The Misuse of Tense and Aspect in Online English Writing: A Comparison Between Liberal Arts and Engineering Undergraduates

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Abstract: The core issue concerning the usage of tense and aspect is seen as significantly important (Michaelis, 1994; Swales and Feak, 2000), especially in English writing in college. This study identifies the erroneous use of tense and aspect in liberal arts students' writing in comparison with that of engineering students' to examine their application ability in writing and identify areas of English learning in need of intensive instruction. This paper displays the frequency rates of errors about two English tenses (the present and the past), two aspects (the progressive and the perfect) based on an online writing corpus of students in two majors, which leads to the result that students in both majors are more likely to make mistakes in the present time and perfect aspect, liberal arts students less influenced. In addition, engineering students writing score seems to be more related to their grammatical errors than that of liberal arts students. To improve their writings, practical teaching strategies such as being aware of cross-lingual influence, practicing grammar on context level, personalized instructions, are also provided.

Keywords: Misuse of tense and aspect; Liberal arts; Engineering; Teaching strategies

Introduction

From previous research, a large number of findings emphasize the studies of the meanings and uses of L2 grammar. It includes papers concerning non-native speakers' learning and acquisition of such features of L2 grammar, particularly tenses, aspects (Rutherford, 1984; Sharwood Smith, 1991, 1993). For instance, in experimental studies, learners are required to take appropriate verb forms, which indicates how L2 learners acquire and use the tense and aspect (Pica, 1994; Pfaff, 1987). Although to convey writers' intended meaning effectively,

taking care of language surface features is necessary (Ferris, 2006; Hyland & Hyland, 2006), the L2 writing instructional trend has shifted focus from grammar to meaning, which is a signal to English language teachers to not only emphasize single grammatical features of phrases and sentences but also consider the whole context. Larsen Freeman (2002) also raised a three-dimensional framework to use grammar accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. To achieve this, English grammar teaching in China has a long way to go.

Meanwhile, some studies concerning non-native speakers' usage of L2 grammar mark all groups from different language systems as a whole without recognizing cross-linguistic differences that may affect learners' processing of English tense and aspect. Take the Chinese language for example, although morphemes representing past tense meaning in Chinese exist such as (Le and Guo), Le and Guo are not grammaticalized knowledge (Yao & Chen, 2017). That is to say, Le and Guo are all able to express past time, and they are not irreplaceable (Guo and Le together can also be a substitute marker).

Concerning the teaching deficiency of focusing on grammar amid differences between Chinese and English tense, studies should be given to Chinese learners particularly in understanding their acquisition and usage of English tense and aspect aiming to improve teaching strategies for Chinese language teachers.

Literature Review
1.Tense and aspects for learning and teaching

Douglas B., S. Conrad, and G. Leech (2002) divide tenses into two types--present and past tenses without mentioning future tense. To understand this, definitions of time and tense should be given. Time is the human perception of the progression of existence namely past, present, and future. Tense is the form of language we use to describe the progression of existence, so since future and present time share the same language form, they all belong to present tense. Besides, there are two aspects--progressive and perfect. When different times (not tenses because it includes more examples like future time with perfect aspect) mix with different aspects, the result turns out to be 12 types as Table 1 shows (Zhai, 2012).

From this table, all times or tenses are connected with aspects to predict all possibilities in oral and written productions. L2 learners have to judge the situations and put the matched grammar into usage. However, if they are inclined to use these appropriately, recognizing the distinction between

Table 1: 12 different forms combining tenses and aspects

	simple	perfect	progressive	perfect progressive
present time	/	have+-en	be+-ing	have+-en+-ing
	write/writes	has/have written	am/is/are writing	has/have been writing
	walk/walks	has/have walked	am/is/are walking	has/have been walking
past time	wrote	had written	was/were writing	had been writing
	walked	had walked	was/were walking	had been walking
future time	will write	will have written	will be writing	will have been writing
	will walk	will have walked	will be walking	will have been walking

similar mixtures of these 12 types, like to choose simple past or present perfect or even past perfect to fulfill their expressions, becomes significantly important. Analyses of the oral and written production of L2 learners have demonstrated that learners' way of learning the tense and aspect grammar system in L2 is probably associating tense-aspect forms and certain verbs with which the forms match best (Andersen and Shirai 1994).

With regard to teaching, tense and aspects are taught mostly in sentences but not discourse in China. This leads to students' lack of knowledge in their speaking and passage writing. Because traditional grammar teaching views grammar as a closed system isolated from language's cognitive meaning. Teachers tend to focus on forms and practice of forms without giving a real-life situation. The same language grammar will be repeated in giving different example sentences to practice over and over again among which no relation could be found. The reason for this kind of behavior may be a lack of time in class to introduce so many frequently or non-frequently used grammars all together while doing much practice in the forms of test papers to consolidate the complex, seemingly-not-related grammatical points. Under this circumstance, Chinese students could hardly understand grammar in a context and put them into oral or written production fully, let alone to use them accurately and appropriately. Take Zhang's (2000) textbook named New Edition of English Grammar, for example, the following A examples can be explained in traditional English grammar classes. In contrast, B examples selected from other grammar books turn out to be hard to explain:

1.Simple present tense:

A. It refers to something that happens as a daily routine or habit or a general fact.

The little boy comes back home at 16:00 as usual.

B: When referring to present tense, most learners'

knowledge of usage is to describe something that is happening or is going to happen soon. However, they must be confused by the historic present tense, although it takes place mostly in conversation, which truly describes something that happened in the past.

No, He says, are you going home tonight? He thought I was going home to my parent.

In this sentence, "says" is a verb describing speaking, and it turns out to be a present tense describing the past because from the latter part with the word "thought", "was going to", it clearly indicates it was a past story. In the historic present tense, verbs expressing directional movement (come and go) or featuring speaking (say) are commonly used in the simple present tense.

2.Simple past tense

A. It is used to express something that happened in the past to either indicate the situation has passed or once existed or some habitual actions taking place in the past.

1) My mother went to the cinema last Friday.

2) In those days we were happy together.

B: It could be seen in two other situations-- to express euphemism or some subjunctive ideas opposite to present fact

1) a: Did you want any help?

b: Yes, I wondered if you could help me pass the coffee.

2)If you were me, you could be angry about him.

Mentioning the above situations, it is easy to understand example A, which demonstrates to us the situations that happened in the past. But to understand example B needs extra knowledge. The understanding of it should be confined to its linguistic meaning but not time. Students who remember the basic rule of past tense would not recognize this special usage.

3.Past perfect

A: Past perfect verb phrases look back to an extended period of time that was completed in the past.

I had baked cakes when my friends came to visit.

Sometimes past perfect verb phrase, though look back to an extended period of time, but the event was not completed in the past and continued.

By tomorrow they had stayed for a week.

B: If teachers try to analyse the following examples with the previous understanding of perfect aspects, it is far-fetched.

Just before 9 o'clock on Sunday evening 28 May 1967, he arrived back in England, where a quarter of a million people were waiting to welcome him. Queen Elizabeth Ⅱ knighted him with the very sword that Queen Elizabeth had used almost 400 years earlier to knight Sir Francis Drake after he had sailed around the world for the first time. The whole voyage from England and back had covered 28, 500 miles. It had taken him nine months, of which the sailing time was 226 days. He had done what he wanted to accomplish. Like many other adventurers, Chichester had experienced fear and conquered it. In doing so, he had undoubtedly learnt something about himself. Moreover, in the modern age when human beings depend so much on machines, he had given men throughout the world new pride.

　　--Sailing Round the World, Unit2 Extensive Reading of College English (Book 1).

This excerpt is taken from the last two paragraphs from Sailing Round the World. The story tells the adventure tour Francis took at the age of 65. Although obsessed with a serious disease, he overcome loads of difficulties and successfully returned. This part is telling he was given a warm welcome by the Queen and civilians. Past perfect verbs are underlined. The first two past perfects can be explained by rules because they happened before a certain point in the past. However, when referring to the author's comment on the adventure, the latter part uses past perfect which is different from the former part using past tense to tell the story. How could students understand based on the rule of time? Larsen Freeman (2001) explained past perfect carries the meaning function of evaluating the past. Hence past perfect verbs in the latter part of this article vividly employ this meaning of evaluation accurately and appropriately.

Since researcher can find different ways of decoding grammar rather than a single and isolated subcategory of language systems like constructing the semantic categories of verb expressions or giving out exceptional usages of grammar in context rather than in sentences with solid rules of time, tense and aspect learning and teaching becomes more challenging but interesting. Nevertheless, Chinese grammar learning and teaching fall into a trap like teaching grammar in sentences than in discourse, students coping with difficult sentence examples in endless exercise in high schools. As non-English major freshmen entering universities, students have no grammar course but college English course instead. So grammar teaching is integrated into extensive reading teaching, which is not helpful for students to establish a systematic view of using grammar in meaningful discourse appropriately.

As traditional English grammar learning has gradually been eliminated, it should consider cognition, noticing, and comprehension so that students can communicate subconsciously with a set of grammar rules. Grammar rules should be integrated with real problem solving, meaning-based and communication-driven, to achieve proper internalization. For instance, teachers can use audio and video materials or discussion and negotiation activities to get students to infer the rules themselves.

Wang (2014) believes that a combination of experience and cognition produces language. Wang's cognitive English grammar teaching theory is critical because it reminds learners to learn grammar starting from its function and meaning in real life. However,

in practice, this goes far beyond ordinary teachers' cognition of how to teach grammar, and there is no real-life experiment to support his theory.

Cross-linguistic differences to late Chinese-English learners

Learning a language later in life (after the critical period) is believed to be the reason why L2 learners have non-native behaviors (Ojima, Nakata, & Kakigi, 2005). In China, students started learning English in the fourth grade of their elementary school or the first year of middle school. And only easy expressions of spoken English would be taught at elementary schools while grammar and syntax features are put into the teaching schedule in middle school merely. That means these students will not receive English systematically until 13 years old. From this fact, they should be grouped into late English learners. Drawing on Yao & Chen (2017), it was claimed that English and Chinese are morphologically incongruent in past tense and third-person singular which causes mistakes in the present tense. Since in English, the morpheme of the past tense is added close to the root with "ed", "t" or "ied" form and it has no substitute. Additionally, when a third person becomes a subject, the singular form of a verb followed up should be marked. Things are different in Chinese since Chinese neither have a third person singular nor morpheme of past tense that is unsubstitutable.

1) Ta Chi Xiang Jiao.

2) Wo Chi Xiang Jiao.

For example, "He eats banana" and "I eat a banana" in English can be observed as using different forms of "eat". In Chinese, the same verb "Chi" can be applied to both behind "Wo" (I) and "Ta" (He) to describe the behavior. Also in English, past tense is marked by a verb's inflectional change with no other letters intervening between the root and the affix, like "play+ed=played". However, in Chinese, perfect markers "Le" or "Guo" or "Hao le" can sometimes be taken place by the other two.

1) Wo Wan Le.

2) Wo Wan Guo.

3) Wo Wan Guo Le.

"Wo (I) Wan (play) Guo Le (ed)" can be also expressed like "Wo Wan Guo" or "Wo Wan Guo Le" with even "Guo" and "Le" putting together to express the past tense. Tense has been mentioned above to have a cross-linguistic difference between Chinese and English, but the progressive aspect between the two languages seems to be more congruent. "Zai" and "Zhe" in Chinese are to express the progressive feature (Chou, 1981; Lin, 2002) with "Zai" putting before the verb and "Zhe" after the verb. As is shown in the following example "Wo (I) Zai (am) Wan (playing) Wan Ju (a toy)", Chinese and English grammatical features in the progress aspect are almost the same.

1)Wo Zai Wan Wan Ju.

2)Wo Wan Zhe Wan Ju.

In a word, late Chinese-English learners may have some challenges in employing English tense and aspect into their writing due to the linguistic difference between these two languages since they are not like natives that can use English at ease. The linguistic differences of past tense between Chinese and English are the three markers in Chinese are substitutable while in English, there is only one past tense marker for each verb. While the two languages are partly asymmetrical in terms of past tense, they are totally congruent in aspects of third-person singular, the form they use when they apply present tense because there is no such a thing called third-person singular in Chinese at all. That is why Chinese is defined as a timeless language because it doesn't have a strict rule of using a certain form to define past and present tense or progressive and perfect aspects.

Research Method

Based on the grammatical feature of tense and aspect, deriving from the purpose of finding out Chinese-English learners' grammatical errors

regarding tense and aspect on essay writing, this paper has collected data from an online writing system called Quan Jing Zhi Neng (QJZN) which is developed by Shanghai Foreign Education Press, one of the most influential authorities in academia field of English. The online system could automatically score students' writing from word choice, syntactic variety, consistency facility, idea, structure, and grammar. But it doesn't correct students' errors in specific by only outlining some problematic parts between the lines. As a result, in order to achieve the goal of observing grammatical errors referring to tense and aspect, the author has to read and mark the outlining parts carefully and point out how many wrong usages of the present tense in each piece of writing. By grouping all tenses and aspects into past time, present time, future time as well as progressive and perfect, and also comparing the two groups of students from different majors, the author tries to calculate numbers of mistakes for each grammatical feature and sum them up to find a tendency of error frequencies as well as a gap in using these features between students majoring in liberal arts and engineering. The author applies descriptive analysis from SPSS for checking the error frequencies. Meanwhile, the differences in writing between two groups of students are given via Pearson value.

1.Context and Participants

The experimental group is freshmen from Class C (low-level class), Wenzhou University. It is made up of two classes of liberal arts students and two classes of engineering students, 176 students in all. They are required to do the online essay under the topic of "Smartphones are changing our lifestyle" as a piece of regular assignments without constraining the time duration and explaining the purpose. As is mentioned, they are almost at the same level of English language ability since they attended a level test after entering Wenzhou University and were then assigned to a low-level class, Class C, according to the test result. By selecting freshmen as the target group, the author could notice some potential ways to transient their adaption from high school language education to college language teaching, thus giving suggestion to college English teachers in China about grammatical teaching strategies accordingly. (please rewrite this sentence and make it grammatically correct) In the following tables, 1 means students of liberal arts while 2 refers to students of engineering.

2. Research questions

a. Is there a tendency of making grammatical errors in students' writing because of the influence of their L1? If there is a trend, to what extent does it influence both liberal arts and engineering students?

b. Is there a difference of relation between students' grammatical errors and their writing performance between two majors? If there is a difference, what are the possible reasons?

c. What strategies should be applied to teaching English grammar, especially tense and aspect, in college according to the findings above?

3. Data Analysis

The essays were written by 176 students with half liberal arts students and the other half engineering students. Among them, four students only wrote a beginning of their writings, which lead to extremely low scores. So these invalid data have been left out to make it 86 versus 86. It is shown in Table 2.

As grammatical errors in verb form become one of the most apparent mistakes among all errors (Liao, 2016) in Chinese students, it is necessary to look into the reasons behind them so as to find a way to facilitate Chinese English learners. In this table, tense (present 1 means present time used by liberal arts students), aspect, number of words, given score by the online system as well as the sum of grammatical mistakes are all included. Although a 150-word essay is required, students of liberal arts produce 105 words at a minimum and 241 words at a maximum which is more than engineering students who produce 89

Table 2 Overall performance on tense and aspect

	N	Min	Max	Average	SD
PAST1	86	0	2	.33	.566
PAST2	86	0	3	.58	.906
PRESENT1	86	0	6	1.47	1.502
PRESENT2	86	0	8	.95	1.430
FUTURE1	86	0	3	.23	.571
FUTURE2	86	0	2	.16	.433
PROGRESSIVE1	86	0	1	.09	.294
PROGRESSIVE2	86	0	1	.12	.324
PERFECT1	86	0	4	.47	.882
PERFECT2	86	0	4	.72	1.182
NO. OF WORDS1	86	105	241	162.93	30.373
NO. OF WORDS2	86	89	205	148.84	21.851
SCORE1	86	8	14	10.79	1.301
SCORE2	86	7	14	10.01	1.526
SUM1	86	0	7	2.58	1.735
SUM2	86	0	14	2.47	2.491

words at a minimum and 205 words at a maximum. This well explains liberal arts students are more likely to find more information about the topic and express their viewpoints on the topic more willingly. Fang's (2013) research result tells that it is because liberal arts students have better critical thinking. However, the more ideas conveyed, the more complex expressions their writing would contain, which could result in more risks of making grammatical errors. The data from this table shows no such risks. As to scores, a 15-point system is given to evaluate students' performance, from which we can tell a higher score is achieved by liberal arts students although the highest score from the two groups is the same. This given score from the system makes an assessment of writing ranging from vocabulary to sentence, from grammar accuracy to structure. It provides relatively objective results that liberal arts students do better in writing essays partly because they make fewer grammatical errors such as tense and aspect. Most importantly, when it comes to tense and aspect, although liberal arts students have fewer mistakes than engineering students, the gap between the two groups is small. What seems to be obvious is that students as a whole are more often to make mistakes in producing present time than a past time, and future time is likely to be the easiest in producing writing English with only a few mistakes made in both majors. Since high-frequency mistakes occur in present tense and perfect aspects, explanations will be given as in the discussion part.

On the other hand, the author applied the Pearson value to find out the correlation between the given score by the online writing system and students' average numbers of mistakes on tense and aspect in their essays. If the correlation is significant, it means

students' grammatical errors are closely related to their marks. Meanwhile, insignificance between these two factors demonstrates the online writing evaluation is not decided mainly by grammatical errors. Table 4 below tells the fact that the average number of mistakes is related to the final mark from the online system. But some other findings is discovered that the p-value of the liberal arts students' group, although below 0.05 which means statistically valid, is above 0.01 while the p-value of the engineering students' group is below 0.01. By this difference, it means that there is greater significance between average mistakes and scores among engineering students than that is among liberal arts students. The reason behind this will also be discussed in a later part.

In this part, the two tables display data

Table 3: Pearson value

	AVERAGE1	SCORE1	SCORE2	AVERAGE2
(Pearson) relevance	1	-.303	1	-.393**
significance (double-tailed)		.048		.009**
N	86	86	86	86

P<0.01 **

information based on students' likelihood of making mistakes in aspects of two grammatical features and also a comparison between two different majors.

Discussions

1.Cross-lingual influence on L2 late learners' writing

The result of the above data delivers a message: all students are more likely to make mistakes in the present time. Perfect aspect, past time and future time errors, although comparatively fewer, often occur to their writing. Compared to them, students rarely make mistakes of progressive aspect. According to the Morphological Congruency Hypothesis (Jiang, 2011), a cross-linguistic difference of particular morphemes may influence late bilinguals' online processing of L2. Mekala, Ponmani & Shabitha (2016) also pointed out errors in verb tenses persisted in students' writing in that students faced the great obstacle of transfer from L1 to L2 in mastering English Tense-Aspect. In our case, these students are late learners, and they process their English writing online, which is completely in a similar situation. If this hypothesis is explained properly, the author could believe when a morpheme in English doesn't exist in Chinese, then it may be the reason why students who are late-learners starting learning English from 12-year-old could easily fall on the same mistakes over and over again in such a short piece of writing. Yao & Chen (2017) also proposed that the progressive aspect is congruent with Chinese while past tense and present third-person singular are not congruent with Chinese, among which only present third-person singular share no morphemes in Chinese. That is why students make most mistakes in the present time. The author could give some examples in the following:

a "It doesn't only make life convenient but also make life colorful."

b "Smartphones are used every day in our life."

c "We can download such instant messaging apps which enables us to make

more friends and be close to old friends."

In sentence a, the student tries to describe the power of smartphones by using a structure "not only, but also". But he forgets to use the third person singular in the latter part of the sentence. To teachers, it means students are easier to make mistakes in

positive third-person singular than negative third-person singular (does not). The student who writes sentence b is clearly unknown about using third-person singular because the sentence structure is too simple to make any other mistakes. In sentence c, third-person singular is overused. All examples show students, whether writing simple sentences or complex sentences, make this mistake not occasionally. This is one major error students have in their use of the present time.

Besides, past time (past tense) takes a certain part of grammatical mistakes in students writing, too. As explained above, Chinese past tense includes more than one morpheme that could replace each other like "Guo", "Le", "Guo Le". In this sense, English is partly different from Chinese because it only allows inflections after verbs. So students would often make such mistakes when they compared the past situation of using smartphones with the present:

1) "In the past, we contact our families and friends by writing letters."

2) "My friends once wrote a letter to me which costs her several hours."

As is shown in sentences, sometimes errors occur because students don't have the awareness to use past tense in a particular context. More frequently, past tense mistakes are made when they are mixed with the present tense.

As for the perfect aspect, the most mistakes lie in the use of third-person singular in the perfect aspect which is counted one by one when repetitive mistakes come out.

While past and present tenses are the most dangerous items for students to make errors in terms of tense and aspect, future time and progressive aspect seem to be a safe choice. Future time, as congruent with Chinese (Yao & Chen, 2017), is easy to recognize and thus to write in an accurate form, such as "We can acquire answers from teachers online. Maybe we will have a chance to talk individually to them on-

line one day". About progressive aspect, the main reasons of errors occur when using the third person singular in progressive aspect like "Learning more things are going to happen", or when it doesn't have a grammatical uniform with the next sentence, e.g., "Smartphones are going to change our lifestyle. First, smartphones have changed our way to communicate".

2.Correlation of grammar with writing performance between different majors

Another issue reflected in Table 4 attracts the author's attention, as engineering students' writing score is highly dependent on their grammatical numbers. Compared to engineering students' performance, liberal arts students' writing score is not that significantly related to their grammatical errors, though to some extent, writing score is relevant to grammar for sure. This is an indicator of their different writing styles as the author could observe from their writings. Engineering students, in common sense, do worse in English learning when compared to liberal arts students. However, in the aspect of grammar, as Table 2 shows, they make a lot fewer mistakes in the present time which is the most frequently used grammar in writing. They also have fewer errors in using future time. Referring to the rest forms of grammar, although they make more mistakes, the gap between engineering students and liberal arts students is not large. To put it in detail, the reason why engineering students' final score is highly relevant to grammatical errors is that they are inclined to use simple sentence structures to ensure their accuracy, so they are not advantageous on sentence complexity, meaning richness, and expression variances. There are exceptions, however: their more linear way of thinking to some extent compromises their way of expression. Liberal arts students, on the other hand, have advantages on various expressions like telling a story or making parallelism, to enrich their writing content. At the same time, grammatical errors are more likely to take place since they need richer expressions. That

may explain the not-so-significant relation between their final score and grammatical mistakes.

3.Grammar based on context

But when regarding grammatical mistakes, the author noticed they should not be separately treated, which means checking errors in tense and aspect by putting them into the context in order to find some clues for accurate corrections. It means whether the grammar is used right or wrong, the functions of grammar ought to be considered in context not just in sentences. Some grammars seem to be right in sentences, but when they are applied to the context, mistakes follow. For example, "We do not only know better about friends but also meet someone we have never known. We can learn a lot that we have never known."

The two present perfect tenses are used in parallelism, but according to the context, they are not grammatically right. "I have never known" means one keeps being unknown from past to present and this kind of mind state has some influence going on. It emphasizes you as the person who is ignorant of something, like "I have never known math, so I can't help you". In this case, students need to use "We never knew", which stresses some topic or someone is new to you so that you didn't know. Such mistakes are not easy to discover because "have done" can be used regularly with present time like the sentence above, or with past time, for instance, "I have never known why my parents got a fight". However, it has different meanings when present perfect or past time is applied with a clause in present time.

"Perhaps a lot of people will have such a situation--you don't know what to eat."

People doubt why future time is applied to this sentence. The reason is students are used to having future time when they start a conditional clause, like "If you don't know what to eat, you will search for information online". But it is not the case in this sentence. Instead, it should be corrected to "Perhaps a

lot of people have experienced such a thing that they don't know what to eat at lunch". In this context, the writer supposes readers to have the same experience in their past time which continues until present days that they usually don't know what to eat.

Such mistakes are made because students don't have a whole picture of the context in mind. They use grammar for grammar's sake. As Larsen-Freeman (2001) proposed, understanding language meaning and using it accordingly is the main difficulty of long-term learning because language is with many features. As a result, tense and aspect should be used based on grammatical knowledge and contexts.

4.Teaching strategies of grammar in college

Error analysis, though out of date, is proven to be useful for teachers to diagnose students' writing problems (Zheng & Park, 2013) and to improve their teaching. The top priority in teaching tense and aspect is practicing past time (tense) and present time more often since these two forms are not congruent with those in Chinese. Considering they are lower-level freshmen who start to learn English not early than 13-year-old, cross-lingual obstacles could not be underestimated. In order to improve their language expressions as well as grammar awareness, individual sentence practice is not enough. Probably the more effective way is to set up a small topic that can compare past with present such as the development of technology, changes of woman's social status for students to outline in brief in a table on which its left column is about past and right column about the present. Based on keywords and phrases listed, they can have an oral practice under the topic in forms like debate, presentation, and group discussion. Teachers are supposed to focus on grammar rather than content at this stage and try to give some feedback on the spot. Some wrong expressions could be neglected unless it disturbs listeners' understanding of the meaning. Lastly, based on the feedback and comment on the oral task, students are required to compose the content into

an essay. To enhance students' awareness of grammar, after finishing their writing, they could even have a peer correction focusing particularly on grammar.

When organizing instructional activities, the practice of grammar in context should be important not only for enriching students' expressions in oral and written productions, but also necessary to establish a firm view that grammar should be properly applied to make a meaningful context. Importantly, they need to know some special usages to break their habitual thinking about solid grammar rules. They are supposed to be informed exceptions such as stative verbs can refer to situations that extend over time, so they occur in the progressive aspect, historic present time could use simple present tense to refer to something happened in the past, past tense could be applied when expressing euphemism or some subjunctive ideas opposite to present fact, and past perfect aspect is sometimes used to show the author's comment on the previous part of the story which is described in the past tense. To let them know context better, Collins (2007) raised the classroom activity to provide different contexts with blankets and give sentences that can be inserted into the blankets. After doing the task, students in groups could start a discussion about their motivations for using such a tense or aspect in the sentence in order to promote their different contextual awareness. According to Mai (2016), to develop Chinese L2 learners' sensitivity and discourse conditions on L2 structure and learn new grammatical forms, a more effective approach to L2 structures and their processing ability should be taken. Therefore, while teaching them language in structure and context, different strategies for processing the information should be given. Moreover, there must have different focuses when teaching engineering and liberal arts students. Engineering students are adept at linear thinking, which makes them use easy grammar and simple patterns of sentences by repeating the same grammar. That's why their writing

performance is decided mainly by grammar in writing. So teachers have to contribute to enhancing students' usage of grammar, and sentence patterns like teaching them long sentences in which different grammars are applied for dissimilar situations. Compared to engineering students, liberal arts students have to raise their awareness of using accurate grammar although difficulties exist when producing long and complex sentences. Because they are more skillful in rich expression, but not good enough to use accurate grammar in complex sentences. Although different teaching methods should be considered when targeting different majors, the rule of thumb is resorting to context-based grammar teaching. This means it is more important to know how the meaning alters when a present time expresses something in the past than to know it is a historic present form.

Conclusion

This paper uses a qualitative analysis in terms of college students' grammatical errors in writing. It targets engineering and liberal arts freshmen in Wenzhou University to find out that low-level students are more likely to make mistakes in the present time and perfect aspect, liberal arts students are less influenced. In addition, engineering students writing score seems to be more related to their grammatical errors than that of liberal arts students. These findings arouse more consideration on the teaching of English grammar in China. Firstly, teachers need to understand the still prevalent mistakes taking place for some cross-lingual influence between two languages and try to practice those asymmetrical grammars more. Secondly, teachers are supposed to practice grammar largely in context based on the overall meaning. Thirdly, teachers should treat students with different majors or traits slightly differently.

The findings of this paper still have their limits. It is an instructional material in university-level writing, and it includes freshmen of two majors only. For more

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