

Abstract

In the present study, the author has adopted a qualitative approach to investigating punctuation errors in compositions written by English majors. Within the framework of Error Analysis (henceforth EA), Contrastive Approach (CA) and Markedness Theory (MT), and with forty seniors majoring in English from the School of Foreign Studies of Nanchang University as the subjects, this research attempts to reveal the problem in the use of punctuation marks by the subjects through investigating the errors found at two different stages. Both subjective and objective factors are analyzed in order to offer solutions to reducing punctuation errors. The instruments used for the analysis include the subjects' compositions in their final exam papers at two different stages (to display the practical situation of punctuation use among subjects in their English writings), excerpts from six classic novels (both in Chinese and English versions)—*Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Sword of the Yueh Maiden*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Ulysses*, *Treasure Island*, and one questionnaire for subjects (to seek for the possible causes of punctuation errors).

Based on the survey and analyses of the data collected and on the theoretical discussions of the data, the findings can be listed as follows:

1. Errors of punctuation in students' writings occurred in their use of colon, comma, stop, question mark, semicolon and ellipsis. In Term 3 of students' English study, errors of colon, ellipsis, semicolon, comma and stop stand in a line from high frequency to low frequency gradually. In addition, two graphic signs of Chinese are used in students' English writings. In Term 6, errors of colon take up the first place, comma the second, question mark the third and stop the last. The data show that colon and comma are the two punctuation marks difficult for the learners since errors in colon and comma occurred in both terms with high percentage.

Our data also pointed to the problem of capitalization in students' writings of English. Errors are usually made in titles, proper nouns although they occur much less in initials of sentences.

2. With the aid of T-test, we find that with the passage of time the problem of students' use of punctuation remains unchanged.

3. There exist both subjective and objective causes for punctuation errors. Negative transfer as well as the difficulty in learning caused by the difference related to the markedness of punctuation, and students' and instructors' neglect of punctuation are the main causes of the above errors.

Feasible solutions are proposed in order to reduce punctuation errors.

This research can shed light on the present situation of students' use of punctuation marks and arouse both teachers' and students' attention to punctuation marks and as a result it will improve students' writing levels. What's more, the successful application of markedness theory to accounting for punctuation errors is an initiative which offers a new perspective for explaining the causes of linguistic errors in second language acquisition.

Key Words: Error Analysis; punctuation marks; writing; markedness

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In this age of information explosion, in order to keep up with the rapid pace of information change, people have to do a lot of reading and writing. To achieve this goal, people not only need a good command of world knowledge and lexicon but also of punctuation marks because misuse or misunderstanding of punctuation undercuts the quality of writing and reading. In 1995, *Punctuation Mark Usage* issued in China has presented the definition for punctuation as follows: “punctuation marks are the symbols which are used to assist lexicon in recording language. In addition, punctuation is an essential part of writing for the purpose of pausing, modal and separating words.” Observing following examples in our daily lives, you may come to recognize the important role played by these tiny-looking punctuation marks.

First, once the American government drew up a piece of foreign trade list which listed out many tax-free products and among them ‘foreign fruit-plant’ was mistyped by a typewriter as ‘foreign fruit, plant.’ Because of this minor punctuation mark, large quantities of oranges, coconuts, bananas, and lemons were imported from other countries free-taxed the following year. As a result, two million dollars were lost because of the typewriter’s minor error of punctuation.

Take a look at another interesting example. Mrs. Abington was picked up as the heroine in the play *The School for Scandal* written by the outstanding play-writer Sheridan. After the play was over, Mrs. Abington received a piece of note written by her opponent, Mary Robinson, a famous actress. The note says, “Mary Robinson says Mrs. Abington is the greatest actress in London.” At the sight of it, Mrs. Abington inserted two commas into the sentence and sent back the note in return for the generosity of Mary Robinson as “ Mary Robinson, says Mrs. Abington, is the greatest actress in London.”

Apart from the above examples, there are many more examples of this type which point to the importance of punctuation marks in our work and life.

In spite of the significant part punctuation marks play, they are still underestimated and overlooked by the public. And this is especially evident in

learners' writings. For the sake of making heads or tails of the status of punctuation marks, there are various ways to make it. Here I will adopt an approach which is widely used in observing the status of certain aspect of language usages, that is, error analysis. On the one hand, error analysis is frequently employed in analyzing errors committed in learners' output and is proved to be valid with the passage of time. On the other hand, till now, there are few papers or articles studying errors of punctuation marks and even fewer articles about error analysis of punctuation based on data.

To fill the gap, my thesis intends to display the practical situation of punctuation using through investigating punctuation errors occurred in students' writing. In short, this thesis aims to reveal distribution and frequencies of punctuation errors in Chinese students' writing of English and seek for accordingly subjective and objective factors of errors and try to find some solution to the problems.

1.1 Reasons for Choosing the Topic

First, punctuation plays an important role in our work and life. Lv Shuxiang, a famous Chinese linguist, once said, "Punctuation mark is not only used to separate sentences, but also an essential part of language." (1979:10) Guo Moruo also noticed the significance of punctuation marks. "The value of punctuation is equal to that of language, sometimes it even outweighs language; A passage without any punctuation mark is the same as a person with no eyes and brows," said Mr. Guo. (quoted from Tian Yuzhe, 2006) From these remarks, we have a better insight into punctuation and its importance to a text. Regarding to the significant role punctuation plays in text, a research on punctuation is worthy of being conducted.

Second, writing as a basic skill of English learning remains a weak point for most college students. How to improve students' writing abilities is a difficult task at hand for instructors. Besides enhancing students' abilities in organizing a whole passage and in expressing meanings clearly through lexical studies, proper use of punctuation is also a part of writing skill which will ultimately result in improving students' quality of English writing.

Third, my part-time job as an English teacher at the university where I study for my Master's Degree gives me access to students' performances in this regard. From

research to investigate the situation of students' using of punctuation and quest for subjective and objective causes of errors as well.

Fourth, so far, previous researches on punctuation have been conducted mainly on five aspects. They are functions of punctuation marks in texts, contrastive study of punctuation, criterion of punctuation marks, errors of punctuation, and its application to translation. (Detailed papers on them will be mentioned in Chapter Two) There are few researches based on data analysis, neither have researches been conducted to reveal the causes of these errors made in students' writing papers.

Fifth, nowadays, English writing, as a means of written communication, dominates not only in language teaching, but also in job-hunting, professional work and various examinations, etc. Writing is a comprehensive manifestation of students' language competence and a real demonstration of students' grasp of language. Investigating punctuation errors in students' written practice and finding ways to improve the skills in this respect can help enhance students' writing as a whole.

1.2 Significance of the Research

As we all know, error analysis plays an important part in second language acquisition which contributes a lot to foreign language teaching and learning. Error analysis of punctuation, as a part of error analysis, also deserves carrying out and will definitely benefit foreign language teaching and learning. Our analysis of punctuation errors will catch English teachers' eyes to the use of punctuation marks in students' writings of English and inspire them to take steps to improve the current situation in their professional activities and this will eventually promote foreign language teaching, especially, the teaching of writing.

Second, to make students gain a better knowledge of punctuation will not only benefit the students in writing but also in fast reading and exercise-doing. Through literature review, we are aware of some other functions of punctuation marks such as replacement, cohesion manner etc., and correspondingly we can take the most of the knowledge of punctuation marks to answer some questions in exams instantly.

Third, a research on punctuation marks is worth conducting whether from a theoretical point of view or in practice since it will shed light on the present situation

of punctuation using and arouse teachers' along with students' attention to punctuation marks and as a result it will finally improve students' writing abilities. Moreover, the findings of this research will also push forward studies on error analysis and present guides and references for selecting course book, designing writing course, editing text book as well as assessing.

Fourth, the findings of this research, such as which type of errors students are likely to make and which ones are less likely, can be applied to language teaching as well as language acquisition. Moreover, seeking out the causes of these errors will also contribute to contrastive study between Chinese and English.

Last but not least, the success in introducing markedness theory to account for punctuation errors is an initiative which offers a new perspective for explaining the causes of other linguistic errors.

1.3 Organization of the Thesis

This is a research which aims to demonstrate the use of punctuation in English majors' writing of English, seeks for subjective and objective causes of the failure in using punctuation marks, and at last explores for ways to solve the problem. In the research, both descriptive and qualitative approaches are employed to achieve the purpose of the research.

Chapter 1 is an introduction. In this chapter the reasons for choosing this topic instead of others and the significance of conducting this research are introduced. In the end, the outline or framework of this paper will be elaborated.

Chapter 2 covers the theories that will be applied for the research. They are error analysis, contrastive approach, error taxonomy, markedness theory.

Chapter 3 is the design of the research. The processes involved in the research, such as the sample, the instruments, the approaches, the procedure in analysis and the findings are elaborated in this part. It spans all of the steps in the five sequential procedures of error analysis. It is not only concerned with the overall processes of data collection and data analysis but also with exploring subjective together with objective factors of those errors and evaluation of errors. After collecting all the data required, punctuation errors are identified carefully according to punctuation norms.

Studying these punctuation errors, we classify them roughly into four categories. These include lack of punctuation or omission, misuse of punctuation or misformation, misordering and redundancy or overuse. Based on the classification, a table will be presented to illustrate the distribution of errors under each category. In light of the table, the situation of learners' using of punctuation is made clear. With the introduction of markedness theory, the use of six co-translated material together with the aid of a questionnaire, the causes related to both the interior and exterior factors are proposed.

Chapter 4 is another major part of this research. With the causes carefully considered and discussed, solutions are proposed on how to remove and eliminate punctuation errors. A few of methods are suggested for each cause.

Chapter 5, the last chapter, is the conclusion of the research. Implications of the research to other academic fields are made. Significance of the research together with the outcome of the research is also revealed.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Error Analysis

Since the thesis is the study on punctuation marks under the framework of error analysis, the first relevant theory is EA (Error Analysis). For EA, minute descriptions of error analysis go ahead, such as the origin of error analysis and processes of error analysis etc. Apart from error analysis, theories on CA (Contrastive Approach) punctuation marks and markedness theory are also introduced.

Speaking of error analysis, one scholar who has to be mentioned is S.P. Corder. He can be regarded as the forefather of EA Theory. Before the publication of his book, *The significance of learners' errors*, the public considered errors as something unwanted (1967). It is he who drew the public's attention to errors and made EA an independent subject of its own. A series of publications by Corder on EA push error analysis forward.

2.1.1 The Definition of Error and Error Analysis

Concepts of error: Many scholars have given their definitions for errors. According to Corder (1973), error refers to those features of learners' utterances which differ from those of any native speaker, reflecting the scanty of the learners' competence in using the target language. Ellis (1980) stated that, "when a language learner unconsciously breaks the unwritten rules of the target language as a result of faulty learning, he makes an error." Brown (1981:165) defines error as "a noticeable derivation from the grammar of an adult native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage incompetence of the learner." Edge (1989:10) proposed a definition of error with regard to language teaching: "If a student can not self-correct a mistake in his or her own English, but the teacher thinks that the class is familiar with the correct form, we shall call that sort of mistake an error." Besides the above, there still exist some other definitions of error. However different their wordings are, they have something in common, that is, errors are the deviation of the norm of the target language, reflecting the scanty of learners' language competence.

Concepts of error analysis: EA is a type of bilingual comparison, a comparison between learners' interlanguage and the target language, which is a systematic study and analysis of errors of the learners of a foreign language, in an attempt to account for their linguistic and psychological origin, their regularity, their predictability and variability. EA is an advance of CA (Contrastive Approach).

2.1.2 The Origin of Error Analysis

It was when Corder's book, *The significance of learners' errors* was published in 1967 that people's attitude towards errors are revolutionarily reversed, and it was from that time people began to be aware of the significance of errors (1967). In that book it provides three positive factors for focusing on errors: (1) teachers will be conscious of to what extent learners grasp the target language and what stages learners are in the process of accessing target language. (2) Through analyzing errors, we can know how learners learn their languages as errors can reflect strategies and processes used by learners during the processes of language learning. (3) Paradoxically, it is possible that making errors may actually help learners to learn when they correct the errors they made by themselves. Corder also proposed two justifications for the necessities of studies on learners' errors in his book *Error Analysis and Interlanguage* in 1981. First, from a practical perspective, pedagogic aspect, a good command of the nature of errors is necessary before a systematic means of eliminating errors can be dug out. Second, from a theoretical perspective, it has been asserted that a study on learners' errors is part of the systematic study on how well the learner's language proficiency is, which is necessary for an understanding of the process of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) by its own.

2.1.3 Processes in Error Analysis

Error analysis is another book on EA by Corder (1974). The solutions to how to carry out error analysis are mentioned in this book. The solutions are the five time-sequential steps: data collection, error identification, error classification, error explanation and error evaluation.

The first step is the sample collection of errors. With regard to this, the first thing taken into account is to make a choice as to what kind of samples from learners'

languages will be selected for our analysis and how to collect these samples. As for this, what should be pointed out is that in order to guarantee learners' language reflecting natural, spontaneous language use, making sure to adopt a random sample is a must, that is to say, the subjects for the research are chosen at random from a much larger scale of potential subjects. A drawback, however, is that learners often do not output much spontaneous data, which leads Corder to argue for elicited data. Corder identified two elicitations: a) clinical elicitation, which involves informant to produce data of any sort, for example, by means of a general interview or by asking learners to write a composition; b) experimental methods, which involve using of special instrument designed to elicit data containing the linguistic feature that the researcher wishes to investigate.

The second step is error identification. Error identification follows immediately after all the data have been collected. It is to decide what constitutes an error and to set up a criterion or a norm to identify errors.

The third step is error classification. Nowadays, a wide range of error classification systems are available and details about them will be introduced in the later part.

The fourth is explanation of errors which centers on recognizing error sources. And this step has a connection with certain theories within and out of linguistics, for example, psycholinguistics.

The final step, error evaluation, is motivated by the desire to meet the need of finding a most efficient way to language learning. The ultimate goal of this step is to show what difficult aspects students confront in language learning.

Nowadays, the most prevalent and widely used procedure on error analysis is the one presented above by Corder (1974). A bunch of researches have been carried out on the basis of this procedure. The validity and reliability of the process is manifested by this widely applied procedure, hence in the thesis I will also apply it for my research.

2.2 Approaches to Errors

Before we carry out the research, some relative knowledge should be mentioned beforehand because they will guide us to conduct the research correctly and

effectively. First we should know how many approaches to error analysis are available. In general, there are two main approaches: contrastive approach and non-contrastive approach (Hu Zhuanglin, 1988: 332).

2.2.1 Contrastive Approach (CA)

Contrastive approach refers to the comparison between linguistic systems of two or more languages, such as phonetic system, syntactic system and so on. It was developed and practiced in the 1950s and 1960s, as a practical requirement to teaching a foreign language in a most efficient way and an implication of structural linguistics to language teaching (Richards, et al. 2000: 104).

Contrastive analysis springs from the belief held by behaviorists about learning theories, that is, errors are the system of failure during learning. If the sources of failures can be traced, efforts should be taken to get rid of those errors.

With regard to this belief, contrastive linguistics came into being. The publication of *Linguistics across Cultures* by Robert Lado in 1957 is the landmark of contrastive linguistics. According to Lado (1957: 2), individuals are inclined to transfer the forms and meanings of their mother tongue and culture to a foreign language and culture both productively when attempting to speak the language and act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives.

Charles Fries, one of the leading applied linguists of that day, claimed that based on such a belief, the most efficient materials are those that are based on a scientific description of the language to be learned carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner (1945: 9).

Contrastive analysis involves four different procedures (Brown, 2001: 194). The first procedure is description. A linguist or language teacher, using the tools of formal grammar, explicitly describes the two languages in question. The second procedure, a selection is made of certain forms---linguistic items, rules and structures as it is impossible to cover every possible aspect of the two languages.. The third is the contrast process itself, the mapping of one linguistic system into the other and a specification of similarities and dissimilarities between two language systems. Last,

procedures.

Contrastive analysis hypothesis:

Derived from those beliefs that contrastive analysis can predict the difficulties in language learning, contrastive analysis hypothesis has been brought out. Weinreich (1953:1) claimed that "the greater the difference between two systems, i.e. the numerous the mutually exclusive forms and patterns in each, the greater is the teaching problem and the potential area of interference." Likewise, Lado (1957) proclaimed that the teacher who has made a comparison of native language with target language of the students will know better of what the real problems are and can provide guidelines for teaching. He stated further that "those elements that are similar to learner's native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult." Sum up, where there are similarities there is positive transfer, *vis versa*.

2.2.2 Non-contrastive Analysis (EA)

Non-contrastive analysis or EA is the development of CA, which attaches importance to errors instead of making comparison between two languages. Readers may be confused that since there is a contrastive approach to analyzing errors why we take the trouble to use a different approach for the same sake. The reasons come from both practical and theoretical aspects. What follows are the reasons in detail. Theoretical aspects mainly reside in the suspicion of the validity of two equations which is the core of the contrastive approach, that is, the notion of equating difference with difficulty on the one side and difficulty with error on the other side. The problem with the first equation rests on that difference falls into linguistic concepts, while difficulty falls into psychological concepts. Hence, it is unreasonable to put an equation between these two concepts of different fields. It is the same case with second equation from theoretical points of view. Theoretical arguments have shown that there is no significant relation between error and difficulty. Provided that there are several errors in one sentence, this does not lead to the difficulty for the person who made them. At the same time, when one sentence or a text is difficult for learners, it does not imply that learners will commit more mistakes than easier one. For this

reason, the contrastive approach can not hold water. Besides the theoretical defects mentioned above, contrastive approach draws criticisms from practical aspects as well. With regard to the belief that the differences and similarities between mother tongue and target language can predict the errors was called into question from the following example. "Three thieves ran out of my room when I opened the door." Here the plural form of nouns does not correspond to Chinese nouns. In light of the belief we may predict that Chinese learners may omit the plural form as there is no counterpart in Chinese, but as a matter of fact, Chinese learners keep this grammatical rule in mind. It is apparent that errors made by learners can not be totally predicted from the contrastive analysis. In light of the errors due to other factors instead of mother tongue, contrastive approach was considered of little value. In terms of the shortcomings of contrastive approach, new approach must be put forward to complement this condition. Therefore, the emergence of non-contrastive analysis at that time is out of question.

The justifications of non-contrastive analysis:

According to Brown (1987:169-171), non-contrastive analysis, also called EA, is based on the following assumptions:

- (1) Human learning is fundamentally a process of error making, which forms an important aspect of learning any skill or acquiring any knowledge.
- (2) Language learning is like any other human learning activity. In the course of learning a second language, learners will produce utterances that are ungrammatical or ill-formed, when judged by generally accepted rules of the language they are learning. Not only teachers of language but also any native speaker of the target language goes through this error-making process. In another word, L2 learning, like L1 acquisition, is trial-and-error in nature. Hence errors are unavoidable.
- (3) Errors made by L2 learners can be observed, analyzed, classified, and described.
- (4) In errors made by L2 learners lie some keys to the understanding of the process of second language learning.

The most significant contribution of non-contrastive analysis, apart from the role

played in the process of complementing with CA, rests on its success in evaluating the status of errors from unpredictability to that of a guide for the inner processes in language acquisition as well.

As the old saying goes that each coin has two sides, there exist disadvantages and advantages in each approach. In view of this the writer will **integrate these two approaches** to analyzing punctuation errors in writing as these two approaches are not exclusive to each other, but interdependent on each one.

2.3 The Relationship between CA and EA

In CA, error is a setback in language learning which should be avoided; In EA, error is a clue offering abundant important information on the performance of language learners, and to some degree it is good. The major differences between them are their contents and scopes. CA focuses on the performance relationship between mother tongue and target language while EA focuses on errors from a larger scale.

2.4 Error Classification

Error classification is a key step in error analysis. In light of its importance in EA, it has been developed into a subject of its own. As to error taxonomy, the earliest book on it is *A Summary of Investigations relating to Grammar, Language and Composition* (1929). Moreover, *Errors and Expectation*, also an initial book on error classification, puts errors under six categories: handwriting, punctuation, syntax, common errors, spelling and vocabulary (1974). And under each category sub-categories are classified further in her book. For example, common errors can be divided into subject-verb concord, usage of pronoun etc. Corder (1971) classified errors under two categories: error of competence and error of performance. In addition, error of competence can be further divided into intralingual error and interlingual error. Richards (1971) accepted the notion of intralingual error, and kept classifying it into overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules and false concepts hypothesized.

Recently, a comparatively comprehensive error classification system has been proposed by Dulay, Burt, Krashen (quoted from Liu Shaolong, 1998) and they have suggested that there are four kinds of error taxonomies:

- (1) Linguistic category classification: phonology, graphology, grammar, lexis, text or discourse.
- (2) The surface structure taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, misordering.
- (3) Comparative taxonomy: developmental, interlingual, ambiguous and unique.
- (4) Communicative effort taxonomy: global and local.

2.5 Recent Researches on Error Analysis in Writing

Up to now, researches on errors cover a wide range, from errors in writing to errors in speaking, etc. Researches on EA in writing outnumber that in speaking mainly because of different technical requirements. In this current thesis, my focus is on punctuation errors in writing. EA in writing is conducted from different perspectives, varying from proportion of errors, normal errors to particular errors. As to the first type, the study on proportion of errors aims to show which the most frequent errors are, in other words, which aspect of language is the most difficult one for a group (Calvez, 2000). The second type, the study on normal errors focuses on uncovering the errors committed by learners (Xue Rong, 2002). The last type, the study on particular errors intends to unveil the condition of using a certain language item in writing (Wang Xuewen, 2004; Shu Wanxia, 2002). In spite of diversity of error analysis, there is still inadequacy within it. Firstly, most conclusions are drawn without data-assistance and remain on theoretical level. Secondly, most of the researches fix their attention on literal aspects, such as grammar errors, spelling errors and the like. However, punctuation is out of sight for most researchers. In response, punctuation is the focus of this thesis.

2.6 Introduction to English Punctuation Marks

2.6.1 Definition of Punctuation Marks

Punctuation is derived from Latin *punctus*, meaning “point.” From the 15th to the early 18th century it was known in English as pointing. There exist different versions of the notion of punctuation. *Cihai*, a dictionary in Chinese, defines punctuation as a graphic sign employed to mark break, tone, features and functions of lexicon and it is an integral part of written language (1999). From *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, punctuation refers to the use of spacing, conventional signs and certain typographical devices as aids to understanding and appreciating reading, both silently and aloud, of handwritten and printed texts. As much as the definitions proposed above, there is one thing in common among them, that is, punctuation is the aid which is used to make reading or writing more smooth and understandable.

2.6.2 Norms of Punctuation Marks

In terms of functions of punctuation, it can be classified into dot and tab. Tab mainly indicates functions and features of words, offers explanations about sayings and quotations, and makes emphasis and omission. Tab is composed of quotation mark, bracket, dash and so on. The usage of tab is almost the same in two languages. Dot holds an active role in both Chinese and English. A dot in a passage is used to mark various break, sometimes intonation such as interrogatory or exclamation. Dots in sentences are comma, semicolon, and colon while dots at the end of sentences are stop, question mark and exclamation mark. In order to identify punctuation errors, we should learn the rules of usage by heart. The criteria of punctuation usages in English are as follows:

Comma is most frequently used both in Chinese and English, but it is not used in the same situation. For example, comma, colon and semicolon in English are employed in the following situations:

- Comma: (1) separating elements in a list or series.
(2) separating compound and complex sentences.
(3) separating nonrestrictive elements.
(4) used with reordered adverbs.

(5) used with direct dialogue.

Colon: (1) used to introduce summary, explanation, amplification before an independent clause.

(2) used to bring in a list or items in a series after an independent clause.

(3) used to make a quotation.

(4) used to punctuate titles, salutations and so on.

Semicolon: (1) used to indicate a close relationship between two clauses.

(2) used to separate independent clauses connected with a coordinating conjunctive and so on.

It is unnecessary to make a redundant account about all punctuation marks in both languages. Comparing the use of punctuation in Chinese and English, we find that the two languages do not apply the same criterion for the use of even the same punctuation, which is a fact worth noticing.

2.6.3 Current Study on Punctuation Marks

Papers on punctuation can be grouped into five types: functions of punctuation (Xu Ming, 2001; Gao Yuan&Liu Runqing, 2002), criteria of punctuation use (Shang Zhiqiang, 1999; Yu Aijv, 2000), contrastive study (Hou Jingjing, 2000; Yuan Jun, 2004), errors of punctuation (Ren Rong, 2003; Lv Yan, 2006), punctuation in translation and some other practical writings (Chen Guangxiang, 2003; Chen Lihong, 2004). In light of this, it is clear that available papers on punctuation mainly remain on the theoretical level. Hence, it is necessary and significant to carry out a research to inquire the real situation of learners' using of punctuation based on authentic data.

2.7 Markedness Theory

2.7.1 The Origin of Markedness Theory

Even though concepts of markedness vary from one linguistic school to another, the basic concept of markedness theory is that unmarked components are more fundamental, natural, and common than marked ones in one language.

Markedness theory was one of important theories in Structural linguistics. In the early 1930s, a phonetician of the Prague School, Trubetzkoy, developed the concept for phonetic studies to emphasize the opposition of phoneme. In his classic work *The Principles of Phonology*, he discussed a wide range of opposition of phoneme, and the concept of markedness came into being through neutralizing phoneme opposition. He found that dichotomy elements have a feature of “positive or negative”, or “all or none.” Jakobson then inherited and developed this theory. He insisted on an opposition, binary opposition, in which an element may be either marked or unmarked. Jakobson’s main devotion is to introduce the concept into the field of grammar and lexicon to describe grammar and semantic notions (quoted from Cai Jinting, 2001) . Therefore, markedness theory in Prague School is absolutely binary, unmarked or marked.

Under the framework of typology, markedness refers to asymmetrical phenomenon in linguistic elements. Within this theory, markedness is not an absolute notion but a relative one. In other words, linguistic elements are in a continuum with regard to markedness.

2.7.2 Definition of Markedness and Unmarkedness

In language, many elements have the relation of opposition. The so-called opposition refers to the fact that there exist significant differences in terms of linguistic level among language elements. Only when two or more language elements share some common features and have at the same time some different features, they have the relation of opposition. Opposition can be multiple division or binary. Markedness of language components belongs to the category of binary, dissymmetrical opposition. In a broad sense, opposition stands between “+X” and “-X”; in a narrow sense, opposition lies between “+X” and “pointing out -X.” (quoted from Fei Liming, 2006:2)

In language system, one part of linguistic elements is basic and the meaning it possessing is neutral; the remaining part bears the character of markedness through adding certain characteristic features to those neutral meanings. In another word, one end of opposition has one feature and the other has no such feature; one end conveys

a definite and exact notion and the other a general and indefinite one. The former of the opposition is marked and exactly transmit X, while the latter is unmarked and can include or exclude X, that is, the opposition is “X” and “X+non X.”

In markedness theory under typology, every language element exists in a continuum, with the two ends unmarkedness and markedness. And this one receives general support taking into account some complicated phenomenon in language like number of nouns: singular, dual and trial. Then what criterion we can adopt to assess markedness of each punctuation needs to be solved. Till now, a bunch of researches have been conducted about the influence of markedness theory upon language transfer (Eckman, 1977; Zobl, 1983; Kellerman, 1979; Ellis, 1994, etc.). A few criteria are proposed by scholars on identifying markedness of language elements (Shen, 1997; Kellerman, 1979; Zobl, 1983, etc.). In this research, the criteria proposed by Shen, Chomsky and Eckman are adopted and they will be shown in-depth in the later chapter.

Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology

This chapter is the main section of the thesis, the core of the research, in which enough attention is paid to the monitoring steps to make the study as objective as possible. Qualitative and descriptive methods are employed side by side during the analysis of data in order to reveal the situation of the use of punctuation by learners of English.

Research questions:

- (1) What is the frequency of each punctuation error?
- (2) With the development of English proficiency does the use of punctuation marks remain the same?
- (3) Which punctuation marks are difficult for Chinese learners in learning?
- (4) What are the subjective and objective factors for punctuation errors?
- (5) What feasible solutions can we use to reduce punctuation errors?

3.1 Participants

The participants of this research consist of forty seniors majoring in English from a regular class at the university where I study for my Master's Degree. All the participants have had the same experience of about ten-year regular English study and accepted by the same university to study English as their major which requires similar prerequisites. These basic premises are to ensure the homogeneity among participants. As English majors, their English competence is almost of the same level. The reasons to choose are two in number. On the one hand, if the subjects are advanced learners, the errors which they made may be fewer than intermediate and lower level students; On the other hand, if the subjects are beginners, the errors committed may cover some errors which may not exist in students of other levels. Hence the reason why I choose intermediate level students as the subjects instead of the other two levels is that it is the most representative one. The findings of this research can be used to infer situations of a larger group.

3.2 Instruments

The instrument of this research comprises three items. First, to indicate the status of learners' using punctuation marks, the instrument selected is eighty compositions. Half of the compositions were written at the 3rd term when the subjects were sophomores, and the remaining ones were written at the 6th term as juniors. All of the compositions come from the writing part of their final examinations. There exist two major merits for selecting compositions from examinations. (1) The marked advantage of selecting compositions from exams is that all the subjects take the writings seriously and are strict with themselves motivated by the idea of achieving better performances in the exams or reaching out for receiving scholarship and the like, which will definitely result in reliability of the data. (2) Compositions from examinations are better than homework since they can prevent students from copying other students' compositions and, as a result, the data we collect are more valid and valuable. Second, to find the truth, in the section of finding out subjective factors of those errors, I will ask the subjects to fill in a questionnaire which aims to reveal the subjects' and their English teacher's attitudes towards punctuation. Third, according to the findings, one hypothesis comes into my mind, that is, overusing comma by Chinese learners may spring from the habit of the students' native language, in that commas are used more frequently in Chinese than in English. To test the hypothesis, I will select excerpts from six classic novels both Chinese and English version. The novels include five classical English novels as well as one Chinese novel—*Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Sword of the Yueh Maiden*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Ulysses*, *Treasure Island*.

3.3 Processes in the Research

To attain validity of the research, I will follow the generally-applied principle and procedure and use great care and precision in the process of error analysis. To be specific, I will use the procedure proposed by Corder for my research since this process of error analysis has been applied by many researchers and the validity and reliability were guaranteed and proven (1974).

3.3.1 Sample Collection

With regard to sample collection, the first thing is to make a choice of what kind of samples to select for my analysis and how to collect them. In my thesis, as for collecting sample, all I should do is to collect all the papers of participants and focus on the writing sections. As has already been mentioned in the previous section, there are two types of elicited samples in EA. The sample used in this study is a clinical sample because the sample is elicited by asking each subject to write a composition in the final examination. The data are composed of two parts. One part is forty compositions with title partially-fixed from the subjects in their final exam at the 3rd term. Subjects can choose titles at will about the theme of “Who is More Beautiful, Short Woman or Tall Woman?” And the other section is forty compositions titled “Should University Students Go in for Business?” written in the 6th term. Collecting performances of subjects in different periods is to achieve the target of investigating the acquisition of punctuation marks of subjects during different periods.

3.3.2 Error Identification

What follows the data-collecting step is error identification. Here one point for attention is that we should make a decision on what constitutes an error and to set up a procedure to identify errors. All punctuation errors are identified with the aid of some relevant books on standard English punctuation usage, such as *A Guide to English Punctuation Marks* (2004), *The Penguin Guide to Punctuation* (1999) and the like which list out criteria for all English punctuation marks. With the aid of these criteria specified in the book, all punctuation errors are identified and marked out in the students' compositions. For convenience, the number of every punctuation occurring, the sum total of punctuation errors and the frequencies of errors for each punctuation are displayed in the following table. In the table, the number and percentage of each type of punctuation used and misused in each semester are listed out.

Table 3.1 Punctuation Errors Collected from English Major Students' Writings

Punctuation Marks	Term 3.		Term 6.		Total.	
Comma	167/686	24%	94/378	25%	261/1064	25%
Stop	5/767	1%	5/470	1%	10/1237	1%
Semicolon	2/8	25%	0/5	0%	2/13	15%
Quotation Mark	0/33 pair	0%	0/10pair	0%	0/43	0%
Colon	9/17	53%	12/16	75%	21/33	64%
Hyphen	0/36	0%	0/14	0%	0/50	0%
Apostrophe	0/184	0%	0/82	0%	0/266	0%
Dash	0/1	0%	0/3	0%	0/4	0%
Ellipsis	1/3	33.3%	0/3	0%	1/6	17%
Question mark	0/25	0%	10/48	21%	10/73	14%
Exclamation mark	0/7	0%	0/5	0%	0/12	0%
Capitalize of Initials	22/824	3%	11/526	2%	33/1350	2%
Capitalize of Titles	19/29	66%	5/40	13%	24/69	35%
Capitalize of Proper N.	4/39	10%	0/8	0%	4/47	9%
Others	1/1 Book title, 7 Separating mark		0	0%		

Notes: In our data identification, sometimes mistakes of quotation mark instead of errors were found. For example, in one case, a student forgot to be complete in the use of a quotation mark. The sentence is about what the writer wanted to tell to every short woman, "don't worry, be more confident and happier, you will also become attractive. Besides, a stop was omitted from a sentence which was used at the end of a composition as "Money isn't everything" To cover a dot at the end of each sentence is a rule stored in all students' mind and the student who made the mistake wrote some other sentences with the same structure correctly. For example, I told him, "You'd better not go in for business." In light of these strong hints, obviously, it is a mistake because of carelessness. As we focus on error instead of mistake, the mistakes of quotation mark and stop, slips of pen, are not taken into consideration.

Table 3.1 shows that in students' writings errors occurred in comma, stop, colon, question mark, semicolon and ellipsis. As to the frequency of punctuation errors, in Term 3, colon runs the top rank, and ellipsis, semicolon, comma, stop stand in a line from high frequency to low frequency gradually. Table 3.1 also indicates the use of two graphic signs which are not English punctuation marks. They are two punctuation

marks that are only used in Chinese. One is a graphic sign (Book title) used for quoting a book name in Chinese while in English we often use italicized forms or quotation mark to show that it is a book name. The other is a dot (Separating mark) which is utilized in Chinese to separate several parallel components while comma is used for the same function in English. In Term 6, errors of colon still take up the first place, comma the second place, question mark the third place and stop the last. In both terms, no error was made in hyphen, apostrophe, dash and exclamation mark. The following are examples of errors of each type of punctuation occurred in participants' compositions:

A. Colon

- (1) In a word, it's unnecessary to ask ourselves: "who is more beautiful, short woman or tall woman?"
- (2) In daily life, being tall in fact has some advantages, for example: women models are all tall, therefore, some beautiful clothes are especially designed for tall women.
- (3) When you ask the university students what are their aim to accept education, most of them will answer: "for a better job, for better future."
- (4) I think it is ok for college students, especially seniors to go in for business, because: they can accumulate some experience and knowledge from the work which can't be learned in textbook.

B. Ellipsis

- (5) The advantages of going in for business for college students are: accumulating experience, earning money to reduce the burden of family, reaching out to more people.....

C. Comma

- (6) So I think a woman's height can't decide her beauty, there is something more like quality to decide a woman's beauty, and short woman has its goods, tall woman has its goods, it really difficult to say who is more beautiful, it depends on man's sight.
- (7) I say, we learn for use.
- (8) When they graduate from their universities they will have no knowledge

about the society and they will find it difficult to adjust to the society.

D. Stop

- (9) According to the report that many students decide to try their hands at business in order to get prepared for the future.
- (10) As the old saying goes, “A tall woman like a crane in a group of hens”.
- (11) ..., but I tell myself, “I have some advantages that they haven’t, if there is no short in the world, there will be no tall person at all”.

E. Semicolon

- (12) However, the tall woman; very different from the short woman; can be dressed up in various fashions of dressing.

F. Question Mark (all errors of question mark occurred in titles)

- (13) Should university students go in for business

G. “Others” in the Table 3.1

- (14) 《All the women are as beautiful as flowers》
- (15) No matter she’s tall or short, both tall women and short women can be beautiful as long as she’s confident、lovely、lively、consciencious、happy、healthy、attractive、warm-hearted.

As for errors related to capitalization, in the 3rd term, titles without capitalization hold the first place, accounting for 66%, proper nouns, 10%, takes up the second, and then the last the initials, 3%. In the 6th term, titles without capitalization take up 13%, initials 2% and proper noun 0%. Examples of errors in each category of capitalization are illustrated as follows:

A. Title

- (16) “How to be a beautiful woman?”, “True beauty”, “Pretty woman”, “short or tall?”, “Should university students go in for business?”

B. Proper nouns

- (17) In the past dynasties of china, the people liked short and delicate women, just as the character Lin dai yu in the Red Floor Dream.
- (18) Most of the students bear a great ambition to become second Bill gates.
- (19) There are also some jobs which set height limits, for example, stewardess. If you want to be a stewardess, you must be enough tall,

otherwise your application to East Airliner corporation will not be accepted.

C. Initials

(20) The women one thinks is beautiful. another may not agree.

(21) Go in for business is also a good choice. after all, university students have relative more spare time.

With the aid of SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences, Version 13.0), T-test was employed to assess on the whole whether the performance of students' punctuation-using in different stages are of distinct difference. The outcome of it is as follows:

Table 3.2 Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Term 3	14.9533	15	21.2332	5.4824
	Term 6	9.7333	15	19.8655	5.1293

Table 3.3 Paired Samples Test

	Paired differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Term3- Term 6	5.2200	19.2004	4.9575	-5.4128	15.8528	1.053	14	.310

Two significant findings can be obtained from the above identification of data, and the two problems proposed at the beginning of the research can be solved.

Finding 1:

Data identification indicates that punctuation errors in students' writings occurred in colon, comma, stop, question mark, semicolon and ellipsis. In Term 3, errors of colon accounted for 9/17 (53%), ellipsis 1/3 (33%), semicolon 2/8 (25%), comma 167/686 (24%) and stop 5/767 (1%). In addition, two graphic signs only in Chinese are used misformatively. In Term 6, errors of colon run the top rank, with

the percentage of 75%, which is followed by comma 94/378 (25%), question mark 10/48 (21%) and the last, stop 5/470 (1%). The data show that colon and comma are the two punctuation marks difficult for learners to learn since errors in colon and comma existed in both Term 3 and Term 6 with high percentage. As for those situations in which capitalized letters are required, it is found that errors are made mostly in titles, proper nouns and initials, which indicates that more attention should be paid to the correct use of capitals to the first letter of content words in titles, to proper nouns and initials from the most difficult one to the least.

Finding 2:

The outcome of T-test indicates that P value of our data is 0.310 which is higher than 0.05 so we can infer that with the passage of time the status of students' punctuation use remains the same. There is no significant progress in this respect.

3.3.3 Error Classification

From literature search, I have found there are four main error taxonomy systems available for the present EA. They approach from different aspects, such as surface structural, source, linguistic categories and communicative effort. In my research, errors are categorized under the surface structural category proposed by Brown (1994), that is, all the errors are classified under four headings: omission, addition, misformation, misordering.

Omission refers to the failure that users do not use a punctuation mark in the place where it is necessary, such as in the sentence "Because he is short he can not attract others' eyes." A comma is omitted from the sentence because according to the criterion of adverbial clause, if an adverbial clause is placed in front of the main clause, a comma is needed at the end of the clause. So such error belongs to the category of omission.

Opposite to omission, addition refers to the failure that learners put a punctuation mark in the place where it is unnecessary. Take the following sentence as an example, "But, I do not agree with it." "But" in this sentence is a conjunctive, and in English the comma after conjunctive "but" is redundant and unnecessary. Therefore, it is grouped into the category of addition.

Misformation here refers to the failure due to the lack of relevant information. For instance, Jany said: "I found this painting incidentally." In English, for introducing direct speech, the punctuation mark we employ is comma and quotation mark instead of colon and quotation mark which are the habit in Chinese. Because of the lack of relevant knowledge, learners can not apply the correct punctuation and we put this type of punctuation errors under the heading of misformation.

Misordering refers to the users' failure of not being able to arrange punctuation marks in order, either postposition or preposition. For errors of misordering, most errors are of the former type. The following sentence is a representative example of misordering as it is required to cover the punctuation mark within quotation mark if the punctuation connected with quotation or the speech: As the old saying goes, "A tall woman like a crane in a group of hens". Based on the above classification, we can group the errors of punctuation in students' writings of English as follows:

Table 3.4 The Classification of Errors of Punctuation in Students' English Writings

Punctuation	Term	Addition	Omission	Misformation	Misordering	Total
Colon	Term 3	4/17	0/17	5/17	0/17	53%
	Term 6	5/16	1/16	6/16	0/16	75%
Ellipsis	Term 3	0/3	0/3	1/3	0/3	33%
	Term 6	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0%
Comma	Term 3	70/686	4/686	92/686	1/686	24%
	Term 6	46/378	3/378	44/378	1/378	25%
Stop	Term 3	0/767	0/767	3/767	2/767	1%
	Term 6	0/470	0/470	4/470	1/470	1%
Question Mark	Term 3	0/25	0/25	0/25	0/25	0%
	Term 6	0/48	10/48	0/48	0/48	21%
Semicolon	Term 3	0/8	0/8	2/8	0/8	25%
	Term 6	0/5	0/5	0/5	0/5	0%
Title	Term 3	0/29	0/29	19/29	0/29	66%
	Term 6	0/40	0/40	5/40	0/40	13%
Proper Noun	Term 3	2/39	0/39	2/39	0/39	10%
	Term 6	0/8	0/8	0/8	0/8	0%
Initial	Term 3	2/824	0/824	20/824	0/824	3%
	Term 6	2/526	0/526	9/526	0/526	2%
Others	Term 3	0/8	0/8	8/8 (Book title, separate mark)	0/2	
	Term 6	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	

The above table is designed to illustrate the distribution of punctuation errors of each type under the four headings. With the help of the table, the status of students' using of punctuation is shown more clearly.

Errors of colon center on two types: misformation and addition. The frequencies of colon under misformation in the two terms are 9/17 (53%) and 12/16 (75%) respectively. As for misformation of colon, it mainly resides in direct speech. Learners use colon instead of comma to introduce a direct speech in English. For example, it is unnecessary to ask ourselves: "who is more beautiful, short woman or tall woman?" Here the colon here belongs to misformation since the error is made as a result of short of relevant knowledge. The remaining errors of colon lie under the heading of addition. Learners put extra colon after such as, for example, because etc.

With regard to comma, in both two terms, errors occur under all of the headings, with misformation (92/686, 44/378), addition (70/686, 46/378), omission (4/686, 3/378) and misordering (1/686, 1/378). Comma errors of misformation in the instrument are mostly the comma used between two or more independent clauses without any conjunctive. "I don't believe that short woman is not as beautiful as tall woman, I think that notion just a notion come from European, It doesn't apply to other countries, In china, it usually said a woman small and exquisite traditionally, so I think a woman's beauty doesn't depend on her height." This is a typical comma error of misformation for students. Then what follows is addition error of comma, inserting extra or additional commas. It may be comma used after a word as "when, tall women pass you, you may..." or extra commas after main clauses as "I praised her the same, though she was short." Comma errors of omission occurred mostly after subordinate clause placed at the beginning of a sentence and after some adverbial indicating the time or place of the event in a sentence. Comma errors of misordering appear when it is used together with quotation mark.

Errors of stop may be either formal errors (misformation) or misordering. As for the former type of stop error, learners used a circle which is the habit only in Chinese to terminate a statement instead of a dot. The latter type of stop, misordering, includes all stop errors postposed. For example, An old saying is "A tall woman like a crane in a group of hens". In English, it is required to cover the last punctuation within

quotation mark if it connects with the quotation.

The error of ellipsis only appeared once in a composition written by a student in Term 3. It is a formal mistake. The student used six dots which is again the habit in Chinese for ellipsis while in English only three dots are used.

Errors of semicolon exist in the heading of misformation. In one case, the sentence goes like the following: However, the tall woman; very different from the short woman; can be dressed up in various fashions of dressing.

Errors of question mark occurred only in titles for Term 6 writing exam, as can be seen in the example collected here, “Should University Students Go in for Business”

The distribution of each category in capitalization under four headings varies from one to the other. Errors of title capitalizing center on misformation and run the top rank among errors of capitalization under four headings in both of two terms. Errors of proper noun capitalizing spread out under misformation and addition in the 3rd term and no errors in the 6th term. Errors of initials capitalizing scattered under the headings of addition and misformation in two terms.

The following are examples of each punctuation errors under four headings:

A. Colon

a. Addition

(22) There are many beautiful women though they are short, for example: Malilian Moroe, Mocdona and so on.

(23) I think it is ok for college students, especially seniors to go in for business, because: they can accumulate some experience and knowledge from the work which can't be learned in textbook.

b. Misformation

(24) When you ask the university students what are their aim to accept education, most of them will answer: “for a better job, for better future.”

(25) When you are asked to answer the question, you may ask yourself: “Should I go in for business?”

(26) Some persons would say: “if they run a business, it can help them

after they graduate.”

B. Ellipsis, only one error-misformation of Ellipsis

(27) The advantages of going in for business for college students are: accumulating experience, earning money to reduce the burden of family, reaching out to more people.....

C. Comma

a. Addition

(28) When, tall women pass you, you may throw more sights on her.

(29) I say, we learn for use.

(30) Although, having own business has many advantages, it also occupies a lot of time and energies for most people.

b. Omission

(31) When they graduate from their universities they will have no knowledge about the society and they will find it difficult to adjust to the society.

(32) In fact tall girls have more advantages than short girls.

c. Misformation

(33) So I think a woman's height can't decide her beauty, there is something more like quality to decide a woman's beauty, and short woman has its goods, tall woman has its goods, it really difficult to say who is more beautiful, it depends on man's sight.

(34) They opened six small shops near their university, in my opinion, I hold a negative view about that students should not go in for business.

d. Misordering

(35) “Let's do what we like”, said one student.

(36) “How tall the girl is”, said my roommate, “and she is beautiful.”

D. Stop

a. Misformation

(37) But in my view, I don't think that university students should go in for business.

(38) My reasons are as follows.

b. Misordering

(39) As the old saying goes, “A tall woman like a crane in a group of hens”.

(40) I have ever admired tall women, they are so conspicuous and graceful, but I tell myself, “I have some advantages that they haven’t, if there is no short in the world, there will be no tall person at all”.

E. Semicolon (only under the heading of misformation)

(41) However, the tall woman; very different from the short woman; can be dressed up in various fashions of dressing.

F. Question Mark (all errors of question mark occurred in titles)

(42) “Should university students go in for business”

G. Titles, only misformation of titles

(43) Should university students go in for business?

(44) How to be a beautiful woman?

(45) Pretty woman

H. Proper nouns

a. Addition

(46) In this city, NanChang City, there are not too many tall girls.

b. Misformation

(47) One of my classmates, Wang Yu tao, was went after by many boys because she is tall.

(48) In the past dynasties of china, the people liked short and delicate women, just as the character Lin dai yu in the Red Floor Dream.

I. Initials

a. Addition

(49) Second, university students going in for business will bring their much material profit,
Money. (In the student’s composition, “money” locates at the beginning of a new line)

(50) Firstly, A good student should not be just bookish.

(51) Secondly, A person who is enterprise is more likely to success in the society.

b. Misformation

(52) The women one thinks is beautiful. another may not agree.

(53) It is true that is most beauty contest. competitors' height are highly required, from 168 cm to 180 cm, we cannot find any woman well below 170 cm.

(54) Go in for business is also a good choice. after all, university students have relative more spare time.

Book title and separate mark:

(55) 《All the women are as beautiful as flowers》

(56) No matter she's tall or short, both tall women and short women can be beautiful as long as she's confident、lovely、lively、consciencious、happy、healthy、attractive、warm-hearted.

3.3.4 Error Explanation

Tables 3.1&3.4 clearly indicated problems with the students' use of punctuation in their English writings both in their junior and senior studies. In order to solve these problems and improve the students' abilities in using punctuation, it is necessary to further analyze the problems and to work out solutions applicable for students as well as teachers. Then the fourth step goes on. The fourth step of our research is the explanation of errors. Like many phenomenon in linguistics, the sources of these punctuation errors may cover both objective and subjective factors. Objective factors here refer to factors of punctuation itself or the nature of it and subjective factors are others except the former.

In order to seek factors of punctuation errors, observing those errors more carefully is necessary.

3.3.4.1 Explanation of Errors in Comma

Within comma, the serious problem lies in the heading—misformation. Learners make too many overuses of commas to separate two or more independent clauses without any conjunctive. At the sight of this phenomenon, one hypothesis pops into

my mind that it may spring from learners' language habits in Chinese since in the students' mother tongue, it is allowable to use comma to separate independent clauses. Through bibliographical search, I take notice that this phenomenon has been investigated by scholars and the sentence in Chinese in which a number of commas are used usually forms the so-called run-on sentence (College English, 2006; Hu Deqing, 1999). And scholars pointed out that there exists the phenomenon of overuse of commas by Chinese learners of English in writing and proposed that language transfer is the very factor for this type of error.

To gain a deep insight into the phenomenon and be more valid and reliable, I will select five classic English novels and one classic novel in Chinese and their Chinese and English translation versions for a comparison. In all, there are twelve articles including six original papers and relevant translation versions. The greatest advantage of choosing papers like these is that the contrast of these papers between English and Chinese is on the same level and comparable. Even papers of the same genre may vary from one to another because of different sub-types of the same genre. Take fiction as an example, scientific fiction is different from romantic fiction though they fall into the same heading—fiction. To minimize the potential differences which may eventually undercut the reliability of outcome, we choose the way here to guarantee the reliability of the research. With the aid of the contrast carried out between the above mentioned materials, it is possible to examine whether commas are used more in Chinese than in English. If it is the case, we can justify that learners' using more commas in English writing results from native language transfer. The selected materials are the first section of Chapter One of *Sword of the Yueh Maiden*, the first section of *Pride and Prejudice*, the first section of *Jane Eyre*, Chapter Two of *Treasure Island*, Chapter Two of *Ulysses* and Chapter Two of *Wuthering Heights*. The first text is from a very famous military novel written by Jin Yong. And the latter five texts are also very famous in literature. Based on our contrasts, we obtain the difference in the use of commas in the two languages which can be shown in Table 3.5 below:

Table 3.5 An Investigation of the Use of Commas in Chinese and English

Language	Sword of the Yueh Maiden	Pride and Prejudice	Jane Eyre	Treasure Island	Ulysses	Wuthering Heights
Chinese	262	85	209	267	381	316
English	50	51	155	241	273	306

Though the deviation of the amount of used comma in two languages among these articles varies from one to the other, the tendency that commas used more in Chinese than in English is obvious. On the one hand, this table is a powerful evidence to prove the hypothesis that commas being used more frequently in Chinese than in English is the result of learners' language habit which will eventually result in negative transfer; On the other hand, the theory of "Run-On Sentence" proposed by some scholars has received empirical verification.

A great deal of ink has been spilled on showing that misformation of commas, redundant commas made in English derive from the native language habit, first language transfer. We will go on searching for the causes of other punctuation errors.

3.3.4.2 Markedness and Errors in Punctuation

Nowadays, markedness theory has been widely applied to various levels of linguistic fields since it was proposed by Prague School. In light of its diversity and practicality, here I attempt to apply this theory to a new field—the sources of punctuation errors. As we all know, colon, comma, ellipsis, semicolon, question mark and stop exist in both of two languages but with some slight differences within them. I will make use of markedness theory to analyze why errors occurred in those punctuation marks instead of others. Ellis (1994) summarized the relationship between markedness theory and language transfer as follows:

Mother Tongue	Target Language	Interlanguage
1 Unmarked	Unmarked	Unmarked
2 Unmarked	Marked	Unmarked
3 Marked	Unmarked	Unmarked
4 Marked	Marked	Unmarked

It is evident from the table that when one element is marked in a target language,

learners will transfer the unmarked form from their mother tongue (2, 4); when one element is unmarked in target language, learners will not transfer the marked form from their mother tongue (1, 3). In another word, the very factor which literally influences language transfer is the markedness of an element in the mother tongue. Now the task at hand is to identify the markedness of each punctuation mark in mother tongue. Given the diversity of punctuation, the criteria presented by Eckman, Shen together with Chomsky will be adopted side by side.

Set forth under the framework of typology, the concept of markedness presented by Eckamn is defined as the following: the degree of markedness of element A is higher than that of element B, if the existence of element A implies the existence of B, and on the contrary the existence of element B does not imply the existence of element A. In other words, the degree of markedness of an implican is higher than implicatum. (quoted from Tang Chengxian, 2003)

Shen (1997) sums up criteria for judging whether an element is marked or unmarked as follows:

- A. Structural criterion: the amount of morphemes in elements. The amount of morphemes in marked elements is no less than those of unmarked elements in expressing one grammatical category. In another word, the number of morphemes of marked elements is generally more than those of unmarked elements.
- B. Distribution criterion: the scale of its distribution. Generally speaking, the range or scope that unmarked elements can be applied is larger or wider than that of marked elements. In other words, in terms of distribution, marked elements are more limited than unmarked ones.
- C. Frequency criterion: the frequency of occurrence of one linguistic component in a language or interlanguage. The practical frequency of unmarked component is higher than marked component.

Chomsky's Markedness Theory is based on the theory of Universal Grammar. According to Universal Grammar, grammatical rules can be divided into core and periphery. Grammatical rules of the core are unmarked because these rules are in

accordance with universal principle; grammatical rules of the periphery disaccord with universal principles and are specific characters of certain languages, so it is marked. One thing to note is that markedness and unmarkedness are not absolute or distinct but relative and they together constitute a markedness continuum (quoted from Tang Chengxian, 2003).

With the above aid, we commence to assess markedness of every punctuation mark.

Colon exists in both of the two languages. In English, colon can be employed between a title and its subtitle, a quotation and its sources like the chapter or the page, an exact time, the proportion as well as appellation in an official letter. On the other hand, stop in Chinese overlaps the norms of colon in English. What's more, colon in Chinese can also be adopted after direct speech, individual words as "because" "for example." Taking into account of the criterion offered by Eckman, the implican (colon in English) is marked and the implicatum (colon in Chinese) is unmarked.

Stop, a sign of termination of a statement, exists both in Chinese and English. In English, stop can be used not only to end a statement but also to separate short forms, such as appellation and date etc. In Chinese, compared with stop in English, it has a limited scope in passages as it is only adopted to terminate a statement. AS a result, in terms of the criterion presented by Eckman, the degree of the implican (stop in Chinese) is higher than the implicatum (stop in English). In a word, stop is marked in Chinese and unmarked in English.

Question mark is also included in the two languages to undertake the same function. Using a question mark to signal an interrogative tone consists with the universal principles of the core, so it is unmarked in two languages according to Chomsky's markedness theory.

Semicolon, the same case as question mark, is adopted to separate compound clauses. Accordingly, semicolon is unmarked both in Chinese and English.

Ellipsis is a sign used to make omission. Because the feature of using an ellipsis to make deletion is prevalent in many languages and the feature belongs to universal principles, ellipsis is unmarked in Chinese and English in terms of the criterion from Chomsky's markedness theory.

Capitalizing initials, capitalizing first letters of a proper noun and capitalizing first letter of each content word in a title are all required in English. According to the criterion put forward by Shen, capitalization is marked in English since capitalized letters are lower and narrower than letters without capitalizing with regard to their distribution and frequency.

3.3.4.3 Markedness as the Cause of Negative Transfer and Difficulty in Learning .

3.3.4.3.1 Marked in the Target Language

Errors of colon take up the summit of the rank because colon is unmarked in the source language and marked in target language, which will lead to language transfer ultimately.

Capitalization is marked in the target language. It is markedness of capitalization that results in errors because learners have to commit more energy and time to grasp its uncommon and complicated form. Hence, errors of capitalization stem from difficulty caused by markedness of capitalization.

3.3.4.3.2 Marked in the Source Language

Stop, marked in Chinese and unmarked in English, is unmarked in interlanguage which implies that errors of stop are not caused by first language transfer. Working on the errors of stop to seek for the cause is a feasible manner. Stop errors cover two types—misformation and misordering. One of the subjects used a circle instead of a dot to terminate a sentence and this type of formal error is under the category of misformaiton. The error of this type shows us that the learner removed the Chinese form into English. Errors of misordering in stop are all postposed stop. Both in Chinese and English, it is required to cover the last punctuation mark within quotation mark if the punctuation connects with the quotation. So the error of misordering is not an effect of language transfer but learners' faults, a subjective factor which will be sought in the following section.

3.3.4.3.3 Unmarked in both the Source Language and the Target Language

Question mark, semicolon and ellipsis are unmarked in both Chinese and English which suggests that the form of them in interlanguage is unmarked. In consequence, to explore reasons why errors occurred in these punctuation marks, we

should have a closer look at those errors respectively.

Errors of question mark are all omission of it in titles. It is a rule to include a question mark in a title as long as it signals an interrogative tone both in Chinese and in English. So deleting a question mark from a title is not a result of first language transfer but other cause. What's more, as requiring a question mark within a title is unmarked in two languages and unmarked forms are not difficult for learners to acquire, errors of this type may be on the learners' part.

Semicolon is wrongly used to separate appositive structures, which is not the case in both of the two languages. As a result, this type of errors is not the effect of language transfer but outside of it. The same case as question mark, errors of semicolon are caused by learners themselves, subjective factor.

The error of ellipsis is a misformation of it. To make omission, the learner employed six dots rather than three dots. Observing the error, it is clear-cut that learners transfer the form in Chinese to the target language. Put it more concrete, the error of ellipsis result from first language transfer.

3.3.4.3.4 Explanation of the Two Chinese Punctuation Marks Used in English

As revealed by Tables 3.1&3.4, two special types of Chinese punctuation are used in the subjects' compositions. The errors result from language transfer since learners removed the form in the native language into the target language.

3.3.4.3.5 Internal Summary

From the above analyses, the causes of all those punctuation errors made in learners' compositions include both objective factors and subjective one. On the one hand, errors of colon, comma, misformation of stop, ellipsis and two Chinese punctuation marks are the result of negative effect of language transfer and errors of capitalization is the impact of difficulty caused by markedness of it; On the other hand, misordering of stop, question mark and semicolon are caused by subjective factors. The finding can also be reproved by Eckman's hypothesis. Based on Markedness Theory, Eckman (1977) proposed "Markedness Differential Hypothesis" to assume and forecast difficulty in second language learning for learners as follows: A. Elements in L2 which differs from that in L1 and are of higher degree of markedness leads to problems for learners. B. Elements in L2 which differs from that

in L1 and are of higher degree of markedness is hard to grasp and the degree of difficulty of it is equal to the degree of markedness. C. Elements in L2 which differs from that in L1 and are of lower degree of markedness are easy to grasp. Hypothesis A justifies the finding concerning the causes of punctuation errors in colon, comma, misformation of stop, ellipsis, capitalization and two Chinese punctuation in that these punctuation marks are different in use between two languages and they are of higher degree of markedness in L2 which will finally lead to problems for learners.

In sum, the objective factors of punctuation, difficulty caused by markedness of punctuation in the target language and negative transfer are the main causes of punctuation errors. What's more, the explanation also reflects that learners' themselves also are responsible for their errors.

3.3.4.4 Subjective Factors

On the other side, besides markedness of punctuation as a cause leading to difficulty in learning and negative language transfer, there are some other factors beyond linguistics like learners themselves and language input. In order to make clear what factors out of language are, I designed a questionnaire for students to get access to attitudes of students and teachers towards punctuation. There are ten questions in all including eight multiple choices and two subjective questions. The former four questions aim at finding out attitudes of students towards punctuation. Among four questions, the first two is regarding the importance of punctuation. And the answers of them show that above 50% of students indeed regard it as an important part of language learning. The latter two questions are concerning students' awareness of punctuation using in writing. The answers show that they seldom pay attention to punctuation as 25 out of 40 students choose the choice "paying little attention to punctuation." The following four questions have an intention to get to know teachers' attitudes towards punctuation through their class activities. 33 out of 40 students choose C "their teacher seldom speaking of punctuation;" 25 out of 40 students select "seldom making comparison of punctuation between two languages;" 27 out of 40 students tick C "their teacher seldom point out their punctuation errors;" No.8 is a question concerning punctuation appearing in course books, and to what extend their teacher explain them? 24 in 40 students choose B "instruct few items." Seldom

pointing out punctuation errors in students' writing, explaining differences between punctuation usages in two languages and speaking of punctuation all reflect that teachers do not attach enough attention to punctuation. The last two questions are open questions. One is to list out top five punctuation marks in difficulty order. Among them, colon, comma and book mark are listed out of high percentage. Another question requires students to say something about punctuation at will. An all-round perspective of students' opinions of punctuation is unveiled. Most students regard punctuation as an important part in language learning. Contrary to this, their knowledge about it is deficient. Therefore, they expect their teacher can instruct them more knowledge about punctuation.

Based on answers from the subjects in the questionnaire, subjective factors or psychological factors are shown. One is on students' part. Though most students are aware of significance of punctuation, they still pay little attention to them instinctively. Their teachers rarely instruct them information about punctuation and seldom pick up errors of punctuation for them so they learn from their teachers that this may be not as important as they think. Misled by this situation, in consequence, students lay minor importance on them when using punctuation in their writings. Because of students' wrong thoughts, students are not interested in undertaking the time-consuming task of learning those tiny-looking punctuation marks. With no doubt this attitude of students will eventually lead to students' paying no attention to punctuation and a considerable amount of punctuation errors committed in their writing.

Inferred from the questionnaire, it also indicates that the great majority of students attribute their deficiency or weakness in punctuation use to their teacher because their English teacher never or seldom mentions something about punctuation in daily lectures. In light of this, it is distinct that teachers are the other factor resulting in punctuation errors. As known to us that teachers play various roles in language teaching process, such as guider, assistant and so on. And what the teacher instructs to their students will have a strong impact on their students. However, because of teachers' inner attitudes to punctuation, they pay little attention to explaining punctuation to their students. Their attitudes will definitely not only influence

themselves on giving lectures but also leave a misleading image of punctuation to their students. At last, this flaw of teaching leads to high frequencies of punctuation errors.

Objective and subjective factors together make bad effects on students' punctuation use. The objective factors are language transfer and difficulty in learning caused by markedness of punctuation in two languages. The subjective factors or psychological factors are attitudes of teachers and students towards punctuation which impact on the situation of punctuation use directly. In brief, negative transfer, difficulty in learning caused by markedness of punctuation in English, students' neglect of punctuation knowledge and teachers' overlook of these tiny-looking punctuation marks in teaching all together constitute the main factors of punctuation errors.

3.3.5 Error Evaluation

After having explained the causes of punctuation errors, we, with the purpose to find ways to improve students' use of punctuation in their writings of English and offer suggestions to foreign language teaching as well, made an evaluation of the data. Through analyzing all the punctuation errors collected from participants' compositions, the state of learners' use of punctuation mark is clearly shown. Besides the two findings mentioned in Section 3.3.2, here is one more important finding (Finding 3).

Finding 3:

There exist both subjective and objective causes for punctuation errors. Markedness theory employed to explain punctuation errors highlights that it is the markedness of punctuation in two languages that leads to negative transfer and difficulty in commanding. Student's overlook together with instructor's neglect are the two main subjective factors resulting in punctuation errors.

In light of these findings, we have found that there are far more errors in some punctuation because they are more difficult for learners to grasp. In consequence, foreign language teachers should focus on those punctuation marks more in their daily instruction:

1. Colon

Colon errors of misformation mainly reside in direct speech. And colon errors of addition are always employed after some words like for example, because and the like.

2. Comma

Comma errors mostly distribute under addition and misformation. Errors of addition are made after subject, conjunctive and verb; all errors of misformation exist between clauses without any conjunctive.

3. Ellipsis

The forms of ellipsis in Chinese and English are six dots and three dots respectively.

4. Stop

On the one hand, in Chinese and in English, forms of stop are a circle and a dot individually. On the other hand, stop errors of misordering refer to the postposed stop. Be cautious when the ending punctuation mark (stop, exclamation mark, question mark) is used along with quotation mark!

5. Question mark

It is unnecessary to use stop when a title of a passage is a complete sentence while it is essential if the title is a complete interrogative sentence.

6. Capitalization

Title errors: misformation of it is the only error of this category. Capitalize the first letter of content words in a title!

Proper nouns: Addition and misformation of it are covered. Make students take notice of how to write proper noun, including the name of country, person and the like.

Initial errors: As for addition of it, there is unnecessary to capitalizing the first letter of a word in the following situations like "Firstly, A good student should not be just bookish." Misformation of initial errors is made by students without capitalizing the first letter of the word at the beginning of a sentence.

All of the above items of punctuation deserve attention in instruction and teachers should concentrate on these difficult items to alleviate difficulty caused by them during learners' punctuation learning.

Chapter 4 Discussions

With the practical situation of punctuation errors presented and the causes of different aspects analyzed, we make suggestions as to how errors of punctuation can be corrected or omitted as follows:

4.1 Different Attitudes to Error Correction

Facing the high percentage of punctuation errors, how to eliminate these errors is a must. So far, a wide range of approaches are put forward to achieve this target as follows:

Instructor-correction. Nothing will undermine learners' self-confidence as much as a series of negative comments on their language performance. So teachers' attitudes towards error are of critical important. Teachers should make appropriate explanation about those high-frequent punctuation errors to facilitate understanding. After analyzing errors and finding something in common with these errors, teachers can make students take notice of those linguistic features and reduce errors through asking questions and correcting directly.

Another method used to correct errors may be correcting errors in group or by peers, also called peer-correction. Correcting errors may be undertaken not only by teachers and peers can do this job well too. Now peer-correcting is very popular among error correction as this method can achieve the same goal. With this method, students will not feel nervous or upset and learn from each other, summarize experience, take in lessons and correct each other's errors. In addition, group discussion is also a good way to correct errors. Most students are willing to discuss other students' assignment and offer different and better expressions. At that time, teachers function as an assistant to help students when it is necessary.

Self-correction, the third way of correction, refers to that students themselves can contribute to correcting their own problems. Students should be conscious of their roles in the process of language learning and look through their assignments closely

to find whether there is any error before handing in. Besides, with the aid of teachers, students should develop some strategies to estimate their English proficiencies objectively and find their own weakness, such as planning, self-monitor, cooperation and so on.

4.2 Error Elimination

It is evident from the previous chapters that there are three main factors resulting in punctuation errors. In order to eliminate punctuation errors, the solutions should be put forward according to the sources of errors.

4.2.1 Error Elimination at Linguistic Level

With regard to the linguistic factor, those differences in markedness of punctuation marks between target language and native language will cause language transfer. It is quite important to find solutions according to this factor as it will reduce proportion of language transfer and will improve learners' language proficiencies in the end. To reduce negative influences of differences in markedness, we can deal with it through a variety of ways from instructors, language input to learners.

4.2.1.1 Diminish Errors through Instructors

In the course of English teaching, teachers should instruct teaching stuff from unmarked to marked materials step by step. As for punctuation, it should be instructed in an order from easy, ordinary, high-frequent, and easy to memorize punctuation forms and criteria to complex, irregular, exceptional, marked ones. Teachers had better explain systematically those elements which are unmarked in Chinese and marked in English to their students and catch students' eyes to those punctuation different in usage and forms between two languages. Teachers should be active in explaining differences of punctuation in two languages in order to reduce negative transfer caused by markedness in two languages. In teaching processes, teachers should take notice, analyze, investigate frequently errors occurred in their students' performances in order to offer tips to their students accordingly and duly. In everyday teaching, especially in writing teaching, teachers should arouse students' interests and attention of punctuation through presenting some examples in which reversed

implications are expressed as a result of lack of punctuation or punctuation errors and at the same time teachers should integrate them into punctuation teaching; Teachers should draw students' attention to different criteria of punctuation in two languages, in particular those unmarked in native language and marked in target language. What's more, teachers also need to design some exercises integrating various differences in punctuation between two languages. With the aid of this regular and intensive practice, students may have a solid grasp of those differences with the passage of time and ultimately avoid committing such errors unconsciously.

4.2.1.2 Diminish Errors through Language Input

As for language input, one point is worth noticing, that is, the teaching stuff must be interest-arousing. As English is the second language after their native tongue, if there is nothing interesting for them, they may be passive in learning and in consequence no good achievements. As the old saying goes, "Interesting is half the battle." Hence, interest arousing teaching stuff is crucial in language input. In punctuation teaching, teachers should impart punctuation criteria together with some interesting examples which will catch their eyes and also contribute to increasing their awareness of the important role played by punctuation. It is also feasible to make use of punctuation to answer certain question instantly. For example, "He is my best friend, ---, sometimes he really makes me angry. A. and B. otherwise C. but D. however" To get an answer for this question is very easy unless you do not know that "however" is used together with comma to separate it from other elements of a sentence. When teachers explain this kind of exercises, teachers can point out to students that with the help of the punctuation in the sentence, it is clear which one is the best answer to this question. With that, students will have a deeper and deeper impression about the various prominent functions of punctuation and take in different usage of them consciously.

What is more, because there exist dissimilarities of punctuation usages within two languages, the input should cover not only punctuation criterion but also similarities and dissimilarities. Out of question this will create a better effect than students do these by themselves.

4.2.1.3 Diminish Errors through Learners

Students, the core of the learning process, should also be responsible for learning process. Students need to learn an entire knowledge about punctuation rules and criteria in target language with the purpose of getting rid of negative effects by language transfer. During studying, students should focus on that information different in two languages and summarize similarities and dissimilarities in order to leave a deep impression. In daily writing, students had better get into the habit of paying attention to punctuation using and attempting to implement various functions of punctuation in writing to make passages diverse. Doing some exercises about punctuation from time to time is also a good way since it can help learners find their weaknesses as well as consolidate their knowledge about punctuation.

4.2.2 Eliminating Errors from Instructors' Neglect

With the answers to those questions in the questionnaire I designed, it manifests that most teachers attempt to improve their students' writing abilities through linguistic levels and pay little or even no attention to punctuation marks because they regard punctuation as something unimportant in passages. To settle this problem, teachers themselves must come back to look at it in perspective; Teachers should be conscious of the essential part of punctuation in writing; In daily writing teaching, teachers should explain some different usages of punctuation in two languages and use some strategies to handle students' errors. Students can feel that punctuation is significant from their teachers' lectures if their teachers often mention some knowledge regarding punctuation. As a result, it will arouse students' attention, reduce occurrences of errors and improve students' writing skills in the end.

4.2.3 Eliminating Errors from Students' Overlook

The third main factor of punctuation errors is on students' part. Students themselves also need to be aware of the importance of punctuation marks. Only with recognition of punctuation by learners themselves can punctuation learning go on and achieve good results. With the increasing of requirements for students' English proficiencies, as a manner of reflecting learners' integrative abilities, writing should be pushed forward not only through linguistic levels but also through punctuation. Students first have to place punctuation at a right position, that is to say, students

should get insight into its functions in expressing feelings and conveying meanings. Apart from students' self-conscious of significance of punctuation, teachers can also make influences on their students. Students will also be aware of the importance of punctuation when knowledge about punctuation is often mentioned in their lectures or punctuation errors are pointed out by teachers. Therefore, to draw students' attention or interests back to punctuation can be achieved not only by students' self-conscious of it but also by teachers' instruction. In all, drawing students' attention to punctuation can be achieved both from students' awareness of punctuation and teachers guide.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Conclusion

In the present study, the author adopts a qualitative approach supplemented by descriptive one to investigate punctuation errors in compositions written by English majors. Within the framework of Error Analysis, Contrastive Approach and Markedness theory, I have selected senior English majors as subjects and their compositions at different stages as the instrument of my research. With the aid of the five-sequential steps proposed by Corder for processing error analysis, I have collected data from subjects' compositions, identified errors, classified error, explained errors and evaluated errors. Forty compositions from each term were used in data collection. Criteria of punctuation usage presented by some grammatical or writing course books have been applied in identifying errors in compositions. From the data collected, it is evident that punctuation errors in learners' writings occurred in colon, comma stop, ellipsis, question mark and semicolon. In addition, a lot of errors appeared in capitalization from learners' writing. With the aid of T-test, we can infer that with the passage of time the status of students' punctuation using remains the same without any significant progress.

With regard to error-classification, surface structural category proposed by Brown was adopted to classify errors made in the instrument. So all the errors are classified under four headings: omission, addition, misformation, misordering. The outcome of this step is that among these four headings, misformation takes up the first place and addition follows. The fourth step, error explanation is to seek sources of errors and in this research sources of punctuation errors include both subjective and objective factors. With the aid of markedness theory, we have found that objective factors of punctuation errors are the effects of markedness of punctuation in two languages. Those frequently occurred punctuation errors are mostly unmarked in Chinese and marked in English. Hence, those punctuation marks which are unmarked in native language and marked in target language will result in negative transfer and

are difficult for learners to acquire. In the process of analyzing addition of commas, with the assistance of selected twelve articles, it demonstrates that Chinese learners' using extra commas in English writing comes from Chinese habit of writing: run-on sentence. Therefore, it proved that punctuation errors should be traced back to language transfer. Apart from linguistic factors, subjective factors, psychological factors are present, too. To be objective, a questionnaire was utilized to find out the truth. After investigating information received from the questionnaire, the neglect of punctuation by students and overlook by teachers were discovered as two main causes of punctuation errors. In sum, three major factors of punctuation errors are language transfer, neglect of punctuation by teacher and overlook by students. The last step, error evaluation, some punctuation are listed out for teachers paying attention for the sake of offering guidelines for punctuation teaching. Till now, all the questions put forward at the beginning of my research are settled.

1. This research tells us that errors occurred in colon, comma, stop, question mark, semicolon and ellipsis. In the 3rd term, errors of colon accounted for 9/17 (53%), ellipsis 1/3 (33%), semicolon 2/8 (25%), comma 167/686 (24%) and stop 5/767 (1%). In addition, two graphic signs only in Chinese are used misformationally. In the 6th term, errors of colon run the top rank, with the percentage of 75%, which is followed by comma 94/378 (25%), question mark 10/48 (21%) and then the last, stop, 5/470 (1%). It is evident that colon and comma are the two punctuation marks which are difficult for learners to grasp since errors in colon and comma existed in both of two terms with high percentage.

What's more, the status of capitalization is also presented. As for those situations in which capitalized letters are required, errors are made mostly in titles, then proper nouns and initials followed. In other words, as for difficulty in capitalizing letters in English, the order is capitalizing the first letter of content words in titles, capitalizing proper nouns and initials from the most difficult one to the least.

2. Through T-test, we can infer that with the passage of time the status of students' punctuation using remains the same without any significant progress.

3. There exist both subjective and objective causes for punctuation errors. Markedness theory employed to explain punctuation errors highlights that it is the

markedness of punctuation in two languages, which leads to negative transfer and difficulty in commanding. Student's overlook together with instructor's neglect are the two main subjective factors resulting in punctuation errors.

4. Colon, comma and stop are the top three difficult punctuation marks in English punctuation-learning.

5. In terms of these factors, available solutions are proposed in order to eliminate punctuation errors. They include the following tips: instructors should pay more attention to punctuation in daily teaching and provide students with contrastive analysis on punctuation between two languages together with pick out errors of learners appropriately; teachers had better deliver knowledge in an order of difficulty levels, from easy, simple and unmarked elements to difficult, complicated and marked ones; students themselves are also required to pay attention to punctuation in everyday learning.

In short, this is a significant and unique study of error analysis. The outcomes of this research include three main aspects. Firstly, the findings about status of punctuation using among learners are shown up and these will guide our teaching in a right direction. Secondly, the sources of errors are sought out in order to find solutions accordingly. Last but not least, some difficult punctuation items are displayed to make us be aware and then some suggestions are put forward to error correction. With the guide of these advices, we can reduce errors of punctuation and do a bang-up job with punctuation.

5.2 Implications

From a macroscopic view, the present study implements previous researches and push forward error analysis in writing. What's more, the findings of the research are also significant in various ways.

Firstly, it has been illustrated that three findings yielded from error analysis and those figures which offer pedagogical implications. As those findings shed light on the status of punctuation-using among students for teachers and will provide teachers with guidelines in punctuation teaching. For example, colon, the most frequently misused errors in writing, requires teachers to pay more attention to it in daily

instruction. Secondly, this research is conducted among English majors—intermediate level learners, and it is the most representative group of English learners. In consequence, the findings can also be applied to a larger group. Thirdly, the explanation of errors presents us an insight into the sources of errors and with that we can propose solutions accordingly. Investigating factors beyond linguistic levels and seeking relevant solutions will also benefit writing-teaching and supply guidance and references for selecting course book, designing writing course as well as editing of text books. Lastly, the still status of punctuation-using will definitely hasten us to take measures to eliminate errors of punctuation which will eventually have a good effect on improving learners' writing abilities.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Unexceptionally, fruitful contributions as it has made, the present study has its limitations.

To begin with, due to the limitations of time and energy, the sample size is not large. Furthermore, all the participants in the current study are confined to English majors.

Another limitation lies in the instrument, English majors' compositions, which is relatively limited in punctuation diversity.

Last but not least, since the application of MT to the analysis of causes of punctuation errors is originally proposed in the study, it lacks sufficient support from the literature.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

To begin with, researches on analysis of punctuation errors is rare, other researches can be conducted to complement the present one from different perspectives.

Second, as it has been mentioned above that types of used punctuation marks in the subjects' compositions are insufficient, studies can be extended by employing other materials.

Future research can also be carried out to analyze causes of linguistic errors under the framework of MT in light of the successful application of MT in the present study.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

同学们好：

今天我们来谈谈可爱的，渺小的小不点——标点符号，它的家族有许多成员：逗号、引号、冒号、句号、分号、问号等等。请在前八个选择题上，选出一个你认为符合情况的项，最后两题请按个人想法填写。谢谢！

1. 你觉得标点符号对于一篇文章的好坏有作用吗？
A 非常重要 B 比较重要 C 有点作用 D 毫无影响
2. 你平时会注意文章中的标点吗？
A 全会注意 B 常常注意 C 很少注意 D 从不注意
3. 标点对于文字在篇章中的作用？
A 标点比文字重要 B 标点比文字稍重要 C 文字比标点稍重要 D 标点对文章无影响
4. 写作文时会留意使用不同的符号来使文章多样性吗？
A 全会留意 B 常常留意 C 很少留意 D 从不留意
5. 英语老师上课讲解有关标点符号的知识吗？
A 系统讲述 B 常常讲述 C 讲解较少 D 从未讲解
6. 老师有分析过英汉标点的差异吗？
A 系统讲述 B 常常讲述 C 讲解较少 D 从未讲解
7. 老师批阅试卷写作部分时会指出标点错误吗？
A 一直会指出所有错误 B 常常会指出 C 指出较少 D 从未指出
8. 写作课程的用书上关于标点符号的章节老师讲解吗？
A 系统讲述 B 挑了几条讲解 C 让学生课后自己看 D 不予理睬
9. 列出最难掌握的五个标点符号：（如：逗号，冒号等）
_____, _____, _____, _____, _____
10. 谈谈你们对英语标点的想法？（爱怎么说怎么说）

Papers Published during the Graduate Study

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