duration: 90 minutes

Grammar	Error Rate in sentence correction	Error Rate in filling in blanks	Error Rate in multiple choice
Compliment of Duration	22%	18%	20%
Adjective Predict	18%	18%	15%
Location of Adverbs	19%	15%	17%
Separable Verbs	21%	18%	18%
others	20%	31%	30%

Analysis of statistical results:

Comparing with the other mistakes in Chinese learning, adjective predict, complement of duration and separable verbs are critical issues and have a high

frequency of errors especially in grammar exercises[5].

HSK Level 4 Writing Score	Errors rate for Separable verbs	Errors rate for Predict sentences	Errors rate for Complement of duration
Above 90%	20.2%	19.2%	20.1%
80%-90%	19.8%	19.8%	19.8%
70%-80%	21.2%	20.2%	21.2%
60%-70%	20.8%	20.8%	20.8%

Analysis of statistical results:

In the above form, the error rates of complement of duration, predict sentences as well as separable verbs are not powerful to establish a cause-effect relation in Chinese writing of HSK level 4. Grammar issues are essential in Chinese language learning, however, the output of the language can be interpreted differently[6].

Error Analysis based on the syntax:

Incorrect Sentences with complement of duration:

(1) “zhang ping xie le yi xiao shi zuo ye”. Zhang ping has done his homework for one hour.

(2) “wo xue han yu liang nian”. I have learned Chinese for two years.

The two sentences are wrong due to position relationship between object and complement of duration. If the verb takes an object and complement of duration, the verb should be repeated in most cases. Due to the interference of English native language, many International student will make the wrong sentences above. Therefore, the correct sentence is that “ta xue han yu xue le liang nian” [7].

Incorrect sentence with adjective predict:

(1) “wo shi hen mang”. I am very busy.

(2) “fang jian shi gan jing”. The room is very clean.

The expressions of two Chinese sentences are not the meanings of two English sentences beside. In English, there should be a Be-verb in front of the adjective. However, in most cases, there should not be a Be-verb before the adjectives in Chinese. Due to the interference of English native language, International student usually make wrong sentences above[8].

Incorrect sentences with separable verbs:

(1) “wo yao bang mang ta”.

(2) “wo men gu zhang zhe huan ying ta”.

“bang zhu” means help which is a common verb and used as a whole part in any case, however, “bang mang” is a separable verb which cannot directly followed with the object. In this case, the object should be inserted between the two words, and the correct sentence is “wo yao bang mang ta”[9].

Based on the error analysis above, L1 transfer is one of the main interference

factors during the Chinese learning. For instance, “wo shi mang”. The English sentence structure “Subject + Be Verb + Adjective” leads to the wrong Chinese expression. Besides, some Chinese learners prefer to apply a kind of Chinese grammar rule to a new structure of Chinese expression which is not exactly the same actually. Such kind of errors is called overgeneralization. For instance, after learning the common form of verb-reduplication, some International students always apply this form to all the separable verbs. Unlike the common form of verb-reduplication ABAB, the form of separable verbs is AAB in which only the front verb are repeated. The correct sentence is “wo xi huan xia ke hou ting ting ying yue、you you yong”rather than”youyong youyong”.

5. Teaching Strategies based on language difficulties

Based on understanding of error analysis, the paper attempts to provide some suggestions in teaching strategies for Chinese teachers including but not limited to complement of duration, multi-category vocabularies and separable verbs.

Firstly, Chinese teachers should encourage International students to grasp the language difficulties through expanding the reading and applying in practice. There is no doubt that numerous exercises from language tests focused on difficulties will make International students to keep the grammar rules from short-term memory to long-term memory, However, International students also should remain flexibility in usages of language especially in a different culture background. Limitations of error analysis are lack of relevant studies of pragmatics as well as culture, though we are able to find enough data of error analysis from language corpus. Moreover, the purpose of error analysis in a language is to correct the errors. Nevertheless, the purpose of language learning is based on output which are speaking and writing. whether International students are able to adequately express themselves should be the standard to evaluate the mastery of the language[10].

Secondly, Chinese teachers should pay more attention to the way of grammar correction. There is no doubt that grammar corrections are crucial part for languages learners. It is the teachers’ responsibility to point out all the mistakes specifically, but for all that, most Chinese teachers treat the errors of grammar from International students in a oversimplified way in which they usually correct all of grammar mistakes directly regardless of the content and students’ logic. Facing with variety of grammar rules and countless grammar mistakes, International students will gradually lose the applied ability of Chinese and even confidence of language learning. From another point of view, language teachers should encourage students’ creativity in the use of language. Hence, it should be noted that, tolerance of grammar mistakes in some extent will be beneficial for alleviating students’ anxiety in a cross-cultural language classroom.

6. Conclusion

As above, complementary of duration, adjective predict and separable verbs are

critical issues for Chinese learners and have a high frequency of errors in Chinese learning. The paper illustrates the usages and analyzes the errors from International students whose first language is English. Due to the L1 transfer and Overgeneralization, Chinese learners always have trouble for above three issues. However, there is no direct cause and effect relation between grammar and language output, so the teaching strategies provided for teachers are tolerance for grammar mistakes in some cases and encouragement for application.

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