

# *Exploring Common Grammatical Errors in Chinese Students Writing*

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**Abstract:** With the increasing influence of China in the world, the grammatical mistakes made by Chinese students in English writing have attracted wide attentions. This research aims at a comprehensive review of some of the most common grammatical errors in Chinese students' writing. The main focus is on errors in sentence structure and tense. This study shows that these errors have a strong impact on the clarity and effectiveness of Chinese students' writing. To some extent, this may lead to misunderstanding or ambiguity. However, educators can help Chinese students overcome these difficulties. This research mainly relies on appropriate teaching methods, explanations and appropriate exercises to attract Chinese students' attention to these problems and allow them to practice repeatedly so as to avoid these mistakes in English writing, which can greatly improve their future English writing level. Thus, the overall English writing ability of Chinese students can be improved to some extent.

**Keywords:** Chinese students, grammar errors, sentence, tense

## **1. Introduction**

Specifically, this review will begin with a review of the literature in some relevant areas, and then focus on sentence level grammar errors and tense errors, then provide some suggestions.

In the section on "sentence level grammar errors," this research first explore the incorrect usage of "There be" sentence patterns. Many Chinese students mistakenly use this phrase inappropriately, leading to confusion and grammatical errors in their writing. Additionally, it will talk about the lack of subject-verb agreement and inconsistent sentence structure that often accompany some error.

In the section on "Tense Error," This research will look into the widespread misunderstanding of past, present, and future tenses. Chinese students frequently have trouble telling these tenses apart, which leads to improper verb tense and inconsistent tense usage in their sentences. We'll also talk about how to employ progressive tenses incorrectly, which exacerbates the tense mistakes in their writing.

By examining and addressing these common grammatical errors in Chinese students' writing, educators and language professionals can better support their language development and help them become more proficient English writers.

## 2. Literature Review

At present, there are many different opinions on why Chinese students make some grammatical mistakes. First, the main reason why Chinese students make grammatical mistakes is the negative transfer of Chinese [1]. Second, learners may make some errors when applying a foreign language due to the negative transfer of the native language or the overgeneralization of interlingual rules. Additionally, their native language interference makes them strict in their usage of English grammar [2]. Third, these errors are caused by native language interference and insufficient understanding of English grammar rules. Students need to understand the differences between the two languages and use the unique features of the languages to write acceptable sentences. The most important thing is to make students aware of the differences in different language structures [3]. It is true that due to the different language families of Chinese and English, the language structure and cultural differences are very different, so the probability of negative transfer of Chinese is also very high. But this does not help to solve the problem of students' grammatical errors. Fourth, social factors, school factors, teacher factors and personal factors are the causes of this problem [4]. But these problems are difficult to solve, and at the same time consume a lot of time and money.

## 3. Grammar Errors at the Sentence Level

### 3.1. The Incorrect Usage of “There Be” Sentence Patterns

The incorrect usage of the “There be” sentence pattern is one of the most common sentence level grammatical errors in the writing of Chinese students. This error occurs when students misuse the construction of “There be” and fail to accurately convey the intended meaning.

“There be” sentence pattern is used to introduce the existence or presence of something or someone in a particular location. However, Chinese students often make mistakes in the structure and word order of this sentence pattern.

One common error is the inappropriate use of the verb “be” after “There.” For example, students may write sentences such as “There is a many people in the library.” This sentence violates the subject-verb agreement, as the singular form of “is” is used with the plural noun “people.” The correct form should be “There are many people in the library.”

Another error is the incorrect placement of the subject and verb in a “There be” sentence. Students may write sentences like “There a dog in the park.” In this case, the subject “a dog” should come after the verb “be,” resulting in the sentence “There is a dog in the park.”

Additionally, Chinese students often struggle with using the correct word order in negative “There be” sentences. For instance, they may write sentences such as “There not any desks in the room.” The correct form should be “There are not any desks in the room.”

Finally, Chinese students also like to write “There have/has” sentence patterns. For example, they might write a sentence like “There have many books in the room.” The correct form is “There are many books in the room.”

There is no “There be” type of sentence structure in Chinese. As a result, many Chinese students have problems using the “There be” structure [5]. To overcome these mistakes, Chinese students should pay close attention to subject-verb agreement and word order of “There be” sentences. They should practice making sentences with the right words, making sure the subject and verb match properly and are in the right place. At the same time, being familiar with the common phrases and idioms using the “There be” pattern will also help improve their accuracy in using this sentence structure.

### 3.2. The Incorrect Usage of Subject-verb Agreement

A typical sentence-level grammatical mistake found in the writing of Chinese pupils is the absence of subject-verb agreement. This mistake happens when the subject and verb don't agree in terms of number and person [6].

In English, the verb must agree with the subject in number and person. Previous findings have shown that, like native English speakers, native Chinese speakers use grammar and conceptual numbers to generate subject-verb agreement [7]. However, due to the differences between Chinese and English, Chinese students often encounter difficulties in this aspect.

One instance where lack of subject-verb agreement occurs is when using singular subjects with plural verbs or vice versa. For example, a student might write, "The boys is eating" instead of the correct form, "The students are studying." In this case, the singular verb "is" does not agree with the plural subject "boys."

Another common error is the misuse of third-person singular verbs. Chinese students sometimes forget to add an -s or -es to the verb when the subject is a third-person singular noun or pronoun. For instance, they might write, "He want to go there" instead of the correct form, "He wants to go there."

Moreover, this error can also occur in sentences with compound subjects. Chinese students may fail to recognize that when two or more subjects are joined by "and," the verb should be plural. For example, a student might write, "Bob and Amy is friends" instead of the correct form, "Bob and Amy are friends."

Subject-verb agreement is a crucial component of English grammar because it supports accurate information transmission and maintains written clarity. Chinese students must therefore be aware of this mistake and take action to enhance their knowledge of and usage of subject-verb agreement.

### 3.3. The Incorrect Usage of Sentence Structure

Incorrect usage of sentence structure is also a common sentence level grammatical error frequently observed in the writing of Chinese students. This error can arise from a lack of understanding or confusion regarding proper sentence construction, leading to awkward and unclear sentences.

One of the main causes of inconsistent sentence structure is the incorrect use of sentence connectors and transitions. Chinese students often struggle with properly linking ideas and sentences, resulting in a disjointed flow of information. They may also misuse transitional phrases, such as "however," "therefore," or "on the other hand," which can affect the logical organization of their writing.

Additionally, Chinese students tend to struggle with sentence length and complexity. They often create fragmented or run-on sentences, which disrupts the readability and comprehension of their writing. A fragmented sentence lacks a subject, verb, or complete thought, while a run-on sentence is overly long and fails to provide clear breaks or punctuation.

Chinese students should pay close attention to the placement of the subject and verb in each sentence while writing in order to address uneven sentence structure. This can be done by paying close attention to where the verbs and subjects are positioned in each sentence. To guarantee a fluid and logical movement of ideas, they should also pay attention to using the proper sentence connectors and transitions.

To improve sentence length and complexity, students should aim for sentences that are concise, yet informative. They should avoid creating run-on sentences by properly punctuating and breaking up their ideas. Similarly, they should aim to complete their thoughts in each sentence to avoid fragmented sentences.

Overall, Chinese students should pay more attention when writing sentences, especially when using conjunctions or punctuation marks [8]. Only when conjunctions and punctuation are used

correctly can the coherence and cohesion of related sentences be proper. In addition, in terms of vocabulary collocation, Chinese students should also pay attention to the positions of different words, so as to avoid their wrong use and make the sentences difficult to understand. Moreover, by understanding and addressing the issue of inconsistent sentence structure, Chinese students can significantly enhance the clarity and coherence of their writing. Through practice and attention to the specific areas mentioned, they can gradually develop a strong command of sentence structure and produce more effective written communication.

## **4. Tense Errors**

### **4.1. The Incorrect Usage of Past, Present, and Future Tenses**

One of the most common tense errors found in Chinese students' writing is the confusion between past, present, and future tenses. This confusion often arises due to the differences in verb tense usage and formation between English and Chinese.

In English, verb tenses are used to indicate the time of an action or event. However, Chinese does not have verb conjugation for tenses like English does. This fundamental difference often leads to errors in Chinese students' writing when they attempt to apply English verb tenses.

For example, many Chinese students may mistakenly use the past tense when referring to present or future events. They may write sentences such as "Yesterday, she goes to the park" instead of "Yesterday, she went to the park." Similarly, they might use the present tense when describing past events, saying "He walks to park yesterday" instead of "He walked to park yesterday."

Another common mistake is the use of the simple present tense to express future actions. Chinese students may write sentences like "Tomorrow, she goes to the park" instead of "Tomorrow, she will go to the park."

Besides, Chinese students tend to overgeneralize the use of "will" and ignore the customary meaning of the word. As a result, they often see the future tense while writing [9].

The coherence and clarity of their writing can be greatly affected by these mistakes. For their sentences to be more accurate, Chinese students must study and comprehend how to use the past, present, and future tenses correctly.

To overcome this confusion, Chinese students need to familiarize themselves with the different forms and functions of verb tenses in English. They should study the rules and usage patterns of each tense, as well as practice applying them in various contexts.

One effective way to improve their understanding is through extensive reading and exposure to authentic English texts. By reading extensively, Chinese students can observe how native English speakers use different tenses in various situations. They can also benefit from engaging in grammar exercises and seeking feedback from teachers or native English speakers.

### **4.2. The Incorrect Usage of Progressive Tenses**

Progressive tenses, also known as continuous tenses, are used to express ongoing actions or states in a specific time frame. However, Chinese students often struggle with the correct usage of progressive tenses in their writing.

One prevalent mistake is the overuse of progressive tenses. Chinese students tend to rely heavily on progressive forms, even when it is unnecessary or inappropriate. For example, they may write, "I am studying in the college now," instead of simply saying, "I study in the college."

Another mistake is the incorrect placement of the progressive form. Students sometimes place the progressive form in an incorrect position within the sentence. For instance, they might write, "She writing a paper is," instead of saying, "She is writing a paper."

Furthermore, confusion often arises between the present progressive and simple present tenses. Chinese students often use the present progressive tense to describe habitual actions, which should be expressed using the simple present tense instead. For instance, they may write, “I am often going to the library,” instead of saying, “I often go to the library.”

Additionally, Chinese students may struggle with the appropriate usage of the past progressive tense. They may mistakenly use it to describe a completed action in the past, when in fact, the simple past tense should be used. For example, they might write, “He was already finished his homework,” instead of saying, “He had already finished his homework.”

Finally, some students fail to recognize the necessity of using the progressive form in certain contexts. They may omit the progressive form when expressing ongoing actions. For instance, they may write, “She dances every day,” instead of saying, “She is dancing every day.”

To overcome these errors, Chinese students should pay close attention to the context and purpose of their writing. They should be mindful of the specific time frame in which the action is taking place and choose the appropriate tense accordingly.

### **4.3. The Incorrect Tense Consistency Within a Sentence**

The inconsistency of the tense inside a sentence is another common tense mistake in the writing of Chinese pupils. This mistake happens when a sentence’s verb tenses don’t agree or are inconsistent with one another.

In English, it is important to maintain tense consistency throughout a sentence to ensure clarity and coherence. However, Chinese students often struggle with this aspect of English grammar, resulting in sentences that are grammatically incorrect or confusing to the reader.

For example, a sentence may start in the past tense but then switch to the present tense without any apparent reason or indication. This lack of consistency can disrupt the flow of the sentence and make it difficult for the reader to understand the intended meaning.

Besides, even “fluent” non-native English speakers have random tense-use inconsistencies in their sentences [10]. Therefore, the lack of tense consistency cannot be attributed solely to the lack of grammatical ability of non-native English speakers. The phenomenon is more likely to be a “lack of control over language use [10].”

To rectify this error, it is essential for Chinese students to pay close attention to the verb tenses they use within a sentence. They should ensure that all verbs within a sentence agree with each other and that the chosen tense is appropriate for the intended meaning.

Additionally, it is crucial for students to understand the specific rules and patterns of tense usage in English. They should familiarize themselves with the different tenses, such as past, present, and future, and learn when to use each one correctly. Moreover, recognizing and avoiding common mistakes related to progressive tenses, such as the improper use of “be” verbs, can enhance the tense consistency within their writing.

Practicing sentence construction exercises and seeking feedback from teachers or native English speakers is beneficial. This will allow Chinese students to identify and correct any tense inconsistencies in their writing. Furthermore, reading extensively in English can help students gain a better understanding of how native speakers commonly use and maintain tense consistency within sentences.

By addressing the issue of tense consistency, Chinese students can enhance the clarity and coherence of their writing, making it more effective and easier for the reader to understand.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Chinese students frequently misuse the English language at the sentence level. They first err in fundamental aspects of sentence construction, like the “There be” pattern and subject-verb agreement. Second, organized writing is difficult for Chinese students because their writing lacks effective consistency and cohesion. The consistency of tenses in sentences is inaccurate, and there are issues with past, present, and future tenses being confused in Chinese pupils’ writing. Progress is also used improperly. As a result, learning the proper tenses is a significant barrier for them.

In response to the above problems, this paper argues that by Chinese students being aware of these mistakes and practicing correct usage repeatedly, their writing skills can be greatly improved in the future, thus improving their overall English writing level.

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