

# A Survey and Analysis of the Linguistic Accuracy of High School Practical English Writing

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## Abstract:

Linguistic accuracy is an important aspect in practical writing. Analyzing the errors in students' practical writing and investigating the causes of the errors help teachers understand the learning situation and improve their teaching. Therefore, this study selects 64 students in senior three class A of a key high school in Hubei Province as the research subjects to analyze the problems in language expression based on the requirements of The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools, and to explore the in-depth reasons and propose corresponding countermeasures.

## Keywords:

High School Practical English Writing, Linguistic Accuracy, Survey

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## 1. Introduction

In practical writing, linguistic accuracy is a significant aspect that cannot be ignored. If the language is inappropriate or the words do not convey the meaning, it is easy to cause ambiguity and make mistakes. An inaccurate word, sentence, data, or even a punctuation mark may cause misunderstanding or disputes [1]. Therefore, it is highly necessary to improve the accuracy of students' language expression in practical writing. However, the current situation of high school students' practical writing is not optimistic. There are many problems in language expression, such as spelling errors, misuse of parts of speech, improper choice of words, incorrect tense and voice, misuse of subordinate clause guiding words, semantic incoherence and so on. It is an urgent problem to improve the accuracy of students' language expressions in practical writing.

How to improve the accuracy of students' language expressions in practical writing is an urgent problem in English teaching at present. To solve these problems, we have to focus on the typical errors in students' work and analyze the reasons for their errors in order to find the appropriate methods for foreign language teaching. Therefore, this study selects 64 students in senior three class A of a key high school in Hubei Province as the research subjects to analyze and categorize the errors in their compositions, and then discuss the reasons for these errors in order to provide some

implications to English teaching, thus helping students to improve the linguistic accuracy of their practical writing.

## 2. Linguistic Accuracy

As one of the important indicators to measure a student's language level, accuracy reflects the learner's ability to use language and can be used to measure the progress of the learner's language learning. Different scholars have different definitions of linguistic accuracy. Foster and Skehan (1996) believe that accuracy focuses on error-free, which is the learner's ability to produce error-free language, which reflects the learner's attention to language form and mastery of grammar rules [2]. Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998) consider accuracy as the degree of deviation of the interlanguage form from the standard form of the target language [3]. The smaller the deviation, the deeper the learner's mastery of the various systems and elements of the target language, and the higher the accuracy. Yuan and Ellis (2003) believe that accuracy is the ability of learners to produce language according to the rules and standards of the target language, and is the degree to which the output language is consistent with the target language target [4].

The new college entrance examination practical writing requires students to use vocabulary and grammatical structure accurately according to the stylistic characteristics and the information given by the topic, and express their thoughts clearly and coherently around the theme of the article. Based on the above reason, this study combines the relevant requirements of the new curriculum standards for students' English writing skills and the new college entrance examination practical article scoring standards (Appendix 3) to define linguistic accuracy from two aspects: grammar and discourse: grammar mainly considers lexical accuracy and Syntactic accuracy; discourse mainly considers whether it is relevant, whether key points are missing, cohesion and coherence, etc. Among them, lexical accuracy is mainly reflected in spelling, singular and plural, whether words are appropriate, collocation, etc.; syntactic accuracy is mainly reflected in subject-verb agreement, tense voice, word order and so on.

## 3. Research Design

### 3.1. Research questions

This study aims to answer the following two research questions:

What problems do high school students have with linguistic accuracy in practical writing? Which problem is most prominent?

What measures can be taken to improve the linguistic accuracy of students' practical writing?

Based on the above problems, this paper first analyzed and categorized the errors in students' compositions, then made statistics on the frequency of each kind of error, gave a specific description of its characteristics, and finally talked about the implications for teaching according to the causes of the errors.

### 3.2. Research subjects

The subjects of this study were 64 students from Class A, Senior Three of a key high school in Jingzhou, Hubei Province. In the final examination of the first semester

of senior three, their average score of practical English writing is 9.73 (full score is 15), with a score rate of 64.87%.

After two years of English learning in senior one and senior two, students have a better understanding of English practical writing and have a certain ability of English practical writing. Besides, students are currently under the pressure of college entrance exams and have a greater willingness and opportunity to practice writing, which contributes to the smooth conduct of this study.

### 3.3. Data collection and analysis

The teacher asks students to write an practical compositions of at least 80 words. Students were asked to complete the compositions in 15 minutes in the classroom, during which time they were not allowed to consult a dictionary. After the compositions were collected, the teacher graded the compositions and analyzed the errors in the compositions.

#### 3.3.1. Writing requirement

I'm Li Hua. My friend Jack is addicted to Tiktok and I'm writing to ask you for help. The contents include:

- (1) To show understanding and concern.
- (2) Analyze the possible adverse effects of Tiktok on our lives.
- (3) Make specific suggestions.

Notice:

About 80 words;

Additional details may be appropriate to make the lines coherent.

The opening and closing sentences are given and are not counted in the total number of words.

Dear Jack,

I do hope my suggestions will be helpful to you. Looking forward to your good news.  
Best wishes!

yours,  
Li Hua

#### 3.3.2. Practical writing score

*Table 1. Practical Writing Score of Senior Three Class A.*

Score ranges	0-4	4-8	8-12	12-15	Total Score	15
Number of people	0	6	52	6	Average score	9.88
Proportion	0.0%	9.4%	81.3%	9.4%	Scoring rate	65.89%

There were 55 students in the class, 58 of whom scored less than 12 points in practical writing, and the lowest score was only 5.5 points, with a class average of 9.88 points, which is not a very good score for students in a key high school.

#### 3.3.3. The analysis of linguistic accuracy

The data collection of linguistic accuracy is divided into two steps: the first step counts the number and percentage of errors in each composition, and calculates the average number of errors in each composition. Through text analysis, it was found that students did well in content and structure, and there were many problems in linguistic accuracy, such as spelling errors, misuse of words, improper word selection, tense and voice errors, incorrect word order, incoherent sentences and so on (see Table 2 for details).

*Table 2. Error Analysis of Practical Writing of Class A Senior three.*

Type of Error		Number of errors	Percentage	Typical mistakes
<b>Noun</b>	Misuse of Singular and Plural	12	6.5%	I will give you some advices to get rid of this bad habit.
	Subject-verb Disagreement	8	4.3%	When you ask me for help, you has known that tiktok isn't good.
<b>Verb</b>	Tense Misuse	5	2.7%	You should find some habits which you liked.
	Voice Misuse	4	2.1%	I heard that you were abandoned yourself to tiktok.
	Misuse of Participle	12	6.5%	It would let our time goes unknowingly.
	Misspelling of Participles	4	2.1%	However, I have gotten rid of it.
<b>Adjective</b>	Misuse of Adjectives with Verbs	2	1.1%	Secondly, you should be closed to nature.
	Misuse of Adjectives with Nouns	5	2.7%	Tiktok isn't benefit to our life. In my opinion, you'd better foster a health habit.
<b>Preposition</b>	Prepositions Missing	15	8.1%	We can use other apps instead titok.
	Misuse of prepositions	16	8.6%	It make difference on our normal life.
<b>Article</b>	Article Missing	3	1.6%	On one hand, we should be firmly determined.
	Misuse of Article	5	2.7%	You'd better foster healthy habits such as playing the football, listening to the music.
<b>Clause</b>	Incomplete subordinate clauses	8	4.3%	You are so crazy about looking through tiktok so that you can't pay attention to your daily life.
	Misuse of Guide Words	3	1.6%	I know that you are feeling now.
<b>semantic</b>	Improper Use of Words	30	16.2%	Don't open your phone.
	Unclear Expression	8	4.3%	It can spend your much time on cellphone.
<b>Others</b>	Word Order Confusion	12	6.5%	However, you shouldn't put your heart in tiktok because of making your grades decreased and your attention not focused.
	Missing of Sentence Components	18	9.6%	You should far away your phone.
	Spelling Errors	3	1.6%	In consequence, opions, infections (influence), attracked,

				sporks,
	Pronouns with Ambiguous Reference	8	4.3%	As a student, it will waste our time.
	Chinglish Expressions	14	7.5%	The tiktok has many colorful things.

## 4. Results and Discussion

To help students correct their errors, teachers should conduct an in-depth analysis of students' errors, find the root causes of their errors, and then teach in a targeted approach. The analysis shows that the most frequently occurring errors are lexical errors, followed by syntactic errors and discourse errors.

### 4.1. Lexical errors

Words are the cornerstone of language learning, and without them, people cannot express themselves. Therefore, words learning is very important. However, for a long time, because students have developed the habit of memorizing words mechanically and out of context, they have only a partial understanding of many words and do not know how to use lexical expressions appropriately. There are many differences between Chinese and English vocabulary in terms of word meanings, collocations, and usage, and there are many cases of non-equivalence. If students write according to the thinking style and language rules of Chinese, they will have inappropriate expressions[5]. The main common lexical errors are as follows:

#### 4.1.1. Improper Use of Words

Many students often translate according to the literal meaning when writing, so that every word in English corresponds to every word in Chinese one by one, and the translation of some Chinese words or words is directly attached to the English words, resulting in wrong expressions. For example:

- 1) You always sink in (are addicted to) tiktok and can't get out of it.
- 2) You spend too much time in watching (browsing) tiktok.
- 3) Don't open (turn on) your phone.
- 4) Watching the phone (playing on the phone) for a long time is not good for our eyes.
- 5) You may see (look through) your phone a long time.

Due to the different cultural backgrounds of Chinese and English, many English words seem to find their equivalents in Chinese but in fact they have different connotations. For example, browsing tiktok has become a part of daily life for many people, but many students don't know how to say "Browse Tiktok" in English. They simply translate it word for word as "see/watch tiktok". In fact, to "browse tikTok" is to do a lot of browsing. The correct expression is "Browse Tiktok". Addicted to tiktok means to be addicted to tiktok, but many students translate it as "sink in tiktok". For another example, some students incorrectly expressed "turn on the phone" as "open the phone" and "play on the phone" as "see the phone/watch the phone" in their writing. These are because students do not have a deep understanding of the words, only according to the literal meaning of rote. All these are because the students do not understand the words deeply enough, and just translate them literally.

#### **4.1.2. Misuse of Singular and Plural**

There is no singular-plural nouns and subject-verb agreement in Chinese, so most Chinese students tend to ignore the singular-plural of nouns and the morphology of verbs in their writing. Most high school students are aware of the need to pay attention to the singular and plural of nouns and the morphology of verbs in English expressions. The difficulty lies in the fact that many students cannot distinguish countable nouns from uncountable nouns. For example:

- 1) You can obtain knowledges (knowledge) by reading books.
- 2) They would waste you many valuable times (time).
- 3) I will give you some advices (advice) to get rid of this bad habit.

#### **4.1.3. Misuse of part of speech**

English words is inflected while Chinese words have no obvious morphological changes, thus some students often make the mistake of misusing parts of speech. It is mainly reflected in the misuse of adjectives and verbs, for example:

- (1) Misuse of Adjectives with Nouns

Tiktok isn't benefit (beneficial) to our life.

In my opinion, you'd better foster a health (healthy) habit.

Spending too much time watching other's life will make us anxiety (anxious).

- (2) Misuse of Adjectives with Verbs

You aware of (be aware of) the harm of tiktok.

I used to interested in (be interested in) it.

#### **4.1.4. Misuse of the article**

The article are unique to English, but there are no articles in Chinese. Students with poor basic knowledge of English often bring the awareness of no articles in Chinese to English, resulting in transfer errors, so that they forget to use articles or use articles incorrectly. For example: in this sentence “You'd better foster healthy habits such as reading books, playing football, listening to the music.”, there is misuse of article. In the sentence "On one hand, we should be firmly determined." there is an omission of the article.

#### **4.1.5. Misuse of prepositions**

The misuse of prepositions is found mainly in fixed collocations, because many prepositions in English have no real meaning, so it is difficult to distinguish and remember them. For example: “We can use other apps instead tiktok.”there is a fixed expression of “instead of” in this sentence. For another example: in this sentence “It's a waste time”, The preposition “of” is left out.

#### **4.2. Syntactic errors**

English and Chinese differ greatly in syntactic structure. Chinese pays attention to parataxis while English pays attention to hypotaxis. Chinese sentence patterns are more flexible, while English sentence patterns are more strict. Students are accustomed to composing in Chinese and then translating word by word into English

during the writing process, which can easily lead to the phenomenon of negative native language transfer. For instance:

1) Subject-verb Disagreement

When you ask me for help, you has (have) known that tiktok isn't good.

Tiktok make (makes) us spend all the time watching it.

2) Misuse of Tense and Voice

I heard that you were abandoned yourself to tiktok.

I believe you will be succeed (succeed).

3) Word Order Confusion

I have learned about your problem is that you can't stop to being buried with tiktok.

We pay much attention to tiktok, influenced our study and our health.

4) Missing of Sentence Components

But can't stoping watching the tiktok wil spent more time in waste.

You should far away your phone.

If you has realised the situation had happened to you.

5) Misuse of Guide Words

I know what you are feeling now.

What gets rid of the tiktok is searching for another meaningful activities.

### 4.3. Discourse errors

People from different cultural backgrounds will develop different understandings of the discourse. Students tend to ignore the different discourse patterns and expressions caused by different cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking between Chinese and English, thus resulting in discourse errors. For example: “.....This is my opinion.” This closing style is the way Chinese students usually prefer to end their writing. “.....I hope you can get rid of tiktok as soon as possible.” This way of closing is in line with the way Chinese authors like to end with a hope or a call to action. In fact, the English discourse is like a straight line, while the Chinese discourse is like a meandering curve; the English discourse tends to go straight to the point, using more direct expressions, while the Chinese discourse is full of roundabout expressions, and the end of the text is usually the highlight.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

From the above analysis of errors in vocabulary, syntax, discourse and other aspects of English writing, it can be seen that high school students are unconsciously influenced by Chinese thinking, Chinese vocabulary and grammar, which leads to the occurrence of negative transfer. In terms of the frequency of errors at each level, lexical errors were the most frequent, followed by syntactic errors and finally discourse errors. For some errors that occur at each level, teachers can use some teaching strategies to avoid them as much as possible.

### 5.1. Cultivating cross-cultural awareness

English-Chinese comparison is an effective way to avoid negative transfer of native language. To improve English writing, it is necessary to strengthen the comparison between English and the native language. According to linguist Lu, "a useful help for the Chinese student is to make him aware of the differences between English and Chinese, and to compare the situation in Chinese with English in every specific issue-word form, word meaning, grammatical category, sentence structure-as much as possible, so that they get a deeper understanding through this comparison."

In the actual teaching process, teachers should not only focus on the teaching of basic knowledge such as grammar and syntax, but also strengthen the comparison of English and Chinese culture, focusing on the differences between English and Chinese vocabulary, syntax, discourse, culture and thinking, so that students can understand the similarities and differences between English and Chinese expressions, thus enhancing their sensitivity to cultural differences and cultivating their cross-cultural awareness [6].

### ***5.2. Expanding English input***

The negative transfer of mother tongue in students' English writing is caused by the lack of language input, the limited reserve of vocabulary, sentence patterns and fixed collocations, the half-understanding of the meaning of the text. Teachers can use multimedia and other means to create context and cultivate students' interest in English. Students can read famous English books and newspapers, listen to English songs, watch original movies and English programs to increase their language input and develop their sense of language. Besides, students are encouraged and guided to get more exposure to pure English original corpus and accumulate more fixed collocations and idiomatic usage of English [7].

### ***5.3. Promote writing with assessment***

Teachers' corrections and feedback have positive backwash effect on students' writing, so teachers should take students' mistakes seriously and provide timely feedback when reviewing compositions. If the teacher's feedback does not catch the students' attention, most of them will just continue to make the same mistakes, especially those that the students are not aware of because of the mother tongue interference. Teachers should appropriately change the composition correcting mode and let students understand the grading standards and participate in the grading process, which will help students to actively recognize their own mistakes. Meanwhile, in the process of error correction, teachers should protect students' self-esteem, find bright spots in the errors, guide students to realize the errors on their own and correct them on their own under the guidance of teachers, and develop students' ability to see problems with error analysis theory [8]. Peer assessment, teacher-student collaborative assessment, and student self-assessment are all good modes of assessment that teachers can choose according to the actual situation.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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