Chinese Teachers’ Feedback on Korean CFL Learners’ Cohesive Errors (“Suoyi” and “Ta”) in Chinese Writing

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**Abstract.** This study investigates Chinese teachers’ feedback on Korean CFL learners’ typical errors of overuse of conjunction “suoyi” and pronoun “ta”. The results showed that Teacher feedback was much concerned rather than cohesion errors but grammar errors because teacher have considered cohesion errors as minor problems. Chinese teacher should acknowledge of repeated typical errors in Korean CFL learners’ writing and be recommended to give direct feedback of cohesive errors (untreated errors: a higher use of “suoyi” and “ta”) to avoid causing fossilization at the beginning.

**Introduction**

While the effect of feedback have been proved in many studies (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Elwood & Bode, 2014; Zarrinabadi, 2014), Korean CFL learners’ typical errors such as the overuse of conjunction “suoyi” and a higher use of pronoun “ta” which was typical errors represented in Korean CFL learners’ Chinese wiring are still observed in their Chinese writing (Guo, 2011; Xu & Xiao, 2009; Cao, 2000; Zhou & Ran 2014). In Truscott (1996) study, he explained one of the reasons why there is no convincing evidence that error correction ever helps student writers improve the accuracy of their writing. He pointed out that this related to the ability and willingness of teachers to give students to receive error correction. Thus author assumes that Korean CFL learners’ cohesive errors might be related to teachers’ wrong feedback.

**Literature Review**

**Previous research on feedback in CFL environments**

Liu (2013) pointed out that investigating CFL learners and teachers’ feedback have had less attention compared to EFL environments. Her finding showed that teacher are favor of selective error correction (90%) and they concerned grammar (vocabulary, syntax) the most (65%) followed by content (30%). Strangely, there was 0% on cohesion error correction. Lee (2004) also mentioned students are favor of whole correction on errors (83%) and cohesion correction (14%) compared with teachers’ feedback on grammar errors. Teacher and students seemed to have difference preference on the way to correction in her study. This brought idea that Korean students’ typical errors such as a higher use of “suoyi” and “ta” might be related to teacher’s lack of feedback on cohesion errors.

**Korean CFL learners’ fossilization in Chinese writing**

According to Selinker (1972), fossilization is identified with the persistence of formal errors in non-native speakers during language development process. In Trillo (2002), the range of fossilization was expanded to pragmatic level; he defined “pragmatic fossilization” as a non-native speaker systematically uses certain forms inappropriately at the pragmatic level of communication. Korean CFL learners’ a higher use of pronouns “ta” and overuse of conjunction “suoyi” would be categorized in “pragmatic fossilization”.
a. A higher use of pronouns “tamen” (Cao, 2000)

After I came to China, I was surprised that ethnic groups in China maintain their own cultures well. When I came to Yanbian, I thought that though they were Koreans, they might not keep the spirit of Korean.

b. The overuse of conjunctions “suoyi” (Zhou & Ran, 2014)

He wants to go on a diet, when he do exercise, he felt tired. So he decided not to have meal because eating medicine is expensive. So he did not eat. Even when he feels hungry, he never ate something. But when he goes to bed, he didn’t feel hungry, So he could sleep.

c. Korean CFL learners’ errors in HSK writing task

24 Korean students and 12 Chinese students were asked to re-compose story (400 words, HSK prompt: “Two doctors”). The results showed that Korean students used more pronouns and conjunction compared to Chinese students. There was significant difference in the frequency use of pronoun “ta” and conjunction “suoyi” in their writing. (Respectively, M=0.0093, SD= 0.0068, F=7.445, p=0.01; M=0.0037, SD=0.0033, F=11.25, p=0.002)

Direct feedback should be provided with “untreated errors”

Dana Ferris (1999) introduced a distinction between “treatable” and “untreatable” errors suggesting that the former (verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, article usage, plural and possessive noun ending, and sentence fragments) occur in a rule governed way, while the latter (word choice errors, with the possible exception of some pronoun and preposition use, and unidiomatic sentence structure, resulting from problems to do with word order and missing or unnecessary words) require learners to utilize required knowledge of the languages to correct the error. For example, In DR Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts, and McKee (2000) study, learners made substantial progress over a semester in reducing errors in verb tense and form (“treatable”), made slight progress in reducing lexical errors (“untreatable”). In Dana Ferris and Roberts (2001) study, the result also shows that there was a statistically significant difference in students’ ability to edit treatable and untreated error types. And many scholars insist that students may be helped more by direct feedback in dealing with “untreatable” errors in Dana Ferris’ and Roberts’ (2001) study. This foretells that different type of feedback should be adapted in Korean CFL learners’ Chinese writing. This study take a closer look at what types of feedback Chinese teacher provide students with “untreatable” errors such as possible ellipses of...
some pronoun “ta” and unnecessary word “suoyi”.

Method

Data collection

Copies of all students’ writing task and teacher feedback were collected and carefully documented and categorized (since all written task were written by hand, all data went through re-typing and saved by each) All the students’ writing and the teacher feedback offered was generated naturally; none was designed specifically for this study, and no inventions were made by the researcher. (i.e., the researcher asked teacher to give feedback on students’ writing assignment as usual). For investigating Teachers’ feedback, four Chinese teachers were informed of the purpose of the study and gave consent for us to do research on feedback of Korean CFL learners’ Chinese writing.

Table 1. Profiles of the participants who were involved this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Study Field</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Teaching Career</th>
<th>Education Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wu</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>Chinese writing</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song</td>
<td>Chinese writing</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruan</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis

The interview data were analyzed according to Miles and Huberman (1994)’s qualitative data analysis. Interview data also underwent cyclical processes of analysis and repeated themes that emerged from interview data were compared and categorized (Erickson, 1973), i.e., whether teacher recognized Korean CFL learners’ typical errors. If they recognized, how did teachers give feedback on errors? Why Korean CFL learners kept making same mistakes? Teachers were given Korean CFL learners’ Chinese writing to ask them giving feedback before conducting interview. Otherwise it may be affected by their feedback content (i.e., teacher could give feedback on specific errors on purpose).

Results

Teachers showed a significant preference for grammatical errors. They had essentially preference for direct feedback on general errors such as wrong choice word, the collocation of words but hardly mention Korean students’ cohesion errors such as a higher use of pronoun and conjunction. In expert below, teachers mentioned that they haven’t recognized the cohesion errors; they thought cohesion errors are not important as much as grammar errors. Surprisingly, the result was different from what the researcher assumed at first, the main reason of giving no feedback on cohesion errors was not related to time concerns or working burden rather it was related to teacher belief and they also preferred to give direct feedback rather than in-direct feedback on students’ errors. Only few in-direct feedbacks were provided on students’ cohesion errors. They believed that it could be taught later.

(1) Interview with Teacher Wu (September, 14)

*The reason why I didn’t correct cohesion problems in their writing is not main problem in Chinese writing.* Since cohesion errors could be considered as minor problems, I rather much concern on grammar errors. As far as I understood, *there were no Chinese materials providing specific explanation of cohesion errors.* For beginners, since they are used to make simple sentence, cohesion errors in complex sentence should be covered over intermediate level students.
(2) Interview with Teacher Hu (September, 14)

I think the repetition of suoyi is common errors of Korean students because I haven’t seen those errors from other countries such as German students. It is recommended to use suoyi only when there is the relation of cause and effect for sure. However, the specific uses of suoyi isn’t mentioned in Chinese materials because materials is written for all over countries’ students, the only way to teach suoyi is giving feedback right after errors showed up. In terms of repetition of pronouns, there are some explanations of right uses in Chinese material; I couldn’t remember the name of the book.

(3) Interview with Teacher Song (September, 14)

As you know, for beginner level, we are encourage students to make sentences as many as possible so we haven’t much attention on cohesion problems and most of content in materials are conversation format. That problem should be covered over intermediate level students and I haven’t recognized the phenomenon of repetition of suoyi in Korean students’ Chinese writing. I think a higher use of suoyi is related to writing genre because your data is based on HSK prompt. That’s why a higher use of pronoun and specific conjunction suoyi are presented in their writing.

(4) Interview with Teacher Ruan (September, 22)

I think cohesion errors are not much as important as grammar errors because it doesn’t make a big problem in overall flow. And if you haven’t mention, I might have not recognized the repetition of Suoyi in Korean writing. Honestly, when I give feedback to students’ writing assignment, I am giving student feedback without consideration of students’ countries because there are many students from all over the world. I could not give a specific error feedback unless I understand each country’s linguistic features. Thus, it is hard to point out Korean students typical errors such as a higher use of suoyi in their writing. In terms of a higher use of pronoun, those errors are presented in not only Korean students but also other country students. The explanation of suoyi must be taught case by case because there are diverse uses of suoyi, it is hard to explain a whole usage of that at a time.

Conclusion

Based on teacher interview, teachers seemed much concern on grammar errors not on cohesion errors because of teachers’ belief. This biased feedback on grammar errors could result in making fossilization of cohesion errors for Korean CFL learners at the beginning. There is a need to make CFL teachers aware of cohesive errors (untreated errors: higher use of “suoyi” and “ta”) with detailed feedback to avoid making false-fossilization.

References


