

The Analysis and Countermeasure Research on Middle School Students' English Writing Based on the Theory of Psychological Linguistics

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Abstract: In recent years, the influence of English has been on the rise. However, with the popularity of English education, more and more English writing problems of middle school students have begun to appear. These problems are affected by students' emotional, psychological and other factors, which in a way restricts students' English writing ability. After the concept of psychological linguistics was put forward by Swain (1985), many educators tried to solve the problem of English learning from the psychological bases. Therefore, this study will analyze the problem of Chinese Student's English writing from the perspective of psycholinguistics, explore effective methods and countermeasures to solve the problems, and attempt to improve the actuality of students' English writing problem to the maximum.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

With the deepening of reform and opening-up and the popularization of basic education, English has been widely used in China. Scholars around the world attach great importance to English writing which has a great effect on the improvement of the other language skills and makes a contribution to personal growth, etc[1]. Therefore, it is worthy of researchers paying more attention to it. However, English writing has been so difficult a skill that both teachers and students avoid talking about it. Traditional exam-oriented education emphasizes only reading and grammar, but to a large extent ignores writing. Many students' English writing problems are beginning to appear, such as smaller vocabulary and difficulty in improving writing level. These problems are affected by students' emotional and psychological factors, which in a way restrict their English writing ability.

English writing has always been an important part of English learning, but researchers have done relatively little research on English writing. Although researchers have recognized the importance of conducting research on English writing, most of the studies are based on regular teaching and classrooms, and how to use the findings of psycholinguistics to form a methodology for teaching English writing is still an urgent problem.

1.2 A Brief Review of the Related Studies Home and Abroad

The theoretical research and practical exploration of psycholinguistics in foreign countries started a little earlier than Chinese scholars, so the theoretical exposition and practical results are richer than those of Chinese scholars in education and English teachers in schools, which is of great significance for Chinese scholars to explore psycholinguistics-based English classroom education methods, on the basis of the excellent research results of foreign countries. It is of great significance for Chinese scholars to explore a psycholinguistic-based English classroom education method that suits the actual situation of English education in China based on the excellent research results from abroad.

Since the 1950s, psycholinguistics formally emerged as an independent discipline. Wilhelm Wundt [2] first combined psychological and linguistic theories and became a founding father of early psycholinguistics. Skinner[3] articulated his behaviourist view of language learning, linguistic behaviour, and made it clear that he did not believe there was a direct link between linguistics and complex psychological structures, and that language was a speech act.

Since the 1960s, with the discovery and formulation of Chomsky's theory of transformational generative grammar, that the study of psycholinguistics moved away from the behaviourist theoretical framework, and in the 1960s many linguists, in the context of Chomsky's work, recognized that there was an important link between the structure of language and mental processes. In the 1960s, many linguists also recognized, against the background of Chomsky's work, that there was an important connection between the structure of language and mental processes, and that the two influenced each other. From the 1970s to the 1980s, the alliance between linguists and psychologists opened up a new dimension in psycholinguistics.

The development and improvement of foreign language teaching ability in China's primary and secondary schools cannot be separated from the continuous research and in-depth exploration of foreign language teaching theories. Since the 1990s, foreign language teaching researchers in China have gradually begun to introduce, learn and absorb the existing theories and practices of foreign psycholinguistics, to carry out their own research and exploration of foreign language teaching, and to apply and practice them in actual teaching activities.

Gui Shichun[4] was the first to study and collate the research results of many domestic scholars on foreign language teaching. Wang Chuming[5], a scholar of linguistics in China, focused on the specific process of foreign language learning, believed that the differences in foreign language learning outcomes are closely related to individual differences, and introduced the inspirational and applied value of the existing research results of the psychology of language in foreign language teaching from the perspective of the foreign language teacher's profession. As a result, the number of empirical studies on foreign language learning in China began to increase gradually.

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Questions

As this study contains both theoretical knowledge such as the relevant theoretical knowledge of psycholinguistics and existing research paradigms on the English output process. As the research time is not long enough, there were two questions in this experiment:

Question 1: What were the difficulties students came across in English writing?

Question 2: What difficulties are influenced by psychological effects in the process of English writing? How should they be solved?

2.2 Research Subjects

The subjects of this experiment were students from Class 1 and Class 2, grade 2 in No.3 Middle School in Linfen. The enrollment performances of the two natural classes were nearly at the same level, and the quantity of students in the two classes belonging to the high-level, medium-level and the low-level were also the same though they were relatively excellent students. Class 1 was the experimental group (EG) with the total number of 50 including 27 boys and 23 girls, and Class 2 was the control group (CG) with 50 students containing 22 boys and 28 girls. Both the EG and the CG were respectively taught in the new model and the traditional model in writing teaching, and they have the same teacher.

2.3 Research Framework

In the late 1970s, Krashen[6] put up the Input Hypothesis. In a simple and general way, the definition of the hypothesis is: "human acquire language in only one way-by understanding messages or by receiving 'comprehensible input'"[6].

It is an all-round theory concerning second language acquisition. Based on the hypothesis, the process of language learning is "acquisition" rather than "learning". In the view of Krashen[6], an important condition for language acquisition to occur is that the acquirer understands input language that contains structures "a bit beyond" his or her current level of competence. The theory proves that a lot of "comprehensible input" should be ensured to the language learners if he or she wants to acquire a language. Supposing the stage of the learner is "i", what the learners should be exposed to is "i+1", which means that the input is one step beyond the language ability of the learners but not very far away than the real linguistic competence.

According to the findings from the studies she conducted on immersion students in Canada, Swain put forward the theory of "Output Hypothesis" which belonged to the theory of second language acquisition. In Swain's view, output is dynamic. In the process of acquiring a second language, output in the view of Swain has greatly enlarged our horizon with a lot of benefit, and at the same time it deepened our understanding on how the process of output production facilitates our learning process.

Swain[7] has argued that comprehensible output contributes to acquisition in that learners need to be pushed into producing output that is concise, coherent, and appropriate in order to develop full grammatical competence [8]. All her views on output can be generalized concisely into the following: learners' production of the target language in a specific context can facilitate their learning process, giving rise to the learners' improvements of the target language and the happening of the L2 acquisition.

3. Research Procedures

Due to the specificity of the theoretical basis on which this study is based, i.e., the inclusion of both psychological and linguistic elements in the theoretical basis, the study combined quantitative and qualitative research, applying questionnaires, classroom observation, and interviews to the study.

The experiment lasted about 3 weeks in total. In the first week, before the beginning, students in both classes were asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to find out how they learned, after that, students in both classes were asked to write a composition, the completed compositions of the students were corrected by their teachers and the data would be kept for further research. In the second week, class 1 was trained by the researcher in the new model of writing, which focuses more on the application of input theory and output theory to English writing explanations and classroom lectures, while class 2 was still trained in the traditional model. In this process, the teacher strictly followed the procedures required by the two models and took the 90-minutes weekly writing instruction

seriously. During the week, the authors conducted in-depth classroom observations and used video-recording to collect classroom data. During the third week, students in both classes took an essay test, and the teacher corrected and scored the periodical essays, followed by another questionnaire collection. Finally, the authors interview the teacher and some of the students who have made significant progress and record the data in the form of audio recordings for later research.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis and Discussion of the First Questionnaire

In the first week, before the start, students in both classes were asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to find out about their studies and basic information about them. The English learning level of the students in the two classes participating in the questionnaire is in the middle to upper level of the grade, and the overall English learning performance is also in the middle of the grade ranking. From the results of the questionnaire, it is easy to see that most of the students still love to learn English, but most of the students are still in the most basic motivation to achieve the "examination target", and they believe that the criterion for learning English is to achieve the ideal score in the college entrance examination, which does not affect the overall grade. From the point of view of English writing, the number of students with passive attitudes towards English is high, and they are even less clear about the influence of psychological effects on writing.

In daily life, if students explore and view this phenomenon from a psycholinguistic perspective and try to come up with solutions to this situation, they must consider how to enhance and improve their cognitive-contextual awareness of motivation to learn English. The construction of any subject requires students to reshape it cognitively, emotionally and even in terms of values. This "reshaping" is not in conflict with the students' inherent knowledge framework, because although the subjects are inextricably linked, they are independent wholes, especially language subjects, which are different from other types of subjects in that they have practical communicative use and output as their main teaching goals.

4.2 Analysis and Discussion of the Second Questionnaire

When the training period comes to an end in the 3rd week, the questionnaire will be chosen as a means to test the changes in the two classes. The analysis of the data is shown in table 1 though the software of the SPSS Statistics. The table 2 shows the details about the questionnaire.

Table 1: Mean, Std. Deviation and Std. Error Mean of the test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EG	50	13.3958	1.84342	.28038
CG	50	12.3726	1.76936	.27232

From the data in table 1, we know the average scores of EG is 13.3958, 1.0232 points higher than that of CG, which means that students make more progress than the CG. The other two variables are almost the same in the two groups.

From the data in table 2, we know that the students in Class 1 (EG) had produced some changes after a two-week training on the new model of writing. Compared with the traditional teaching model, the new model combines English learning with psychology and helps students break down barriers to learning, for example, using inputs such as words and phrases in the new writing, which strengthens the relationship between input and output. In addition, they are willing to use the new model to train other English skills, such as speaking and listening.

Table 2: Data analysis of second questionnaire on Class 1

What do you think of the new writing instruction?	Better than ever. (72%)	Worse than ever. (13%)	No difference. (15%)
Do psychological effects affect English writing?	Yes (83%)	No (17%)	
Did the New Model Writing Exercise help you write better?	Yes (63%)	No (25%)	I have no feeling. (13%)
Can the new model of writing training have an impact on other English language skills?	Yes (76%)	No (34%)	
Would you like to continue studying psychology in conjunction with English?	Yes (74%)	No (24%)	I have no feeling (2%)

4.3 Analysis and Discussion of Interview

After a three-week study, the author conducted interviews with this teacher and two students from Class 1 (EG). The interview method is one of the most effective ways of communicating visually and obtaining key information, and allows the interviewer to analyse the interviewee's words, gestures, and facial expressions in a comprehensive way to produce feedback that is more reliable than written or even practical result.

Through the interview with this teacher, the author learned that it was not that teachers were reluctant to integrate psychology with English language learning, but that they were not brave enough to experiment with pedagogical changes due to the school's performance requirements. A new model for such a short period of time is good for the students, it is just hard to stick with it. The interviews with these two students revealed that the students still had great problems with the use of grammar and sentence structure in writing, that input and output were not linked, and that there was still internal resistance to writing in English.

5. Conclusions

Based on the input and output theory and the characteristics of English, the following factors should be considered in teaching English writing.

Firstly, the materials should be motivating and interesting for students. The more interesting the materials are, the keener the students become. "An approach that provides substantial quantities of comprehensible input will do much better than any of the older approaches" [6]. Much input without comprehension is meaningless and useless. For students, the material type should be in a large range. Language is the carrier of culture, art and language ability, for which the topics of the input materials should be widely diversified. The learners will be qualified with abundant background information and schema. In the process of establishing the class bookstore, the teacher should consider carefully students' level, characteristics and interest.

Secondly, though the input and output theory emphasizes the language input of the target language in real situations, the author finds in observing that students find it difficult to cope with the sheer target language. The input is useless if it is not comprehensible. Many researches on the interlanguage have showed that some native language used by teachers is necessary for students to understand the target language.

Last but not least, in teaching writing based on the new model, the author finds the effects of input are not satisfactory. So recitation input is necessary. As we all know, recitation is not only a process

of the coding and individual storage of the materials, but also a process for the brain to decode and recover the information stored before. In the process of recitation a list of hypotheses and confirmation are covered. According to the hypothesis testing function of Swain, the recitation will act as a direct and influential contribution to the output. After a period of recitation, students' wording becomes diversified, the content turns to be plump, and the accuracy and fluency of the language enhance. Recitation plays a vital role in improving the language application ability, especially the writing ability.

All in all, students meet many kinds of problems in English writing, such as the use of words and grammars. They can't use what they have learned correctly in English writing. They have difficulty in transferring basic knowledge to writing. Teachers should help students to get out of the dilemma, not only from the aspect of English writing. Strengthening the use of psychological knowledge and English learning can help students to build up confidence and internalize their knowledge, thus improving their English output.

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