Error Analysis of College Students' Spoken English

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Abstract—**Based on the theory of Error Analysis, this thesis records the production of spoken English of first year college students of Northwestern Polytechnical University as samples. After listening to the recorder repeatedly and carefully, the author classifies and describes the errors found in the corpus, investigates the causes of these errors and provides solutions to these problems. It is found that there are errors of performance, phonological errors, lexical errors, grammatical errors and pragmatic errors in this study. Reasons for these errors can be explained from the perspectives of interlingual transfer, intralingual interference, cognitive and affective factors, and communicative strategies. Accordingly, some countermeasures could be taken to effectively decrease errors.**

Index Terms—**Errors, spoken English, error analysis.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Along with the globalization and multi-polarization, English as a universal language has a profound significance for communication and cultural exchanges. In particular, high proficiency in spoken English helps speakers gain some advantages in job-hunting and job promotion in an international company, international business negotiation and academic exchanges. However, Chinese college students still have a low level of oral proficiency in English after having studied English for more than nine years. When speaking English, Chinese students commit various errors. In fact, errors are a blessing in disguise. Learning is a process of committing errors and correcting errors, and then learners make progress. The study of linguistic errors benefits teachers, learners as well as researchers.

For students whose majors are not English, they do not have abundant opportunities to speak English. Fortunately, the oral English class provides a perfect place for students to speak with their teachers and classmates in English. Therefore, this paper focuses on their language production in the oral English class, and the oral speech collected in this study is natural and first-hand, representing their true oral proficiency in English.

Since Corder [1] published his article *The Significance of Learners' Error* in 1967, error analysis has attracted great attention. Based on the theory of Error Analysis, this paper collects samples of college students' spoken English, and intends to identify the types of errors in this sample, causes of these errors as well as approaches to decrease errors.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS

A. *Errors* and *Mistakes*

Errors can not be avoided in the process of language learning. However, when identifying errors, people are confused about the distinction between errors and mistakes. According to Corder [1], errors are some regular patterns in learners' speech, which are consistently different from the target language model. Richard [2] defines errors as the use of a language item in a way in which native speakers or fluent language users of the language regard as showing incomplete or false learning. According to the definition by Rod Ellis [3], errors are deviations from the norms of the target language.

On the other hand, mistakes are different from errors. Mistakes occur when learners fail to perform their competence. Mistakes are self-correctable because learners know the correct form. James [4] adopts the concept "intentionality" to define mistakes. In his opinion, a mistake is either intentional or unintentional deviant or self-corrigible while an error is an unintentional deviant and is not self-corrigible by its author.

B. *Definition of Error Analysis*

The study of Error Analysis (EA) resulted from the limitations of Contrastive Analysis (CA). According to Corder [5], EA is a bilingual comparison between learners' interlanguage and target language, which describes the language system of second language learners. It is a methodology which investigates language learning from the perspective of psycholinguistics, and helps teachers or learners take remedial action to correct an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

C. *Classification of Errors*

Richards [6] divides errors into three types: interference errors, intralingual errors and developmental errors.

From the perspective of a teacher's knowledge of his or her students, Edge [7] classifies errors into slips, errors and attempts.

Based on who should be blamed for the commitment of errors, Hammerly [8] classifies the neutral form deviance into four types: learner distortion, mismanagement distortion, learner fault, and mismanagement fault.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen [9] propose some descriptive taxonomies of errors that focus on observable, surface features of errors: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering.

Politzer and Ramirez [10] start with more general categories: morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. This classification allows for a detailed description of specific errors and also for a quantification of a corpus of errors.

Corder [1] proposes the errors of performance and errors of competence. Later, he further identifies three types of errors: presystematic errors, systematic errors and postsystematic errors.

In this study, the author classifies the errors based on the framework of previous scholars. Firstly, the author makes a distinction between errors of performance and errors of competence. Secondly, the author classifies the errors of competence into phonological errors, vocabulary errors, grammar errors and pragmatic errors.

D. Steps in Error Analysis

Corder [5] comes up with five steps in EA research.
1. Collection of samples of spoken language.
2. Identification of errors.
3. Description of errors.
4. Explanation of errors.
5. Evaluation of errors.

This paper adopts the above steps but excludes the fifth step, that is, the evaluation of errors.

E. Previous Studies on Error Analysis in SLA

In 1957, Robert Lado [11] published his work *linguistics Across Culture* which investigated the effect of the native language of foreign learners on foreign language learning. In the late 1960s, cognitive psychology dominated the error research on the ground that a massive number of experiments had proved that errors were not only resulted from the mother tongue interference. After that, EA became more popular. In 1970s and 1980s, EA waxed important to analyze linguistic errors of learners, and most researches mainly focused on the collection, identification, description and evaluation of errors. Generally, EA has been applied to foreign language teaching with the purpose of improving language pedagogy, especially English writing and grammar teaching. However, the studies on oral English are still scant.

In the present study, mistakes are regarded as the performance errors, which are failures in successful performance of one's knowledge. Errors are deviance from the correct form of the target language because learners do not know what is correct. However, there is no absolute boundary between errors and mistakes. Even Corder himself admits that it is rather difficult to tell the difference between mistakes and errors. The present study can not dispel the possibility of putting mistakes and errors into the same label.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

The author intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the error types of spoken English of these college students?

2. What are the main sources underlying students' spoken errors?

3. What are the countermeasures against college students' spoken errors?

B. Research Subjects

The subjects of the study are 51 freshmen in Northwestern Polytechnical University. Their first language is Chinese and they have studied English more than nine years. Their major is aerospace. The author selected samples from the oral communication in class among 51 students of NPU in the second semester of 2020-2021. The requirement for students in the English class is to speak English whenever they want to speak. The samples are collected from presentations of group work, dialogues of pair work, answers to questions raised by teachers, questions raised to teachers, and communication with teachers or classmates.

C. Research Procedures

Based on the five stages in EA research proposed by Corder, the author proceeds with the study in the following steps.

Firstly, the author went to the classroom on every Tuesday's and Friday's afternoon as a teaching assistant to collect a number of samples by using a recorder. Every lesson lasts 90 minutes and the author records the content of ten lessons. That means, the author has made a tape lasting for nearly 900 minutes.

Secondly, the author listens to the tape repeatedly and transcribes all the errors from the tape into written sentences. When identifying an error, the author refers to other authoritative books, professors and native speakers of English to achieve the correct identification of errors.

Thirdly, the author categorizes all the errors found in the sample. All the errors are classified into errors of performance and errors of competence. Then based on the linguistic descriptions proposed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen [9], errors of competence are further divided into errors of phonology, errors of vocabulary, errors of grammar and errors of pragmatics.

Fourthly, due to the limited space, the author only lists part of the error samples to give a further analysis.

Fifthly, the author explores the reasons for these errors. This study investigates the causes of errors from the perspectives of interlingual transfer, intralingual interference, affective and cognitive factors, and communicative strategies. Then the study concludes with possible countermeasures against those spoken errors.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Description of Errors

Errors in this study are divided into errors of performance and errors of competence.

1) Errors of performance

Errors of performance result from the failure in language use. Language users actually know the correct knowledge but they commit mistakes such as repeats, false starts, or self-corrections. For example:

Third, uh...uh...Chinese...we...Chinese...uh...we Chinese food is mainly based on animals and grains.
That is the most, em, em, it is so wonderful.
I hope, I hope (long pause) I can contribute to the construction of our country.

Non-fluency probably is not considered to be an error, but they still influence the communication and thus should be taken into consideration. As the above examples show, speakers use several hesitation fillers to fill up their utterances.

When people are tired, nervous or do not pay enough attention to the form of their utterances, they may make a slip which is a careless mistake. For example:

It is a quite big differences, uh... difference.
During the winter holiday, our family usually, em, go to shopping...uh...go shopping.

The above examples show the phenomenon of slips which happens when the author can self-correct his mistakes. When people are producing words, they actually monitor their production continuously. If the speaker has enough time, correct knowledge and adequate attention to the form of the language, he can correct his mistakes. Therefore, the error belongs to the errors of performance.

Although listeners can finally understand speakers' opinion, and probably it does not impede people's communication, if it occurs too frequently, it will undermine the language system of speakers, as well as make listeners uncomfortable and irritated.

2) Errors of competence

This study subdivides errors of competence into errors of pronunciation, errors of vocabulary, errors of grammar, and errors of pragmatics.

a) Errors of pronunciation

Some English pronunciation can not find its counterpart in Chinese, and some pronunciation is similar in the two languages but they are not identical, causing confusion to Chinese students.

By the classroom observation, the author finds that the subjects commit various errors in pronunciation.

i. Mispronunciation of stress. For example:

The hotel will not compensate /kɒm'penseɪt/ (✗) /'kɒmpenseɪt/ (√) for it.

Firstly, I will introduce the publicity /pʌblɪ'city/ (✗) /pʌb'lɪsətɪ/ (√) of the promotion to you.

It reflects economic /i:'kənɒmɪk/ (✗) /i:kə'nɒmɪk/ (√) development.

I have been to Thailand. /taɪ'land/(✗) /'taɪlənd) (√)

The study finds that students usually make errors in pronunciation of stress in the polysyllabic words. Though there are rules regarding the stress, many words are exceptions, causing a great challenge to foreign learners. What's more, students do not have enough time to recall the rules at the moment of utterance if they do not internalize the pronunciation.

ii. Errors of substitution

Chinese students confuse /s/ with /θ/, /z/ with /ð/, /s/ with /z/, and the long vowel with a short vowel. They pronounce "sheep" as "ship", "hear" as "hit", and so on. For example:

The third /sɜːrd/(✗) / θɜːrd/(√) one is a double room.

Chinese dorm is designed /dɪ'saɪn/(✗) /dɪ'zaɪn/(√) for six.

Due to the lack of counterparts of /θ/ and /ð/ in Chinese, students always find similar ones to replace them whenever these two phonemes occur.

iii. Mispronunciations of some words. For example:

To bring a small bag, you can put your ID card and clothes /kləʊsɪz/(✗) /kləʊðz/(√) in it.

The most expensive room is the presidential suite /sju:t/(✗) /swi:t/(√).

But in some formal occasions, such as wedding... /'waɪdɪŋ/(✗) /'wedɪŋ/(√)

We have luxury room.../'lʊkʃərɪ/(✗) /'lʌkʃərɪ/(√)

We provide all kinds of service you want, such as buffet./bʌfɪt/(✗) /'bʊfeɪ/ (√)

As can be seen from the above examples, "suite" and "suit" are similar in form and then students just assume they have the same pronunciation. The word "buffet" is pronounced differently when it is used as different word classes. In this case it is a noun and should be pronounced as /'bʊfeɪ/.

b) Errors of vocabulary

Errors of vocabulary are analyzed from the formal level and the semantic level. The former refers to the errors of choices of words coming from the same stem. The latter deals with errors in the sense relation. The following examples are selected from the samples of the classroom observation.

i. Lexical errors at the formal level

Example: *You can do everything you want, include (including) singing.*

(Note: the words in the parentheses are the correct form, the same below.)

The word "include" is a verb while "including" is a preposition which means having something as part of a group or set. In this sentence, "do" acts as the verb and thus preposition "including" is needed to give more information.

Example: *And the tablewares (tableware) is usually a set of forks and knives.*

Obviously, here the student confuses the countable noun with the uncountable noun and he chooses the wrong one. In English, tableware which refers to items used in meals is uncountable and thus it is not allowed to add plural suffix "s".

Example: *Still, I hope you can treat each other friendly (in a friendly way).*

Generally, words with suffix "-ly" are adverbs. However, the word "friendly" is an exception, that is, it is an adjective. So it is incorrect to use the adjective "friendly" to modify the verb "treat".

Example: *Why do I have to attend to (x) this boring meeting?*

When "attend" is used to express the meaning that someone is present at an event, it should not be followed by the preposition "to". The phrase "attend to" means dealing with or taking care of somebody or something. Therefore, "to" in this sentence should be deleted.

ii. Lexical errors at the semantic level

Example: *By far, I have not gone aboard (abroad), but I have met many foreigners in my hometown.*

The phrase "go abroad" means being in or to a foreign country whereas the phrase "go aboard" refers to being on or onto a ship, plane, bus or train. Accordingly, here the speaker wants to express the former meaning and thus the proper word is "abroad" in this context. Because of the similarity in the form of these two words, the student just confuses them.

Example: *If you think something is wrong, you may arise (raise) questions.*

In this sentence, the speaker should have used the word "raise" to co-occur with the word "question" rather than the word "arise". Due to the similarity in the form between the two words, that is, they can refer to the occurrence of something, it is difficult for students to make a distinction between them.

Example: *Internet promotion is used to convey more information and sell good (goods) and service.*

Based on the linguistic context of this sentence, the speaker is talking about things that are produced to be sold. Therefore, the needed word is "goods". Though the words "good" and "goods" are very similar in form, their meanings are totally different.

c) *Errors of grammar*

In this study, grammar errors are divided into Chinglish errors, disagreement errors, disorder of structure, and misuse of tense and voice.

i. *Chinglish errors*

Chinglish is also a kind of grammatical error. Due to the differences between English and Chinese, Chinese learners subconsciously use English based on the linguistic habit of their mother tongue.

Example: student A: *Why don't you open it?*

Student B: *Open it? Why?*

Student A: *No why (No reason).*

In the above example, the response from student A is a literal translation of Chinese expression "meiyou (no) weishenme (why)". Native speakers of English will use " no reason" to express the same meaning.

ii. *Misuse of tense and voice*

There are sixteen tenses and two kinds of voices in English, which poses a great challenge for EFL learners to study. By way of changing the form of a verb, different tenses and voices can be achieved. However, in actual use, learners always have difficulty in having a good command of various tenses and voices.

Example: *You can relax yourself after you doing (have done) some physical activities.*

The present perfect tense is used to show an action done in a time period up to the present. Here it is supposed to adopt the present perfect tense to describe the impact of physical activities on the present condition.

Example: *I wish I grow up (grew up) in the countryside.*

When the word "wish" means wanting something to happen to be true even though it is unlikely or impossible, the clause concerned should adopt subjunctive mood, and thus the verb "grow" should appear in its past tense, i.e. grew.

Example: *In primary school, our teacher told us that the earth moved (moves) around the sun.*

When a subordinate clause states natural phenomena, its tense should adopt the simple present tense without being influenced by the tense of the main clause. Accordingly, the correct form of "move" is "moves" in this sentence.

iii. *Disorder of structure*

Influenced by mother tongue or incomplete knowledge of target knowledge, students make sentences which do not conform to the grammatical rules.

Example: *There is a shuttle bring (bringing) you to our hotel.*

In English, the present particles can be used as postpositive attributives. The present particle of "bring" should have been adopted to modify the word "shuttle", showing an active state.

Example: *I think he is not smart. (I don't think he is smart.)*

In English, when the verb of a sentence is "think", and the subject is the first person pronoun, the negation should be transferred to negate the predicate verb.

iv. *Disagreement errors*

In oral production, students always neglect the agreement between subjects and predicts or other related agreements between two parts.

Example: *He is one of my favorite movie star (stars).*

Obviously, this sentence is wrong. The speaker is talking about only one movie star but there are many other movie stars about whom he is crazy. Accordingly, it is supposed to adopt the plural form of "star".

Example: *What you have eaten are (is) not enough.*

In this sentence, the nominal clause "what you have eaten" is the subject of the whole sentence. According to the grammar, it belongs to the singular form.

Example: *My roommate, together with his sister and grandmother, like (likes) watching TV very much.*

The subject of this sentence is "my roommate" which is a singular form. Although this sentence also mentions other persons, the verb should be in accordance with the subject by adopting the singular form.

d) *Errors of pragmatics*

Pragmatic errors often refer to the communicative errors or communicative failures, which result from the linguistically and culturally inappropriate utterances. Unlike linguistic errors, pragmatic errors are not easy to discern.

Example: Student A: T*eacher, do we have homework this week?*

In Chinese, it is very common to address people by their surname plus their profession, whereas in English, it is more natural to address people by adding "Mr, Miss, Mrs" before their surname as well as calling their name directly. In English, it is not acceptable to address people by using such forms as Bella teacher. Lack of knowledge of social conventions will trap students into the addressing problems.

There is another example concerning the pragmatic failure. One day when the teacher was going to start the lesson, some students looked very tired and were not ready for the class. The teacher asked them: "Are you sleepy?" Students answered: "Yes, very sleepy." This answer was correct from the grammatical aspect but not appropriate from the pragmatic perspective. In this case, students did not understand the implied meaning of the teacher's utterance. The teacher's real purpose is to remind students of their slack attitude in class, and the proper answer should be: "we are sorry."

The author also found that students observed always use the discourse marker " I think" to start a sentence. Discourse markers refer to the independent words or phrases which contribute little to the meaning of the sentences but can organize the discourse to express the speaker's communicative purpose. Adequate use of discourse markers can fill the gap of utterances. However, overuse of the same discourse marker results in the verbosity and non-fluency of the discourse.

Example: *I think college students should take a part-time job. It is very... I think it brings us a lot of benefits. In terms of voluntary activities, I think they are meaningful.*

As can be seen from the sentence, the student uses the discourse marker "I think" to revise and organize his utterances. However, too much use of "I think" makes the sentence redundant and influences the fluency of utterances.

B. Explanation of Errors

In this part, the author analyzes the causes of the errors.

1) Interlingual transfer

Interlingual transfer means that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meaning of their native language to the foreign language and culture. There are positive transfer and negative transfer. Considering that Chinese and English are from different language families, the negative language transfer can be great.

In terms of phonology, some students pronounce $/\theta/$, $/ð/$, as /s/, /z/ respectively in that there are no dental fricatives in Chinese. Moreover, since Chinese syllables are formed by a

consonant and a vowel, when there is a combination of vowels and consonants in English, Chinese students tend to commit some errors of deletion in pronunciation to make the pronunciation easier. For example, they pronounce /əʊ/ as /ʊ/, /aɪ/ as /ɪ/.

When it comes to vocabulary, some errors arise because Chinese students translate L1 into L2 without considering its forms. In Chinese, different parts of speech, cases and numbers can be expressed by one single form. However, in English, the form of a word changes as its linguistic context changes. Therefore, it causes confusion to Chinese students as to which form should be adopted. What is more, Chinese only has several prepositions to collocate with different objects whereas in English, there are so many prepositions used in different occasions, which challenges Chinese students significantly. The fact that there is no equivalence in Chinese to the articles in English also poses a difficulty in English learning.

Moreover, Chinese is meaning-centered whereas English is form-centered. Chinese uses specific characters to indicate plurality, tense and voice. On the contrary, English exhibits the tense and voice by changing the form of words. So Chinese students always omit the plural ending of nouns and third person singular ending of verbs as well as use the incorrect form of tense and voice.

Negative cultural transfer is also accountable for the errors found in pragmatics. Chinese people value modesty and collective interest whereas westerners emphasize self-confidence and individualism. The Chinese thinking patterns cause misunderstandings in language use, such as the refusal to foreigners' compliments and inappropriate form of address.

2) Intralingual interference

When analyzing these errors, the author finds that some errors can not be explained by L1 transfer. In fact, these errors are produced by the negative transfer within the target language. They are made due to the language being learned, independent of the native language. Richard [6] identified four sub-types of intralingual interference: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, false concepts hypothesized.

i.   Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization means that language users have acquired certain rules and they know how to apply these rules but they ignore some exceptions to the rules and apply the rule in a similar context.

Example: *I think his participation is undispensable (indispensable).*

Generally, we add prefix "un" to indicate the meaning of "opposite" or the reverse side, and it is true that many words are formed in this way, such as "unimportant", "unnecessary", "unrelated". However, it is not true of the word "dispensable". The student just overgeneralizes the rule, and then an error occurs.

Example: *I spreaded (spread) a cloth on the table.*

In most cases, the form of the past tense is to add "ed" at the end of a word. But there are some exceptions. The past tense of "spread" is an irregular inflection, that is, spread. The student commits this error because of overgeneralization of the rule of inflection.

ii.   Ignorance of rule restrictions

Ignorance of rule restrictions means that language users apply certain rules to contexts in which these rules are not suitable. In this case, speakers have learned part of the rules and they do not realize the restriction of existing structure. It is often caused by the use of analogy on the part of learners.

Example: *The official charged the man of (with) murder.*

The words "accuse" and "charge" have the same meaning of reporting somebody who commits a crime so that there can be a trial in court, while they have different collocations. The speaker only notices their similarity without realizing their different prepositions.

iii.   Incomplete application of rules

Incomplete application of rules refers to that learners fail to learn the more complex types of structures. In this case, learners find that they can achieve communication by using relatively simple structures.

Example: *I can not recall where is the bookstore. (where the bookstore is.)*

It is obvious that the student has acquired the interrogative formation: select the right wh-element and front it. However, the speaker does not invert subject and verb.

Example: *I want to buy a yellow big (big yellow) bag.*

When there are several adjectives before a noun, the modifiers indicating size usually precede the modifiers indicating color. The speaker has learned that these adjectives should be put before the noun, but he ignores the order among the adjectives.

iv.   False concepts hypothesized.

In the development of learners' interlanguage, they sometimes falsely form their own rule, which results from the incorrect comprehension of their target language.

Example: *Maybe it is because that (x) their food resource is related to their nomadic background.*

In this sentence, "because" is used as the conjunction, and consequently, there is no need to adopt another conjunction "that". The student puts emphasis on the coherence of the sentence but ignores the redundancy of the sentence structure. This may result from the speaker's misunderstanding of the existing knowledge:"because" is used as a conjunction referring to "for the reason that"; "that" is used to introduce a new part of the sentence.

3) Errors of cognitive and affective factors

Cognitive and affective factors also account for the errors speakers commit, especially errors of performance. Learners' personality, intelligence, learning motivation, learning interest, psychological state, to name just a few, can greatly influence their language production.

One of the most common factors is test anxiety. Although teachers try to establish a harmonious atmosphere in the classroom, students still can not totally be at ease. When students have to make presentations or report their homework to their teachers and classmates, they unavoidably feel nervous, and consequently, repetition, false start or hesitation appears.

Furthermore, for some extroverted learners, they are confident, and they care little about making errors. On the contrary, for the introverted learners, their speech may be halting and they tend to use easy and familiar expressions to avoid errors. They learn target language carefully but their language proficiency may be developed in a rather slow way in that they are unwilling to exchange with others. For those students who have strong motivation to learn *English, their language proficiency can be improved effectively. Learners who hold* passive learning attitude may only grasp an i*ncomplete language system and thus make more errors.*

4) Errors of communicative strategies

It is common to see that during a conversation, if the speaker can not find an accurate word to express himself or herself, he or she may resort to other communicative strategies to proceed with the conversation, such as word-coinage, literal translation and appeal to authority.

Example: *People can get a discount if they can pay the earliest money (pay the deposit).*

In this case, the speaker does not know or can not immediately recall the word referring to a sum of money that is given as the first part of a larger payment. And then he adopts the strategy of word-coinage. However, it does not work in this context in that foreigners can not understand him and it may result in communicative failure.

Example: *Every afternoon, I have a small sleep in our dormitory (take a nap).*

The student adopts the strategy of literal translation to express the meaning of "nap". Although listeners can understand his idea, it is inappropriate and unnatural in the communication.

C. Countermeasures of Reducing the Oral Errors

After exploring the causes of the errors speakers commit, the author comes up with possible solutions to decrease the errors, improving both English learning and teaching.

1) Reducing interlingual transfer

Firstly, learners could try to immerse themselves in the natural L2 learning environment. If it is impossible to live in the country of the target language, learners could read materials in target language to learn some idiomatic expressions, marvellous sayings and quotable sentences. After the long period of accumulation, learners may gradually attenuate the mother tongue interference. Secondly, learners should have the awareness of the differences in Chinese and English. In terms of phonology, learners should learn the correct pronunciation of each sound based on the muscles, organs concerned and articulation. They should not produce English sounds in light of the muscular habits of their mother tongue. If learners confront some formal similarities in a certain language point of the two languages, they should not be hasty to make a conclusion of their equivalence but give a second thought. Last but not least, some cultural background knowledge of the target language is a must. To communicate with native speakers appropriately and successfully, learners should also know some social conventions and cultural connotations.

On the part of teachers, the method of contrast is an effective approach to elucidate the differences between the mother tongue and the target language. Be it in phonology, vocabulary, grammar, or pragmatics, teachers could make a contrast to help learners better realize the differences between the mother tongue and the target language. What's more, teachers could assign some tasks to students, such as recitation, summary of a passage in target language, and imitation, all of which provide an effective way for knowledge accumulation. In addition to language teaching, introduction of western culture is also indispensable. Teachers could impart some information about western history, social customs, thinking mode and some other aspects to help students better decrease the influence of Chinese thinking mode.

2) Reducing intralingual interference

Intralingual errors are mainly caused by partial knowledge of target language. As for phonology, learners should learn the correct pronunciation and avoid confusing one with another. When it comes to vocabulary learning, students should learn a new word in a certain context, and then they can learn how to use the word in various contexts appropriately. Learners can put the words in sentences or passages to memorize rather than learn their literal translation in Chinese. And it is more beneficial to use the English-English dictionary. When studying a new grammatical point, learners should try to gain a correct and comprehensive picture. After learning it, students can adopt different ways to consolidate the language point by writing, reading, or retelling.

3) Other implications

As have been mentioned, cognitive and affective factors could also have an impact on committing errors. If students are anxious and/or diffident, they tend to make more errors. Therefore, teachers should contrive to create a positive atmosphere in language teaching and learning, such as the sense of security, pleasure, achievement and ease. As to errors of performance, teachers should not over-correct them in that too much emphasis on form may impede fluency. As to some recurrent errors of competence, teachers should choose the proper time and occasion to correct. It is of vital significance for teachers to pour attention to students' self-esteem, emotions and self-confidence. What is more, the way of correction is also important. Explicit denial to students' answer is not advocated on the supposition that it may discourage students from being more confident to express themselves. It is advisable that teachers adopt several implicit ways to correct students' errors. The first one is self-correction which provides students another chance for them to re-experience the language and reflect on their language use. The second one is peer-correction which makes students less dependent on teachers and helps learners realize to what extent their production is comprehensible to their fellows. The third one is teacher-correction. When all of the present learners do not know the correct answer, teachers could play the primary role of error correction.

Anyway, from the perspective of teachers, the top priority is to encourage students to study harder and better.

V. Conclusion

By transcribing all the errors from the tape into the written form, the study has the following findings.

Firstly, errors in this study are classified into errors of performance and errors of competence. Errors of performance include repeats, false starts and self-corrections.

Secondly, errors of competence found in this study can be classified into phonological errors, lexical errors, grammatical errors and pragmatic errors.

Thirdly, four major sources are responsible for these errors: interlingual transfer, intralingual interference, cognitive and affective factors, and communicative strategies.

Fourthly, through revealing the errors and causes, there are measures to actively decrease the errors. From the perspective of students, they should have the awareness of language differences and adopt some effective study strategies. From the perspective of teachers, they should make the confusing language points clear by comparison. It is also important for teachers to strike a balance between accuracy and fluency, and correct errors in proper time and place.

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