

A study on the lexical fossilization in senior high school English writing

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Abstract: Lexical fossilization is a phenomenon in the process of the development of interlanguage into target language. Based on error analysis theory and fossilization theory, this paper analyzes whether there is fossilization phenomenon in the English writing continuation of senior high school students and how to solve it. Through a series of investigation and research, two questions are solved: 1) Is there fossilization in the English writing continuation of senior high school students? 2) If so, what types of lexical fossilization phenomena exist in high school students' English writing? 3) What measures should be taken to solve the lexical fossilization? After statistical analysis of the survey results, the following conclusions are drawn: 1) There is indeed a fossilization phenomenon in high school students' English writing. 2) High school students do have fossilization in vocabulary, syntax and grammar. 3) In view of fossilization phenomenon, teachers can take various measures to improve this phenomenon and improve students' writing ability.

Keywords: Lexical fossilization; English writing continuation; Error analysis theory

1. Introduction

Since the English reform of college entrance examination, English writing continuation has become another difficult problem after writing. Different from English writing, English writing continuation is based on the analysis of the given materials and develops in the way of continuing to write stories, and the content is not fixed, so there are many phenomena that are difficult to cover up. In fact, writing continuation is still closely related to students' writing ability. The problem is both a headache for teachers and a pain for students. The phenomenon of fossilization has occurred especially when students have invested their energy with little result. In order to understand the problems that arise in students' writing continuation of new question types, this study makes an in-depth analysis to improve students' English writing ability.

2. Literature review

The term "fossilization" was proposed by the famous American linguist Selinker in 1969. In 1996, Selinker reiterated his definition of fossilization. He believed that language fossilization refers to the state in which some language items, language rules and systematic knowledge tend to be fixed in the transition language of foreign language learners. Fossilization is manifested by the fact that second language learners with a native language background will remain stagnant at a certain stage of target language acquisition, regardless of the learner's age and whether they have learned it or not^[1]. Since Selinker's "fossilization theory" was put forward, many linguists at home and abroad have carried out further investigation and research on fossilization phenomenon, but fossilization phenomenon can not only draw conclusions from the surface.

Leech, a British linguist, also pointed out in his book *Semantics* that fossilization refers to the immobilization of meaning in the long-term use of words. That is, in the process of language learning, there are solidified error forms, which lead to a completely different form from that of the target language.

At present, there are many domestic studies based on fossilization theory, aiming at different students' phonetic and writing problems. Based on the theory of fossilization phenomenon and error analysis, this study conducted research and data analysis on the writing continuation materials of 30 students to help students better understand fossilization phenomenon, formulate appropriate strategies to deal with fossilization phenomenon, and improve students' writing continuation ability in English.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research theory

3.1.1. Fossilization theory

The phenomenon of fossilization was proposed by the famous American linguist Selinker in 1969. In 1996, Selinker reaffirmed the definition of fossilization. He believed that fossilization refers to the state in which some language items, language rules and systematic knowledge tend to be fixed in the transition language of foreign language learners, and the growth of age and the change of learning volume have no effect on changing this fixed state^[2]. Fossilization is the phenomenon that second language learners with a native language background will stagnate at a certain stage of target language acquisition, regardless of the learner's age and whether they have learned it or not. Leech, a British linguist, also pointed out in his book *Semantics* that fossilization refers to the immobilization of meaning in the long-term use of words. According to the fossilization phenomenon, this paper analyzes the stagnation of students' English writing ability.

3.1.2. Error analysis theory

Error analysis theory is a theory proposed by British linguist Pit Corder. Its development dates back to the 1950s, when its core idea was contrastive analysis, that is, to explore the differences and similarities between two or more languages by comparing them. The emergence of this theory marked the birth of the theory of error analysis, which opened a new era and has remained dominant ever since^[3]. Early foreign scholars focused on improving the theoretical system of error analysis and classifying errors into different categories. They focus on the errors of students in the target language and incorporate these categories into the theoretical framework to achieve better results. Meruyert Seitova investigates error analysis as an important theory in second language acquisition, aiming to analyze the problem of learning objects in the learning process, so as to explore the principle of learning^[1]. Error analysis argues that errors exist in the language learning process of second language learners, so as to explore more writing teaching methods and improve students' writing ability. The research is based on error analysis theory in order to improve students' writing ability.

3.2. Research Problems

This paper analyzes and summarizes the problems and phenomena of middle school students in the new question type of the college entrance examination reform. The thesis aims to find out students' mistakes in writing continuation and summarize experiences and lessons based on found mistakes, which is not only helpful to guide students to avoid the same problems in future writing, but improve students' writing ability and enable students to continuously develop from interlanguage to target language. Therefore, the following three research questions are raised:

- 1) Is there a phenomenon of vocabulary fossilization in high school students' English writing?
- 2) If so, what types of vocabulary fossilization phenomena exist in high school students' English writing?
- 3) What measures should be taken to solve the fossilization of students' vocabulary?

3.3. Research objects

The main object of this study is to systematically analyze and classify the errors in English writing in a senior high school. A random sample of 30 students was taken to carry out the English writing test. The writing subject is a narrative essay. The writing requires reading the material and writing two more paragraphs according to the content given, so that it forms a complete essay. The essay should be completed within 30 minutes, and the word count should be about 150 words. A total of 30 articles and 0 invalid compositions were recovered in this test, with an effective rate of 100%.

It should be noted that the reason why this study chooses sophomore students as the main research object is mainly based on the fact that the students studied have been systematically learning for eight years, and their learning ability and practical application ability are relatively good. This random sampling can well reflect the students' learning level, making this study more representative and reliable.

3.4. Research Procedures

According to the current situation of students' English knowledge and writing ability, students with medium level are selected to take the writing continuation test. The content of the test is consistent with the type of questions given in a regular exam: the reading material is given and a sentence is given at the beginning of two paragraphs to continue. Students will analyze the content according to the materials given by the teacher, and complete the continuing content within the specified time. And collect students' continued writing materials for analysis of data results.

4. Research results and discussion

After correcting and marking the students' writing continuation materials, it is found that there is a phenomenon of lexical fossilization in senior high school English writing continuation. The study divides the types of errors in students' vocabulary fossilization into three categories: technical errors, vocabulary errors and sentence errors. Among them, technical errors refer to basic errors in language caused by memorization or memorization, including word capitalization errors and punctuation errors in students' English writing. Vocabulary mistakes refer to students' mistakes in word choice, such as word collocation, word choice, and the absence of various words. Sentence errors include basic sentence errors and complex sentence errors. Among the grammar patterns commonly used by students, in addition to basic sentence errors, complex sentence errors and Chinglish, non-predicate verb errors, subject-predicate verb agreement errors, emphasis errors and subjunctive errors are classified as "other sentence errors" due to their low frequency. After analyzing and studying the errors, the distribution of the three types of errors is shown in the table below.

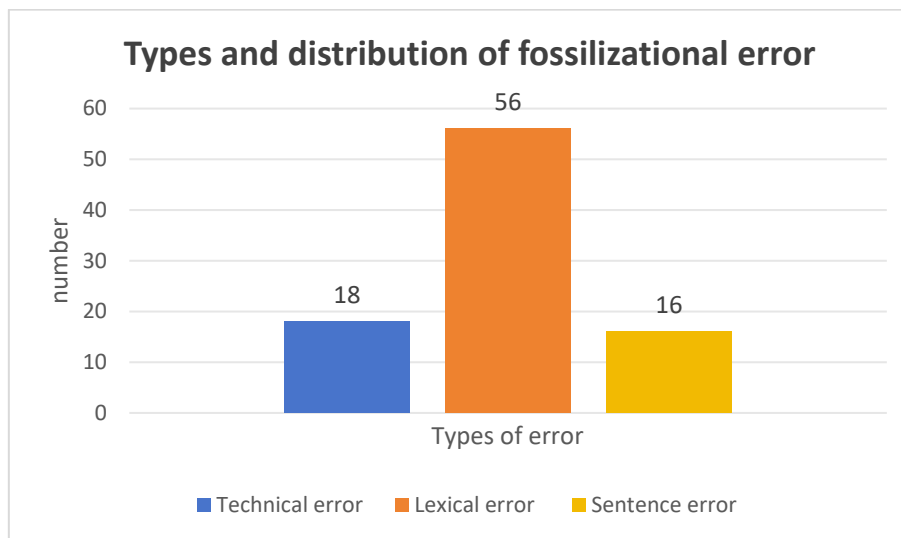


Figure 1: Types and distribution of fossilization errors

As can be seen from the figure 1, the total number of mistakes made by students is 90, and there are mistakes in the three categories of mistakes: technical mistakes, vocabulary mistakes and sentence mistakes. It can be seen from the figure that the main category of mistakes made by students is vocabulary mistakes, indicating that students' major fossilization occurs in vocabulary. In addition, the main mistakes students make are lexical mistakes, including the misuse of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositions and conjunctions.

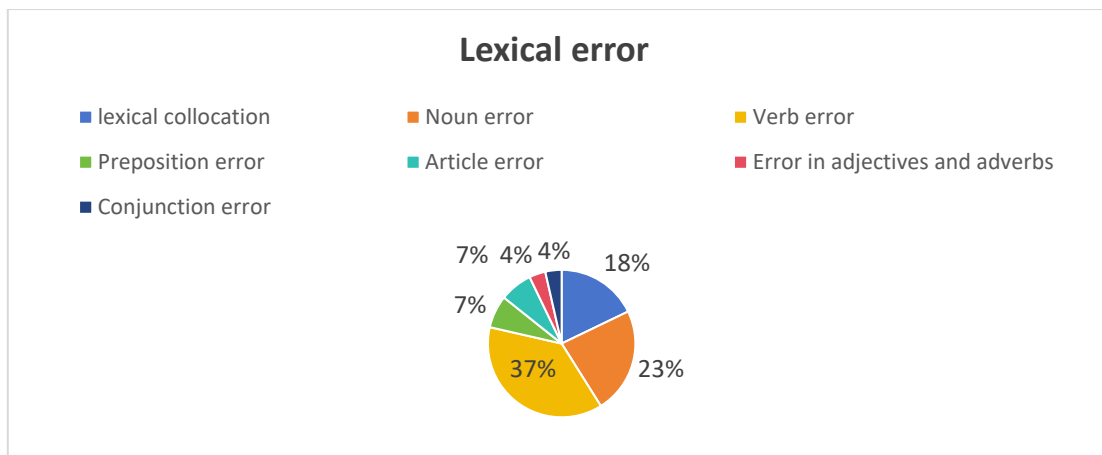


Figure 2: Distribution of lexical errors

As can be seen from the figure 2, students' vocabulary mistakes mainly occur in verb mistakes, and verb mistakes account for 37% of all mistakes. Verbs have the most varied forms in English and are the most difficult part in foreign language learning. There are two reasons for this: First, there are differences in expressions between Chinese and English due to different language habits. There are 16 tenses in English expression, each of which is different, becoming past usually has the suffix "-ed", the present continuous is the suffix "-ing", and the past participle and past tense is the suffix "-ed". In addition to the general rules, there are special variations. The next most common mistake is the collocation of nouns and words. Noun and word collocation problems accounted for 23% and 18% of the total, respectively. Nouns play an important role in English expression. Generally speaking, in English and Chinese, there are many similarities in terms of noun definition, classification and category, but there are many differences in the way of writing. In students' continuing compositions, the most common noun mistakes are single and plural errors. Many students are not familiar with the rules of the change of single and plural nouns, or the change form of nouns, which will lead to students' writing mistakes, which will not be corrected for a long time, resulting in fossilization. Vocabulary collocation is generally a fixed collocation formed by the requirements of vocabulary usage and the habits formed by long-term use. General students do not understand the specific usage of vocabulary and have inaccurate memory of vocabulary collocation, which leads to repeated mistakes. The remaining four kinds of article errors, preposition errors, conjunctions errors, adjectives and adverbs errors accounted for 7%, 7%, 4% and 4% respectively. Compared with the mastery of nouns and verbs, students have a better grasp of articles, prepositions, conjunctions, adjectives and adverbs.

To sum up, the main reasons for students' vocabulary mistakes in English writing include:

First, errors caused by negative transfers in language transfers. Interlingual error is a kind of error caused by language transfer, which is influenced by the student's mother tongue. For example, Chinese people do not have the relevant single and plural expressions for nouns, but only use the degree adverb to express the number of modifiers, so Chinese people do not pay special attention to the plural of nouns, and writing English often can not distinguish the form of nouns single and plural.

Secondly, there are some mistakes in English because some concepts are completely abstract in Chinese, such as articles.

Finally, errors caused by intralingual negative transfer. Intralingual errors are caused by the interference of the target language system or incomplete learning of the target language system. They are part of the rule system of the target language and are the language that has been internalized by the students. However, the target language cannot be fully used due to inaccuracy or incomplete understanding. For example, a misunderstanding of the words used in English can lead to biased generalizations.

5. Discussion

The fossilization phenomenon mainly occurs in the stage of students' relatively good command of English, which is a stagnant stage when students' ability is getting closer to the target language. There are several reasons why students' vocabulary fossilization can not be improved.

First of all, students are not interested enough in English writing, and there is a psychological rejection. Although many students are well aware of the importance of English writing, they want to work hard to improve their writing level. However, in the process of writing, the unsatisfactory performance will strike students' self-confidence and produce negative emotions of avoiding and rejecting English writing, thus weakening their enthusiasm for English writing and causing stagnation in English writing.

Secondly, students do not have good English writing habits and lack effective writing strategies. Many students often present their ideas in Chinese characters, which causes confusion in word order, Chinglish problems, and hinders the improvement of their English. And most people simply add some concluding words to meet the word count requirement. Using this writing method will make the structure of the article chaotic, and the word arrangement is unbalanced. In addition, it is easier to ignore the key content, resulting in the failure of writing. Although most students have good organization and presentation skills, only a minority can use the words and phrases they have mastered effectively. This is why errors in voice, compound sentences, cohesion, and so on are not common. Through effective checking, spelling, capitalization and punctuation errors can be significantly reduced, however, a minority of students still neglect this important aspect.

Finally, students can not consciously correct mistakes and can not correctly classify mistakes. Although most students agree that correcting mistakes in writing is an effective method, very few students can actively use their notebooks to sort out mistakes and generalize good language. Most students think that their writing skills are not good enough, which leads to their writing mistakes. They do not realize that the root cause of these mistakes may be their lack of language skills, writing strategies that are not flexible enough, and single thoughts and emotions. They lack the ability to reflect on and categorize their writing mistakes, and they do not take the initiative to correct them.

6. Teaching Suggestions

Fossilization is an inevitable phenomenon in second language acquisition. Language rigidity exists in all aspects of language learning. Once fossilization occurs, it is a deep-rooted problem. In English writing, fossilization generally exists in the aspects of discourse, grammar, syntax and vocabulary. Vocabulary as the most basic writing unit, once rigid, will greatly hinder the improvement of writing ability. The study focuses on the continuous English writing of sophomore students, focusing on the analysis of the specific content of fossilization phenomenon, in order to avoid the trap of continuous English writing. In addition, according to the analysis results of students' fossilization phenomenon, the following teaching suggestions are put forward for teachers.

1) Provide a diversified output environment: The effective combination of input and output is the key to learning a foreign language well. In teaching, teachers adopt a variety of teaching methods and create different contexts, and help students understand the use of vocabulary in specific contexts through examples and situational explanations. Such as games, role playing, practical activities, so that students can use vocabulary in different contexts, improve the flexible use of vocabulary. Only in writing can students effectively output and reduce the probability of making mistakes.

2) Provide a variety of error correction strategies: Teacher's error correction feedback is an important part of second language acquisition, and plays a crucial role in correcting students' vocabulary mistakes and avoiding vocabulary rigidity. Error correction can make students' use of interlanguage more and more standardized and closer to the target language system. For students' good vocabulary, teachers should give timely feedback and give students full affirmation, so as to increase students' enthusiasm and confidence in learning. Teachers should also explain and correct in time, check and consolidate in time. There are three kinds of error correction methods: teacher error correction, peer error correction and self-correction. Teacher error correction is one of the most important methods, but peer error correction and self-correction should also be adopted in the process of error correction, which can reduce the occurrence of negative transfer of mother tongue, improve the language level of students, and improve the fossilization of interlanguage.

7. Conclusions

Lexical fossilization is an inevitable phenomenon in the development from the interlanguage stage to the target language. The study pays attention to students' fossilization phenomenon and gives teaching suggestions, hoping to help students improve their English writing ability. In addition, the research time is short and the research materials are less. It is expected that more materials will be collected in future

studies and more accurate conclusions will be drawn.

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