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An Exploration of the Causes and Coping Strategies for Pragmatic Failure in Senior High School Students' English Writing

Huiping Zhang
China West Normal University, Nanchong 637000, China

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Abstract

The study examines the causes and coping strategies for pragmatic failure in senior high school students' English writing. With reference to curriculum standards and theoretical frameworks, it identifies seven primary sources of pragmatic failures through the analysis of approximately 300 student essays and relevant literature. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach. Based on the findings, six practical teaching strategies are proposed, such as enhancing pragmatic awareness, utilizing situation-bound utterances(SBUs), incorporating intercultural perspectives, and optimizing feedback. The study aims to shift the focus from mere grammatical accuracy to contextual appropriateness, thereby helping students minimize pragmatic failures and achieve more effective cross-cultural written communication.

Keywords

Pragmatic Failure; Strategies; SBUs; Senior High School English Writing; Context

1. Introduction

General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2020) (here in after referred to as Curriculum Standards) emphasize that "in the context of English as an international lingua franca, learning and mastering certain pragmatic knowledge can enhance senior high school students' ability to use English effectively and flexibly". Specific requirements for pragmatic knowledge in Curriculum Standards are also outlined (Figure 1). At the same time, China Standards of English (CSE, 2018) define pragmatic competence as "the comprehension and expression of communicative intentions"(Liu Jianda, 2019), highlighting that the effectiveness of pragmatic expression depends on appropriateness, thereby providing an evaluative basis for transitioning from "writing correctly" to "writing appropriately". However, at the senior high school, English writing often presents challenges and holds

significant weight in the National College Entrance Examination(Gaokao). Through internships in teaching English and relevant literature review, it has been found that pragmatic failures are prevalent in students' English writing. But existing research on pragmatic failures in senior high school students' English writing remains insufficient. Most studies are based on error analysis theory and focus primarily on grammatical errors. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an analysis of pragmatic failures in students' writing texts.

General Senior High School English Curriculum
Pragmatic Knowledge Content Requirements

Course Category	Pragmatic Knowledge Content Requirements
Compulsory	1. Choose language forms appropriate to communicative occasions and the identities of interlocutors, such as formal and informal language, to express greetings, introductions, farewells, thanks, etc., and maintain good interpersonal relationships; 2. Use appropriate language forms to respond to others' viewpoints or expressed meanings, to insert remarks, make judgments, or end conversations, and effectively use non-verbal forms in oral communication, such as eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, posture, movements, and other body language; 3. According to specific communicative situations, correctly understand others' attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints, and use appropriate language forms, such as polite, direct, or tactful expressions, to express one's own attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints.
Selective Compulsory	1. According to the degree of formality of communicative occasions, procedures for handling matters, and emotional distance from interlocutors, choose formal or informal, direct or tactful language forms; understand and express apologies, requests, wishes, suggestions, refusals, acceptance, etc., to achieve the expected communicative effect; 2. In relatively in-depth cross-cultural communication, correctly understand others' attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints; according to the degree of formality of communicative occasions and procedures for handling matters, choose formal or informal, direct or tactful language forms to express one's own attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints, reflect cultural understanding, and use appropriate language for cross-cultural communication; 3. When communicating in written form, be able to choose appropriate language forms according to the identity of the interlocutor, the matter concerned, and formal or informal procedures, so as to carry out effective cross-cultural communication.
Elective (Advanced)	1. According to the degree of formality of social communicative occasions, procedures for handling matters, and emotional distance from interlocutors, use formal or informal, direct or tactful language forms to appropriately understand and express broader communicative intentions, reflect due respect and politeness toward interlocutors, and make communication appropriate and effective; 2. According to different interlocutors, times, places, and situations, comprehensively understand others' attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints, and use appropriate language forms to express one's own attitudes, emotions, and viewpoints, reflect cultural understanding, and achieve good communicative effects; 3. Be familiar with the cultural characteristics and ways of thinking of English-speaking countries such as Britain and the United States; effectively use appropriate language to carry out cultural exchanges, demonstrate pluralistic thinking, and communicate smoothly with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Figure 1. Pragmatic Knowledge Content Requirements in General Senior High School English Curriculum

1.1. Background of the research

The Curriculum Standards point out that foreign language education at the senior high school is an important process in cultivating citizens' foreign language competence. It should not only meet the developmental needs of students' intellectual, emotional, and attitudinal growth, as well as the needs of high school graduates for employment, further education, and future survival and development, but also satisfy the demands of national economic development and technological progress for talent cultivation. The goal of English teaching is to develop learners' practical communicative competence, which in turn is manifested through their pragmatic competence in English. The latest round of senior high school curriculum reform has proposed and implemented a series of practical measures, including teacher training, textbook revision, and curriculum learning, underscoring the development of students' pragmatic competence and the importance of context, which balances the linguistic and instrumental aspects of English. Cultivating pragmatic competence in English is one of the key objectives in learning the language and serves as an important means of assessing English acquisition proficiency. Compared to the traditional focus on the transmission of fixed

knowledge, the cultivation of pragmatic competence has increasingly gained prominence.

Writing primarily involves conveying written information through language, requiring students to possess strong thinking and expressive abilities, and mainly examines their comprehensive ability to use language. Furthermore, with some provinces already implementing the new Gaokao reform, the proportion of composition has been on the rise. Particularly noteworthy is the inclusion of new types of writing tasks in the examination. Undoubtedly, written expression serves a unique communicative function. As the reform progresses, the trend is shifting toward a greater emphasis on cultivating students' practical application abilities.

In recent years, with the implementation of new Curriculum Standards, corresponding adjustments have been made to new textbooks and new Gaokao. The new textbooks fully reflect teaching concepts such as the core competencies of the English discipline and the view of English learning activities. It can be said that they have introduced many changes based on new Curriculum Standards. In terms of Gaokao design, continuation writing has replaced the traditional letter-writing tasks, requiring students to develop a coherent story based on given prompts. This shift indicates that educators are placing greater emphasis on assessing students' writing abilities. As a crucial component of language output, writing can effectively reflect students' communicative competence.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the study

During the teaching internship, the author collaborated with teachers on multiple occasions to grade student compositions, such as those from monthly exams or routine writing exercises. Observations revealed that most teachers primarily focused on correcting students' grammatical errors, writing conventions, and content quality. Surprisingly, apart from a limited number of grammatical mistakes, many sentences in the students' essays remained nonstandard. Specifically, these sentences or expressions while perhaps formally impeccable, often sounded awkward or did not align with native speaker conventions, which could easily confuse or even mislead readers, thereby undermining effective communication. It seems that whether in oral interaction or written texts, pragmatic failures are inevitable.

Based on above findings, the author retrieved and reviewed a substantial body of literature from academic databases. Many scholars have conducted extensive research on pragmatic failures in verbal communication (e.g., Long, 2012; Xue Min & Wang Yan, 2014), whereas written communication has received comparatively less attention regarding language use. Through reading and synthesis, this study aims to identify several types of pragmatic failures and explore their causes along with practical pedagogical approaches. The objective is to offer insights or references for high school teachers and students, enabling both of them to recognize the root of the

problem, reflect on teaching and learning processes, and ultimately enhance students' writing competence and the pragmatic appropriateness of their written expression. Through systematic investigation, it is hoped that students will learn to select appropriate English expressions in different contexts and situations, thereby avoiding unnecessary pragmatic failures in real-world applications.

1.3. Research methods

This study takes literature from the CNKI platform and selected writing samples collected during the teaching internship as research subjects. Employing a combined methodology of quantitative statistics and textual analysis, it conducts descriptive statistics based on textual examination, followed by systematic organization, categorization, and analysis of all literature. Aligned with established research conventions, analytical practicality, and existing research frameworks (Bryman A, 2016), the literature is categorized into empirical and non-empirical studies. Based on common definitions in sociological research, empirical research primarily utilizes quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods; non-empirical research mainly employs speculative methods, such as induction-deduction, analysis-synthesis, and abstraction-generalization.

On the one hand, the literature search targeted relevant articles published between 2016 and 2026 in CNKI. A search using the Chinese&English topic keywords "pragmatic" AND "senior high school students" AND "English writing" yielded 516 related publications. To ensure comprehensiveness, a separate search using the keywords "pragmatic failures" AND "English" was conducted, retrieving 145 articles, with core journals predominantly being Peking University's General Catalogue of Chinese Core Journals (Figure 2). After merging the two datasets, removing duplicates, and screening out irrelevant literature (studies on second or foreign languages other than English), 257 articles remained as research material.

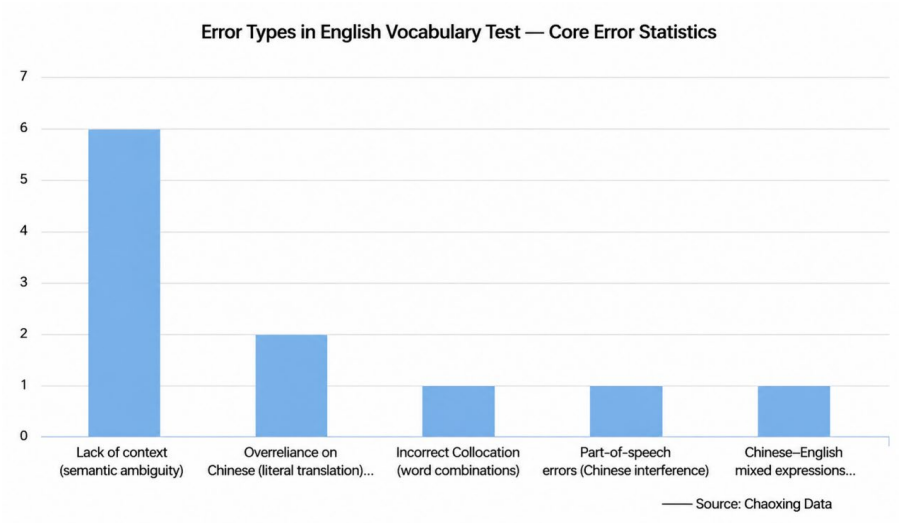


Figure 2. Statistics Of Error Types in English Vocabulary Test

On the other hand, research materials from the teaching internship were primarily derived from 102 students in two Grade 10 classes at a high school in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. In terms of the overall grade's English proficiency, these students were at an intermediate level. All students had eight years of English learning experience. This study analyzes essay texts from regular assignments and examinations to identify the types of pragmatic failures in senior high school students' English writing and to explore the underlying causes.

2. Theoretical Basis

Related studies home and abroad have offered varying definitions and classifications of pragmatic failure. Some common concepts and categorizations are outlined below. This study integrates the concept of situation-specific language and theoretical foundations of intercultural communication to analyze the causes and propose corresponding countermeasures.

2.1. Pragmatic Failure

Jenny Thomas was the first scholar to introduce the concept of pragmatic failure. She defined it as "the inability to understand what is meant by what is said (Jenny Thomas, 1983, p. 22)". Professor He Ziran said that pragmatic failure does not refer to the general wording and phrasing errors that appear in language use, but rather refers to the failure to reach the expected result because of speaking improperly, expressing ideas in unidiomatic way. G.Leech believed that a pragmatic failure occurs when the communication rules of a community's transfer to another community. In other words, pragmatic failure refers to language users' lack of awareness of pragmatic differences across cultural contexts, as well as communication breakdowns resulting from improper word choice or expression. Such failure may lead native English speakers to misinterpret non-native speakers, mistakenly perceiving their utterances as intentional. In short, even when communicating in the same language, if a speaker fails to consider or comprehend the listener's cultural background and communicative intent, misunderstandings may arise despite grammatically correct sentences. The harm caused by such pragmatic failure can be severe and often goes unnoticed. Due to the speaker's lack of awareness, these failures may provoke discomfort or embarrassment in the listener.

Pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure were classified by Thomas based on Leech's taxonomy of pragmatics. And He Ziran referred to Thomas's classification as the "dichotomy theory". Pragmalinguistic failure is usually caused by differences among languages and their reciprocal influences, such as directly translating Chinese declarative request patterns into English using structures like "want""need""imperative". Sociopragmatic failure occurs when the speakers and listeners fail to adopt the proper communicative choose appropriate language forms

because of not realizing the strategies or two party's cultural difference or social custom difference. Examples include misjudging contextual variables such as power (P), social distance (D), and degree of imposition (R), leading to inappropriate politeness strategies. Studies on email requests in second language contexts reveal that learners often employ overly direct strategies in request head acts, such as imperatives or "want" "need" statements, and exhibit limited sensitivity to variations in P, D, and R.

2.2. Situation-bound utterances (SBUs)

The term "situation-bound utterance" was first introduced by Istvan Kecskes. As a key category within Kecskes' proposed continuum of formulaic language in English, SBUs are distinguished from other formulaic expressions such as idioms (e.g., "kick the bucket") and fixed semantic units (e.g., "after all," "to tell you the truth") by their inherent high dependence on the communicative situation (2000). "Situational relevance" is the essential characteristic of situation-bound utterances. Therefore, a clear understanding of the situation and its operational definition constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for defining and classifying such utterances. A situation refers to the contextual background that enables participants in communication to interact and renders their linguistic expressions comprehensible (MW/Brown K, 2006, pp. 5-12). Situations highly associated with SBUs are conventionalized, recurring standard scenarios, which exhibit both regularity and variability.

Allendorfer (2020) posits that in the real world, the number of potential situations is vast, if not infinite, with numerous interacting factors at play. Operationally, situations equate to more specific scenarios (ALLENDORFER W H, 2020). Drawing on research into scenarios and frames in pragmatics, he argues that situations primarily encompass the following four elements: setting (including time, weather, and preceding events), participants (including the identity relationships, power distance, and intimacy between speaker and hearer), location, and motivation. This provides a more convenient and effective method for operationally controlling situational factors in SBUs. From this perspective, the concept of a situation emphasizes only those details relevant to the utterance, forming a framework shared by all members of the linguistic community. SBUs are repeatedly evoked by specific details within this framework, such as particular sub-events or interpersonal relationships. In the exhaustive compilation of SBUs in a given language, the shared setting, participants, location, and motivation factors of the linguistic community can operationally serve as criteria for identifying situations (definition method and classification criteria for SBUs in second language pragmatic acquisition).

Thus, SBUs can be understood as conventionalized, highly formulaic, prefabricated pragmatic units typically associated with standardized communicative situations and possessing a degree of cultural specificity (KECSKES I, 2000, pp. 605–625). For

example, the English SBUs “welcome aboard” is used exclusively when boarding an airplane or train, while the Chinese SUBs “Have you eaten?” is typically employed in greeting situations.

2.3. Intercultural Communication (ICC)

Hymes (1974) initially proposed the concept of communicative competence, positing that the process of communication involves not only linguistic components such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or spelling, but is also profoundly linked to factors such as cultural values, role identity, customs and etiquette, channels of communication, geography, ecology, and the history of the speech community. Communicative competence encompasses not only knowledge of rules (grammatical competence) but also the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts (pragmatic competence). It constitutes individuals’ linguistic capability to engage in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and interaction with others in a meaningful manner. To achieve effective and successful communication, speakers require certain linguistic knowledge, awareness of non-verbal cues, background knowledge about the topic of conversation, and social information regarding the listeners. The concept of communicative competence has garnered widespread attention within the field of foreign language education. From the perspective of language testing, Bachman (1990, p. 84) developed a theoretical framework for communicative language ability, defined as “the capacity to implement the communicative competence in appropriate contextual situations.” This framework encompasses the interaction between knowledge of language, knowledge of the world, knowledge of the discourse situation, as well as strategic competence. Byram (2008) suggested that the current focus of foreign language teaching is to cultivate learners’ intercultural communicative competence, namely, an individual's ability to engage in effective communication in intercultural contexts by utilizing intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

3. Problem solutions

The following are causes and an exploration of coping strategies for pragmatic failure in High School Students’ English Writing.

3.1. Causes of Pragmatic Failure

This study selected approximately 300 student essay texts and some classic examples are listed below. Based on the aforementioned theoretical foundation and an analytical framework constructed with reference to extensive literature, most instances of pragmatic failure present in the students’ writing were identified. The primary sources of pragmatic failure are Ignorance and avoidance, Mother-tongue influence (interlingual errors), Target language causes (intralingual errors), Learning strategy-based errors, Communication strategy-based errors, Induced

errors, and Compound and ambiguous errors. Among these, Learning strategy-based errors include False analogy, Misanalysis, Incomplete rule application, Exploiting redundancy, Overlooking co-occurrence restrictions, Hypercorrection (monitor overuse), and Overgeneralization or system-simplification. In addition, Induced errors include Material-induced errors, Teacher-talk-induced errors, Exercise-based induced errors, Errors induced by pedagogical priorities, and Look-up errors.

3.1.1. Ignorance and avoidance

Ignorance and avoidance primarily refers to the phenomenon where second or foreign language learners, due to a lack of knowledge of the pragmatic rules of the target language, insufficient competence, or communicative anxiety, deliberately avoid appropriate pragmatic expressions. This ultimately results in the failure to achieve communicative intentions, violations of politeness norms, or the generation of communicative misunderstandings. This concept was proposed in the analysis of learners' pragmatic competence deficiencies, fundamentally reflecting the typical characteristic where learners' pragmatic competence lags significantly behind their linguistic competence. Its essence is an unintentional deficiency in pragmatic competence, distinct from communicators' subjectively intentional impolite behavior.

Ignorance is the cognitive root of this type of pragmatic failure. It means learners have a complete knowledge gap regarding the pragmatic rules, politeness hierarchies, conventionalized expression patterns for specific speech acts in the target language, as well as the sociopragmatic norms within the target culture. This is often accompanied by the negative transfer of pragmatic rules from their mother tongue, leading directly to the production of expressions that do not conform to target language pragmatic habits. For example, in English writing, Chinese high school students, unfamiliar with polite or mitigatory sentence structures in English such as "Could you possibly…" or "I was wondering if…", often opt for more direct and simpler expressions, like using "I want you to…" or "You should…". This can appear blunt or even offensive in request or suggestion genres.

Avoidance is a strategic withdrawal triggered by ignorance. It does not stem from a complete absence of pragmatic knowledge, but rather from learners' conscious avoidance of normative expressions despite being aware of more appropriate and complex pragmatic forms in the target language. This avoidance, driven by a scarcity of pragmatic resources, communicative anxiety, or fear of making mistakes, leads them to adopt overly simplified, vague, neutral, or even ineffective expressions as substitutes. Avoidance-based pragmatic failures are mainly categorized into formal avoidance and functional avoidance: formal avoidance manifests as shunning complex pragmatic sentence structures, while functional avoidance is evident in avoiding high-difficulty speech acts. For instance, in written contexts where passive

voice or dummy subject structures like “It is suggested that…” may be largely used, students might use the active voice directly due to unfamiliarity, resulting in inappropriate register.

Example 1: Our school will hold a ceremony for us in our big playground.

This sentence aligns with Chinese thinking and habits. But in English, such situations typically require the passive voice while omitting the agent: “ ceremony will be held for us in our big playground.”

In summary, ignorance and avoidance fundamentally reflect the insufficient development of learners’ pragmatic competence, particularly in terms of sociolinguistic competence and situational adaptability.

3.1.2. Mother-tongue influence:interlingual errors

Errors caused by mother-tongue influence refer to learners’ unconscious borrowing of grammatical structures, expressive habits, or pragmatic rules from their native language when using the target language, resulting in linguistic forms or pragmatic failures that do not conform to target language norms. This type of error reflects that learners have not yet established the linguistic thinking and pragmatic patterns of the target language. As Chinese learners of English, students’ ways of thinking are influenced by Chinese. If they are unclear about English expressions, they are likely to express themselves according to Chinese structures.

Example 2: I have been considering to express my thanks to you for a long time.

This sentence comes from a thank-you letter where the student writes to thank his host family during his time as an exchange student in the UK. Understood from a Chinese perspective, his intended meaning is: For a long time, I have been deeply grateful to you. However, the English sentence conveys the meaning: For a long time, I have been considering whether or not to express my gratitude to you. Therefore, this sentence applies a Chinese mode of expression, which may cause misunderstanding for the recipient. It could simply be expressed as “I’m writing to express my thanks to you for your help”. Furthermore, when concluding a letter, students might follow the Chinese convention of writing “Please take care of yourself.”, which may appear overly concerned or unnatural in an English context.(Wu Zongren & Wan Zhiyi, 2022)

In a nutshell, mother-tongue influence is one of the common obstacles in the pragmatic development of second language learners, particularly evident in the aspect of pragmatic transfer.

3.1.3. Target language causes: intralingual errors

Intralingual errors refer to mistakes made by learners during the process of acquiring the target language, resulting from incomplete understanding or overgeneralization of its rules. These errors do not stem from mother-tongue interference but rather from generalization or simplification within the target

language system itself.

Example 3: Some people always run fast speed to save time.

Although this sentence contains no grammatical errors, it exhibits inappropriate lexical collocation. The word "fast" inherently conveys the meaning of high speed and generally should not be used together with "speed." It should be revised to "Some people always run fast to save time."

Thus, intralingual errors reflect the tentative and developmental characteristics of learners in the process of constructing their internalized target language system.

3.1.4. Learning strategy-based errors

Learning strategy-based errors refer to pragmatic or linguistic form mistakes that arise when learners employ inappropriate learning methods or cognitive strategies during the language acquisition process. These errors typically stem from misunderstandings, oversimplifications, or improper analogies of language rules.

3.1.4.1. False analogy

False analogy occurs when learners inappropriately extend a particular language rule or form to other contexts that appear similar but are, in fact, different. For example, a typical instance is a student's description of the symbolism of "diligence."

Example 4: We should study like bees, working from dawn till dusk without complaint, for the collective good of the hive (our class).

While the idiom "busy as a bee" exists in English, extending it to mean "working from dawn till dusk without complaint" with an explicit focus on "for the collective good of the class" injects the collectivist values inherent in Chinese thinking. In the context of English culture, bees are often used to symbolize "industriousness," but the emphasis is more on individual initiative and sustained effort rather than self-sacrificial dedication to the collective. Such an analogy can easily seem strained to English readers because it overlooks the importance of personal goals and rewards within Western educational concepts.

3.1.4.2. Misanalysis

Misanalysis refers to learners forming incorrect understandings of language structures or lexical meanings. For instance, mistaking the "to" in "look forward to" as an infinitive marker, resulting in sentences like "I look forward to see you."

3.1.4.3. Incomplete rule application

This occurs when learners have only mastered part of a language rule, leading to its incomplete use. For example, knowing that the word order in an object clause should be that of a declarative sentence but still writing "I don't know where is he."

3.1.4.4. Exploiting redundancy

Learners over-rely on redundant information in the language, neglecting necessary formal changes. For instance, ignoring verb tense changes even when the time context is clear, as in "Yesterday he go to school."

3.1.4.5. Overlooking co-occurrence restrictions

This involves ignoring the co-occurrence restrictions of word collocations or syntactic structures. English places great emphasis on lexical collocation; even the same word can carry different meanings depending on its collocation. In senior high school English writing, many students make pragmatic errors due to a poor grasp of appropriate collocations (Yin Kun, 2025).

Example 5: learn knowledge

Influenced by Chinese thinking, many students habitually use this expression. In fact, it is incorrect. In English, "learn" should be followed by specific learning content, while "knowledge" is an abstract noun. The correct collocations are "get/gain/acquire knowledge."

Example 6: Doing exercises regularly will make our body healthy.

This expression suffers from improper collocation. It is sufficient to say "make us healthy" and adding the word "body" is unnecessary.

3.1.4.6. Hypercorrection(monitor overuse)

This refers to errors of "overcorrection" that arise from excessive focus on linguistic form. For example, students might overuse conjunctions in an attempt to make their writing more fluent, resulting in lengthy and convoluted sentences.

Example 7: In addition, it is said that it is easy to cultivate good living habits.

This could be more directly expressed as "In addition, it is easy to cultivate good living habits."

3.1.4.7. Overgeneralization, or system-simplification

This involves overextending a particular rule or simplifying the language system to reduce the learning burden. Examples include adding "-s" to all nouns for pluralization (e.g., "childs" "sheeps") or regularizing all verb past tenses (e.g., "He eated lunch.").

In summary, learning strategy-based errors reflect learners' active construction and trial-and-error behavior in their cognitive processing of language.

3.1.5. Communication strategy-based errors

Communication strategy-based errors refer to the phenomenon where learners, in actual language use, adopt strategies such as simplification, substitution, or avoidance to achieve immediate communicative goals, resulting in inaccurate or incomplete linguistic forms or pragmatic expressions.

Example 8: Don't always stay alone.

As a piece of advice may fail to achieve its intended purpose. Suggestions made with the imperative mood may make readers feel uncomfortable. “You had better not always stay alone” would be a more suitable expression for this suggestion.

3.1.6. Induced errors

Induced errors refer to learner mistakes indirectly caused by external factors, such as teaching materials, teacher talk, classroom activities, or pedagogical priorities.

3.1.6.1. Material-Induced Errors

Unclear grammatical explanations or inappropriate example sentences in teaching materials can mislead students. For instance, if a textbook emphasizes that “used to” indicates past habits but fails to explain its distinction from “would,” students might produce sentences like “I used to go to the park when I was young, and I would go there every Sunday,” resulting in semantic overlap and redundancy.

3.1.6.2. Teacher-Talk-Induced Errors

The simplified language or non-standard expressions used by teachers in the classroom may be imitated by students. A typical example is when teachers, in pursuit of lexical richness, overemphasize so-called “advanced vocabulary,” leading to pragmatic failures involving inappropriate collocations by students.

Example 9: We should enhance our English level.

Example 10: This activity cultivated my teamwork spirit.

The words “enhance” and “cultivate” are precisely the “sparkle words” that teachers often encourage as replacements for simpler terms (like “improve” or “develop”). The problem lies in the fact that students only remember their corresponding Chinese meanings (like “improve” or “develop”) but fail to master their typical collocational ranges in authentic English (e.g., enhance quality/reputation, cultivate skills/interest), thus producing awkward or even erroneous combinations. The root of this induced “lexical misuse” lies in the pedagogical process equating vocabulary upgrading with mere “replacement with difficult words,” failing to place collocation instruction on an equally important footing and not clearly defining the applicable contexts and stylistic nuances of these words. The result is that students acquire isolated “big words” but lose the naturalness and accuracy of the language. The sentences could be revised to: "We should improve our English proficiency." or "This activity developed my teamwork skills."

3.1.6.3. Exercise-Based Induced Errors

If classroom exercises overemphasize a particular structure, students may overuse it in inappropriate contexts. For example, after repeatedly practicing “not only…but also…,” students might force its use in simple coordinate sentences, making the writing verbose.

3.1.6.4. Errors Induced by Pedagogical Priorities

If teaching places excessive emphasis on grammatical correctness, students may resort to overly simple or conservative expressions to avoid mistakes, thereby inhibiting the development of their pragmatic competence. For instance, using the simple present tense throughout an entire text to avoid tense errors.

3.1.6.5. Look-Up Errors

When using dictionaries or translation tools, students may misuse words due to a failure to understand their contextual meanings. For example, simply equating "ambitious" with the Chinese meaning "a person who has a strong desire to be successful or achieve something difficult" (often carrying a negative connotation), and thus misusing it only in positive contexts lead to pragmatic failure.

In summary, induced errors highlight the profound impact of teaching materials and teacher behavior on students' pragmatic development.

3.1.7. Compound and Ambiguous Errors

Compound and ambiguous errors refer to pragmatic or linguistic form mistakes that involve multiple causes and are difficult to categorize simply. They typically reflect the interactive influences and developmental imbalances across various levels of the learner's language system.

Example 11: She explained me the problem. This error may simultaneously involve the following errors:1) mother-tongue influence; 2) overgeneralization of target language rules; 3) false analogy as a learning strategy.

Example 13: Hey, what's up? I need your help.

In a formal letter. This contains both register inappropriateness (a sociopragmatic failure) and may also stem from oversimplification of English address term rules (a pragmalinguistic failure). This type of error illustrates that pragmatic failure is often the result of multiple factors interacting, and a single-cause attribution may be insufficient for a comprehensive explanation.

3.2. Coping Strategies of Pragmatic Failure

3.2.1. Enhance Pragmatic Awareness: Correct $\neq$ Appropriate

On the one hand, introduce the concept of "pragmatic failure" in teaching by comparing sentences that are grammatically correct but pragmatically inappropriate (e.g., an overly direct request: "Give me your pen." vs. an appropriate request: "Could I possibly borrow your pen?"). Through case analysis of pragmalinguistic failures (such as misusing "How are you?" to respond to "Thank you") and sociopragmatic failures (e.g., addressing a teacher with "Hey buddy!"), help students understand the influence of contextual variables like form and function, power distance (P), and social distance (D). On the other hand, encourage students to self-check after writing: Have they considered the reader's identity, the purpose of writing, and cultural

expectations ?

3.2.2. Utilize SBUs to Build a Contextualized Expression Repository

SBUs are "highly formulaic, prefabricated pragmatic units associated with standardized situations", and their usage is constrained by four elements: setting, participants, location, and motivation. Specifically, teachers should introduce situation-bound utterances categorized by writing genres (e.g., letters, argumentative essays, narratives) and subdivided situations (e.g., apologies, suggestions, invitations). Then, design "contextual element substitution exercises": given the same function (e.g., making a request), change the participant's identity (to a friend vs. to a principal), requiring students to select different expressions to experience how setting and power distance (P) influence language choice. Finally, establish a "Situation-Function-Expression" reference table to prevent students from generating unnatural expressions due to avoidance or direct translation from their mother tongue.

3.2.3. Compare Chinese and English Pragmatic Norms from an Intercultural Perspective

Byram's (2008) intercultural communicative competence emphasizes using knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective communication. Hymes(1974) notes that communicative competence includes sociocultural rules. Therefore, teachers should systematically compare differences between Chinese and English in politeness strategies, expressions of modesty, and textual structure. For example, regarding politeness, Chinese often emphasizes self-deprecation before showing respect (e.g.,my humble work), while English tends to use direct affirmations (e.g., I'm pleased to share my essay). In terms of structure, Chinese writing emphasizes introduction, development, transition and conclusion, while English argumentative essays prefer "linear logic" (topic sentence and supporting details). Thus, teachers should guide students in analyzing typical errors caused by negative L1 transfer or cultural misjudgment and explain the underlying cultural differences. Encourage students to read authentic English essays, letters, and reviews to intuitively grasp the expression habits of native English speakers in similar contexts.

3.2.4. Strengthen Ss' Pragmatic Competence to Balance Form and Function in Teaching

Both the "communicative competence" framework and "pragmatic competence" emphasize the alignment of linguistic form with social context. That is, the pragmatic dimension must be integrated into grammar teaching. For example, when teaching the subjunctive mood, teachers should first emphasize its function in making polite suggestions (e.g., "If I were you, I would…") or requests (e.g., "Could you…?"), rather than focusing solely on its structure. Then, design "Function-Form Matching" tasks: for instance, provide a set of sentences expressing complaints (from direct to

indirect), ask students to sequence them according to the context (complaining to a merchant vs. venting to a friend), and explain their reasoning to develop strategic competence. To address learning strategy-based errors (e.g., overgeneralization, simplification), provide counterexamples and clarify rule boundaries. If students overuse "more and more," supplement it with synonymous expressions like "increasingly" or "a growing number of," and explain their stylistic differences.

3.2.5. Optimize Input and Feedback to Reduce "Induced Errors"

Regarding teaching materials and input, teachers can supplement textbooks with authentic contextual materials (e.g., sample letters, blog comments) to ensure students are exposed to natural and situationally appropriate language. In terms of teacher feedback, go beyond grammatical correction to provide pragmatic guidance. For example, annotate a student's essay with: "This sentence is grammatically correct, but using 'I want you to…' when making a request to a professor sounds too direct. Consider changing it to 'Would it be possible for you to…?' to show politeness." In exercise design, reduce mechanical transformation drills and increase situational writing tasks (e.g., "write invitation emails to different recipients') with explicit requirements to consider the reader's identity, communicative purpose, and appropriateness.

3.2.6. Cultivate Metapragmatic Reflection and Strategic Competence

Strategic competence refers to the ability to flexibly use language resources to achieve communicative goals. When students do not know the exact expression, teachers should guide them to convey their intent clearly through paraphrasing or exemplification, rather than avoiding or translating literally. Furthermore, teachers can encourage the creation of a writing self-checklist that includes pragmatic dimensions: 1) Is my tone appropriate for the reader's identity (P/D)? 2) Are my expressions in line with English cultural conventions? 3) Do my sentences achieve the intended function (e.g., persuasion, apology)?

Finally, implement peer review focusing on pragmatic appropriateness, discussing reasons for revisions to enhance metapragmatic awareness.

In summary, by constructing a four-in-one writing teaching model integrating "Form-Function-Culture-Context," we can better address pragmatic failures in high school students' English writing. This shifts the teaching focus from the one-dimensional goal of linguistic accuracy to the multidimensional goal of pragmatic appropriateness. Through theoretical enlightenment (clarifying concepts), enhanced input (contextualized and culturally comparative materials), restructured practice (function-oriented and authentic tasks), and upgraded feedback (pragmatic correction and strategic guidance), students can gradually internalize the pragmatic principle of "saying the right thing, in the right way, to the right person, in the right context." This will enable them to effectively achieve communicative intent in

intercultural written communication and reduce misunderstandings and barriers caused by pragmatic failure.

4. Conclusion

This study systematically examines the causes of pragmatic failure in high school students' English writing and proposes corresponding pedagogical strategies. Guided by Curriculum Standards and China Standards of English, it indicates a tendency in current writing instruction to overemphasize grammatical accuracy while often overlooking the appropriateness and communicative effectiveness of language in specific contexts. This may lead to the prevalence of writing that is "formally correct yet pragmatically inappropriate."

Through literature review and empirical analysis, seven main categories of pragmatic failure causes have been identified: ignorance and avoidance, mother-tongue influence (interlingual errors), target language causes (intralingual errors), learning strategy-based errors, communication strategy-based errors, induced errors, and compound and ambiguous errors. Each category is analyzed with authentic student writing samples, revealing the underlying cognitive, cultural, and instructional factors contributing to such failures. Theoretically, the study integrates frameworks of pragmatic competence development, situation-bound utterances (SBUs), and intercultural communication theory, constructing a multidimensional analytical model. Here, the concept of SBUs emphasizes the conventionalized association between linguistic forms and standardized situational contexts, while the intercultural perspective underscores systematic differences between Chinese and English in areas such as politeness strategies and discourse patterns.

Building on this foundation, the study proposes six comprehensive teaching strategies, forming an integrated writing instruction model that balances "Form, Function, Culture, and Context." This model aims to promote the cultivation of pragmatic competence in writing by focusing on contextual appropriateness and communicative effectiveness. It is hoped that this research can offer high school English teachers a structured pedagogical approach and practical reference points, ultimately assisting learners in achieving their communicative intentions more effectively in intercultural written communication and reducing misunderstandings arising from pragmatic failure.

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