

Senior High School Students' Errors on the Use of Relative Words

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Abstract

Relative clause is one of the most important language points in College English Examination. Teachers have been attaching great importance to the teaching of relative clause, but the outcomes are not satisfactory. Based on Error Analysis theory, this article aims to explore the reasons why senior high school students find it difficult to choose relative words and how to improve this situation. Participants in this study are 73 senior high school students from Tong Liao, Inner Mongolia. These students are given a test on using relative clause. Questionnaire on these 73 students and 30 teachers has also been carried on. After collecting and sorting the tests paper and questionnaires, using quantitative and qualitative method, the author finds the main causes of the students' choosing wrong relative words stem from: students pay much attention to language form and apply English rules mechanically, ignoring meaning and context of the language; students' grammar knowledge is not comprehensive and systematic and students tend to neglect or forget some grammar points; students lack necessary basic English grammar and vocabulary knowledge, resulting in the difficulty in understanding the meaning of the sentence; students can't adjust to relative clause because of language transfer. Therefore, teachers should strengthen the exercises of students' English basic knowledge, teach grammars systematically and comprehensively, encourage students to use effective learning strategies to learn English, find ways to increase the input and output of English language and train students think in English mode. As to the students, they should learn to reflect on themselves, strive to improve their English and correct their learning attitude, and learn to use learning strategies effectively under the help of teachers.

Keywords: error analysis, relative words, senior high school students

1. Introduction

Errors are inevitable in the process of language learning and study and analysis of these errors is of great significance in foreign language teaching in our country. As Pit Corder (1967) points out, errors of the learners is important because these errors give instruction to teachers and let teachers know what they should teach and how to teach. If teachers analyze the errors systematically, they will know what level students have reached, how much students approach to the target language, what students should continue to learn and what strategies and steps students take in their learning process; error is the way the learners use to test the hypothesis to the laws of target language. Learner can know their weaknesses through analyzing and correcting their errors. Learners can find characteristics of second language learning through analyzing their errors. Errors reveal the process of language learning and provide the basis for the acquisition of language. All in all, Learning English as second language is the process where learners commit errors and correct them continuously and approach to the target language.

Applying Error Analysis to the second language learning refers to analyzing errors made by learners in their foreign language learning systematically and comprehensively and exploring the nature and reasons of these errors in order to prevent or reduce the errors. Error Analysis is a branch of applied linguistics and is an important part of second language study. Error Analysis looks learners as the center of the research and through analysis of the errors of learners the process of learners' acquisition will be found. The improvement of foreign language teaching in our country relies on the deep understanding of the learning process while error analysis theory is just based on the analysis of the learners' language errors to reveal the regularity of learning process. Error Analysis holds belief that when foreign language learners learn a new language it is just like children acquisition of their mother language. Learners make hypothesis to the target language according to the language material they access and verify its correctness and actively approach to the target language. Error analysis

emphasizes the importance of studying and analyzing role of learners' errors in their language acquisition process.

Therefore, error analysis plays an important role in English teaching activities and also plays an important role in exploring the law of foreign language learning process and improving foreign language teaching.

Although there are many scholars in our country who do research on the various errors made by Chinese students in their English learning, there are few researchers who do researches on the wrong use of relative words of Chinese senior high school students. As an important grammar point in College English Examination, Relative clause has always been taken seriously by English teachers. In all senior high school's English text book, relative clause is the most important grammar points in students' first year study. However, most students think it difficult to learn because it is complicated. The study of relative clause involves sentence structure, none phrase, the choice of relative words, the process of embedded clause, etc. Based on error analysis, this study analyzes why it is difficult for Chinese senior high school students to choose relative words and how to improve this situation.

2. Theory

2.1 Different Definitions of Error

In order to understand the Error Analysis theory and apply it into linguistic study, we should know what the definition of error is. However, there is no consensus on the definition of error.

A) Richard et al. (1985) defined an error as "the use of a linguistic item in a way in which fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning".

B) Ellis believed that "an error is a deviation from the norms of the target language" (Rod, 1999, p. 51).

C) "An error is an unsuccessful bit of language" James said (Carl, 2001, p. 1).

D) Error refers to "regular patterns in the learners' speech which consistently differ from the target language model" (Corder, 1967).

E) Error is the result of behavior failure (Corder, 1971).

F) Error is a linguistic form or combination of forms which, in the same context and under similar conditions of production would, in all likelihood, not be produced by native speaker counterparts (Lennon, 1991).

As mentioned above, different specialist has different descriptions about error.

However, they have one common that "errors are deviations from the norms".

2.2 Theories Related to Error Analysis

2.2.1 Error Analysis

The Theory of Error Analysis is one of the most important methods in second language acquisition research. James defines Error Analysis. He claims that "Error Analysis is the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language".

Pit Corder is the advocator and founder of the EA theory. Corder wrote an article *The Significance of learner's Error* in 1967. In this article, he considers that applied linguists' focus on second language learners' error is not a "bad habit" to be eradicated, but is a ways of insight into learners' learning process. He points out errors are essential and important parts in students' learning because it can reveal the differences between learners' transitional language grammar and target language grammar. Corder notes that errors can be significant in three ways: they provide the teacher with information about how much the learner have learnt; they provide the researchers with evidence of how language is learnt and they serve as devices by which the learner discovers the rules of the target language. Corder (1974) suggests Error Analysis has five steps: collecting of the samples of learners' language; identification of errors; description of errors; explanation of errors; evaluation of errors.

2.2.2 Interlanguage

Interlanguage is a language between mother tongue and target language system, also known as "transition" language. It refers that in the process of second language acquisition, based on the input of target language, language learners through certain learning strategies form dynamic language system that is both different from their mother language and from the target language. This dynamic language system will gradually be transferred into target language. Interlanguage Theory was first put forward by Selinker etc. in the late 1960s. Selinker put forward the concept of hypothesis of interlanguage in 1969 and wrote it into his famous paper "interlanguage". Its inherent assumptions are as follows: the starting point of interlanguage is the learner's native language. With

increasing accumulation of the knowledge, interlanguage gradually closes to the target language in the process of learning. This is just what the learners need. The process of foreign language learning is just the process of constant adjustment in order to approach the target language (Selinker, 1972).

2.3 Relative Clause and Its Relative Words

An RC is a group of words that modify a noun, noun phrase, pronoun or a sentence, and the modified elements is called “antecedent”. It is a subordinated clause and can be used to provide more information about the person or thing that appears in the main clause. An RC is introduced by either relative pronouns (who-, whom-, which-, that-, whose-) or relative adverbs (when-, where-, why-). RCs are also called the adjective clauses because of the function as the adjectives to describe or modify the noun phrase. For example,

The girl [RC (that) we saw yesterday] was my cousin.

In the above example, the relative clause “that we saw yesterday” modifies the subject of the sentence “the girl” (the domain) and narrows down its potential set of referents. The modified pronoun is called the ‘head’ and it is co-indexed with the empty position- the ‘gap’, in the relative clause.

This paper aims to study the errors of relative words.

2.4 The English and Chinese Relative Clause

Based on the linguistic typology, English and Chinese relative clause structures can be illustrated in the following.

English: Head NP—RC

Chinese: RC—Head NP

In English, the relative clause post-modifies the nouns it describes; while in Chinese, the relative clause (connected with the head noun through the word—“de”-由“的”引导) premodifies the nouns, just as the following examples show:

English:

Key noun	relative clause	main clause
The city	which Lu Sun once lived	is often visited by a lot of people.

Chinese:

Adjectival clause	Key Noun	Complement
Lu Sun sheng huoguo de	chengshijingchang	you ren can guan

Ellis (1997, p. 101) discusses the acquisition of relative clauses in English. First, he holds the point of view that: the acquisition of relative clauses presents learners with two tasks. In case of English, they must first learn that relative clauses can modify noun phrases that occur both before the verb (i.e. as subject of the main clause) and after the verb (i.e. as object or in a prepositional phrase):

The man who won the Nobel Prize works very hard.

We visited the man who has contributed so much to the protection of the wildlife.

Second, they must learn the various functions that the relative pronoun can serve. English permits a range of functions, as shown in the following table. These two tasks amount to a substantial learning burden.

Function	Example
Subject	The woman who committed the crime...
Direct object	The woman whom I visited...
Indirect object	The woman to whom I present a medal...
(Object of preposition)	The man about whom we talked...
Genitive	The woman whose husband is a president...
Object of comparative	The man that I am richer than...

3. Methodology

In part two, relevant studies of EA and RC have been reviewed. In this part, methodology will be introduced.

3.1 Research Question

In this part, through analyzing the senior high school students' errors on the use of relative words the following questions will be answered:

Firstly, why is it difficult for students to choose relative words?

Secondly, how to improve this situation?

3.2 Subjects

All subjects taken in the experiment are senior high school students in their first year. The samples are selected systematically from 73 question papers by those students. The test papers were done by grade 2013 students in Middle One School in Tong Liao. To a degree, this research reflects the level in learning and using relative words.

3.3 Instrument

The research concentrates on qualitative approach on the basis of quantitative approach. The test paper (Appendix I) concerning relative clause was designed. The test paper was divided into four parts: multiple choice, blank filling, error correction and sentence combination. Diverse question types can ensure data collected is objective and real, and more convincing. A questionnaire to students and a questionnaire to teachers were given after test. Finally, 20 students and 6 teachers were chosen to give the sampling interview according to the statistics.

3.4 Research Procedure

Firstly, data was collected and a small corpus of relative clause was built up.

Secondly, errors on the use of relative words were pointed out according to the grammatical rule of relative clause.

Thirdly, calculate the proportion of errors on using relative words.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study collected 73 copies of test paper. The test paper includes four big topics. The number and rate of error are listed. See table 1 to table 4.

Table 1. Error statistics of "I"

Items	Types of errors	Numbers of errors	Rate of errors
1	preposition+ which	48	65.75%
2	where	41	56.16%
3	whose	47	64.38%
4	preposition+ which	26	35.62%
5	who	9	12.33%
6	ellipsis of relative words	61	83.56%
7	where	61	83.56%
8	as	34	46.58%
9	who	46	63.01%
10	that	51	69.86%
11	non-restrictiveclause introduced by "which"	32	43.84%
12	whom	43	58.90%
13	where	63	86.30%
14	that	21	28.77%
15	agreement of subject and verb	43	58.90%
16	when	34	46.58%
17	as	25	34.25%

18	that	27	36.99%
19	ellipsis of relative words	68	93.15%
20	that	53	72.60%

Table 2. Error statistics of “II”

Items	Types of errors	Numbers of errors	Rate of errors
1	preposition+ which	34	46.58%
2	which\that	31	42.47%
3	where\ in which	40	54.79%
4	non-restrictive clause introduced by “which”	34	46.58%
5	whom	28	38.36%
6	when\that	29	39.73%
7	why	18	24.66%
8	that	31	42.47%
9	whose	28	38.36%
10	as	48	65.75%
11	antecedent is “the way”	45	61.64%
12	that	43	58.90%
13	that\which	22	30.14%
14	where\in which	41	56.16%
15	when\that	34	46.58%

Table 3. Error statistics of “III”

Items	Types of errors	Numbers of errors	Rate of errors
1	preposition+ which	26	35.62%
2	agreement between subject and verb	57	78.08%
3	preposition+ which	53	72.60%
4	who	33	45.21%
5	that	33	45.21%

Table 4. Error statistics of “IV”

Items	Types of errors	Numbers of errors	Rate of errors
1	who	49	67.12%
2	which\that	65	89.04%
3	non-restrictive clause introduced by “which”	61	83.56%
4	who\whom	54	73.97%
5	preposition+ which	70	95.89%
6	why	39	53.42%
7	non-restrictive clause introduced by “which”	66	90.41%
8	whose	48	65.75%
9	where	59	80.82%
10	when	52	71.23%

4.2 Discussion

After data collection, the errors on use of relative words made by senior high school students are classified according to the grammatical rules concerning relative clause.

4.2.1 Incorrect Use of Relative Pronouns

Relative pronoun is used to refer to the person or thing in the attributive clause. Each relative pronoun has its specific use. If students can't grasp these usages, there will be many errors. After statistics, this kind of error accounts for 52.54%.

1. Errors of "which"

Table 5. Error statistics of "which"

Item	Types of errors	Numbers of errors	Rate of errors
I	1 preposition + which	48	65.75%
	4 preposition + which	26	35.62%
	11 non-restrictive clause introduced by "which"	32	43.84%
II	1 preposition + which	34	46.58%
	2 which\that	31	42.47%
	3 where\ in which	40	54.80%
	4 non-restrictive clause introduced by "which"	34	46.58%
III	1 preposition + which	26	35.62%
	3 preposition + which	53	72.60%

In this test, students' error rate on use of "which" is 49.31%. Relative pronoun "which" is widely used in the relative clause and it can be used as subject or object in the relative clause. When used as object, the relative pronoun can be omitted but if there is a preposition ahead of "which", "which" can't be omitted. In some cases, "which" and "that" can be interchangeable, but in other cases, they can't be.

a) Relative pronoun "which" refers to the thing. It can be used as subject or object in the relative clause. When used as object, it can be omitted. For example:

China is a country which has a long history.

The car (which) my uncle had just bought was destroyed in the earthquake.

Football, which is a very interesting game, is played all over the world.

b) Relative pronoun "which" is used to introduce a non-restrictive clause, which indicates the content of the main clause or part of the content of the main clause.

It was raining hard, which kept us indoors.

They played truant, which made the teacher very angry.

c) Relative pronoun "which" can be used as attribute in non-restrictive clause, ahead of "which" there is usually a preposition.

It may rain tonight, in which case we won't go to the party.

d) Relative pronoun "which" is used as object of the preposition.

Can you lend me the book about which you talked the other day?

We visited the room in which Lu Sun once lived.

From table 5, we can see that students didn't grasp the use of "preposition + which" so well, for example, "(I) 1. The pen _____ he is writing is mine." This problem is to test the use of "which" after preposition, but 65.75% of the students chose the wrong answers. Similarly, "(II) 1. Last summer we visited the West Lake, _____ Hangzhou is famous in the world." Only forty students chose the right answer. Another example, "(II) 14. I paid a visit to company last month, _____ my brother is working." The right answer is "where\ in which". Only forty-three students chose the right answer, among them only two students chose "in which" and the rest students forgot to choose preposition "in". This shows students are not familiar with the use of relative clause

“preposition + relative pronoun”. (IV) 14 is used to examine the use of “which” used to introduce a non-restrictive clause referring the main idea of the main clause. Only eight students chose the right answer. The right answer is “He completed college at 15, which I could hardly believe.” But many students chose “that”, because they didn’t understand the function of relative pronoun “which” in the relative clause.

2. Errors of “that”

Relative pronoun “that” refers to person or thing. It can act as subject or object of the clause. When used as object, it can be omitted. It can’t be used as the object of the preposition. It can only be used to introduce restrictive relative clause. When it refers to person, it can be interchangeable with whom\who. For example,

The student (who\whom\that) the teachers are talking about has won the first prize in the English contest.

That’s the problem (that\which) I can’t solve.

When it refers to the thing, it can be interchangeable with “which”. However there are cases “that” and “which” can’t be interchangeable.

1) Use “that” instead of “which”

a) When antecedent is thing or object, “which” instead of “that” is used to introduce non-restrictive clause. For example:

Liquid water changes to vapor, which is called evaporation.

b) When antecedent refers to the thing or object, “which” is used after preposition. For example:

They arrived at a farmhouse, in front of which sat a small boy.

c) When antecedents are “that” “those”, the relative pronoun should be “which”. For example:

What’s that which was bright in the car?

d) If one sentence includes two relative clauses, in order to avoid repetitiveness, one is to choose “that”, and the other is “which”. For example:

Let me show you the novel that I borrowed from the library which was nearly open to us.

2) Use “that” instead of “which”.

a) When antecedents are indefinite pronouns (anything, nothing, the one, all, few, any, little, much, none, etc.), “that” should be used to introduce a relative clause. For example:

You should hand in all that you have.

Everything that he said was true.

There seems to be nothing that is impossible to him in the world.

Is there anything that I can do for you?

b) When antecedents are modified by the only, the same, the last, just, any, every, each, few, little, no and some, “that” should be used. For example:

The only thing that we can do is to give you some money.

The little money (that) he had was stolen.

c) In “there be” structure, if antecedent is an object or a thing “that” should be used. For example:

There is a regulation that you don’t know here.

d) If the antecedent is adjective supreme degree or modified by the adjective supreme degree, “that” should be used.

This is the best film that I have seen.

e) If the antecedent is the ordinal number or modified by the ordinal number, “that” should be used. For example:

The first place that they visited in London is the Big Ben.

f) In a sentence beginning with interrogative “who, which” etc., if there is a relative clause in this sentence, “that” should be used to introduce a relative clause.

Who is the man that is standing there?

Which is the T-shirt that fits me most?

g) If antecedent is made up of both person and thing “that” should be used. For example:

Can you remember the scientist and his theory that we have learned?

h) If there are two clauses, one is guided by “which”, and the other should use “that”. For examples:

He built a factory which produced things that had never been seen before.

i) Relative pronoun act as predicative in attributive clause, in this case “that” should be used.

Jorge is no longer the boy that he was five years ago.

In this test, the average rate of errors in using “that” is 47.82%.The statistics of errors concerning “that” are as follows.

Table 6. Error statistics of “that”

Item	I			II			III		
	10	14	18	20	2	8	12	13	5
Numbers of errors	51	21	27	53	31	31	43	22	33
Rates of errors (%)	69.86%	28.76%	39.99%	72.60%	42.47%	42.47%	58.90%	30.14%	45.21%

From Table 6, we can see most students know the basic usage of “that”. For example, (I) 14, (II) 2, 3, the rate of errors is relatively low. (I) 14 is used to examine the antecedent including person and thing “The bike and its rider _____ had run over an old man were taken to the police station. A. which B. that C. who D. whom”. Twenty-one students chose the wrong answers because they failed to identify the antecedent, considering “person” as the antecedent, therefore, they chose “whom”. If they knew antecedent is “the bike and its rider”, they would choose “that” because antecedent refers to both person and thing.

(I) 10 and (II) 12 are used to test how to choose relative words in a sentence beginning with interrogative. 64.38%students made errors in this problem. This shows that they didn’t master the grammar that in a sentence beginning with interrogative “who, which” etc. “that” should be used to introduce a relative clause. For example (II) 12, “Who is the woman _____ was praised at the meeting?” The right answer is “that”. “That” is used to introduce a relative clause and acts as subject of the relative clause.

(I) 20 “She is no longer the sweet little girl _____ she used to be. A. which B. that C. where D. when” is used to test “that” which acts as predicative in a relative cause. The rate of errors is 72.60%, only twenty students chose the right answer.

3. Errors of “who, whom”

When antecedent refers to the person, relative pronoun “who, whom” should be used. “Who” acts as subject of the relative clause and “whom” acts as object of the clause. In some cases, “whom” can be replaced by “who”. If there is a preposition ahead of relative pronoun “whom” should be used. “That” can also be used to refer to person.

This is the new secretary (who/whom/that) I would like to introduce to you.

Do you know the professor who/that will give us a speech next week?

Who is the old man to whom you were talking?

In the following cases, only “who” or “whom” should be used.

1) In non-restrictive relative clause, when antecedent refers to person, relative pronoun should be “who” or “whom”

The famous basketball star, who comes from America, will visit our school soon.

2) In relative clause, relative pronoun acts as the object of the preposition referring to the person, “whom” should be used.

In those days, she used to go to Mr. Black, with whom she had a wonderful time.

3) When antecedents are collective nouns “family, team, club, class, government etc.” and refer to the members of the nouns, relative pronoun “who” should be used; if these collective words refer to the whole concept,

relative pronoun that/which should be used.

Mr. White came to visit my family, who were watching TV.

Our class, which is a very good one, was praised again at the meeting.

(In above case, only “which” can be used because “which” is used to introduce non-restrictive clause, however “that” can’t.)

4) When antecedents are “she, he, they, man, these, those, one, people, all”, relative pronoun should be “who” or “whom”

He who doesn’t reach the Great Wall is not a true man.

We all like those who are honest.

5) If antecedents are “few, someone, anybody, somebody, everyone, everybody, ones, and anyone”, relative pronoun “who” should be used.

Anyone who comes to China will surely visit the Great Wall near Beijing.

6) In “there be” structure, when antecedent refers to person, “who\whom” should be used.

There is a man who wants to see you at the school gate.

However in the restrictive relative clause, when the antecedent refers to person, in the following cases, the relative word “that” should be used.

1) In a special question (wh-question), when sentence begins with “who” or “which”, “that” should be used to introduce a relative clause. For example:

Who is the man that is reading the newspaper over there?

Which of us that knows anything does not know this?

2) When the antecedent is modified by the adjective supreme degree or ordinal number. For example:

He is the greatest man that has ever lived.

3) When the antecedent is modified by “the only, the very, the last and suchetc.” For example:

She is the only person that understands me.

The statistics of errors concerning “that” are as follows.

Table 7. Error statistics of “who, whom”

Types of errors	Errors of “who”			Errors of “whom”	
	I	II	III	I	II
Item	5	9	4	12	5
Numbers of errors	9	46	33	43	28
Rates of errors	12.32%	63.01%	45.21%	58.90%	38.36%

In this test, the rate of errors in using “who\whom” is 43.56%. For example, (I) 5 “Do you know the man _____ is talking with your mother? A. which B. when C. where D. who” Nine students chose the wrong answers. (I) 9 “Those _____ respect others are usually respected by others.” It is used to test when antecedent is “those” what relative pronoun should be chosen to introduce a relative clause. Forty-six students chose the wrong answers. It shows many students failed to master this particular use of “who”.

(I) 12 “I like the person to _____ the teacher is talking. A. that B. who C. from who D to whom”. (II) 5 “Our school has five English teachers, two of _____ are from the United States.” are used to test the use of “whom” in the relative clause. 48.63% students made errors. The formal is concerned with idiom “talk to sb.” Relative pronoun is after the preposition and refers to person, so “whom” should be used to introduce the clause. The latter is used to test that “whom” introduces a non-restrictive relative clause after a preposition, referring to person.

4) Errors of “whose”

“Whose” can be used to refer to both person and thing. It acts as attribute in a relative clause. The relative clause

introduced by “whose” can modify person or thing. For example:

The boy whose legs were badly hurt was quickly taken to hospital.

Is the notebook whose cover is green yours?

I have a pen friend whose father is a policeman.

Although the use of “whose” is simple, there are still 50% of the students made errors because they failed to master the use of “whose”. For example, (I) 3. “Is there anyone in your class _____ family is in the country? A. who B. whom C. which D. whose.” Only twenty-six students chose the right answer. Thirty students chose “which”, seventeen students chose “of which”. Only twenty-six students chose the right answer. Similarly (II) 9. “Recently I bought a beautiful vase _____ price was quite reasonable.” There are thirty students who gave the wrong answers. If they can notice that relative word should act as attributive of “name” in the relative clause and notice that antecedent is the “brave girl”, only “whose” is right to fill in the blank.

5) Errors of “as”

Relative word “as” can refer to person or thing. When used to introduce a relative clause, it can act as subject, object and predicative etc. in the clause. When acting as object, it can be omitted. It is often used in some fixed structure “such...as...” and “the same...as...” For example:

As is well known, great changes have taken place in China.

They were satisfied with this decision, as was agreed beforehand

I never heard such stories as he tells.

Have you bought the same book as I referred to yesterday?

The non-restrictive clause introduced by “as” is usually used in the fixed sentence structures. For example: as we can see, as can be seen, as we know, as is (well) known, as may be imagined, as often happens, as has been said before, as was mentioned above, as is often the case, as/indeed it is, etc.

Both “which” and “as” can be used to introduce relative clause, but there are some differences between them.

1) Relative pronoun refers to the noun or noun phrase in the main clause and makes some extra explanation to the noun or noun phrase, in this case, “which” should be used. For example:

I asked him to lend me his car, which he did.

(Here relative pronoun “which” refers to the thing in the main clause “lendme his car”.)

2) When relative pronoun refers to the whole idea of the main clause meaning and this\that, “which” should be used.

It was raining hard, which kept us from arriving there on time.

3) Although both “which” and “as” can be used to introduce non-relative clause, indicating the main idea of the main clause, “as” can be put at the beginning of the sentence, but “which can’t”.

As we all know, China is a multi-ethnic country. (right)

Which we all know, China is a multi-ethnic country. (wrong)

4) “Which” can act as object in the relative clause, while “as” can act as predicative besides subject and object.

This question is very simple, as indeed it is.

He married well, which\as was natural.

He is a French man, which\as we know from his accent.

5) Relative pronoun refers to the main idea in the main clause, meaning “which fact”, in this case, non-restrictive clause should be introduced by “as”. For example:

He came to work very early this morning, as was usual.

6) When the predicate of the non-relative clause are passive forms of “know, say, report, announce, imagine, expect, explain, point out”, “as” should be used to introduce this non-restrictive clause.

Jackie Chan will come to our town, as is announced.

7) If the content of the relative clause has the negative effect on the main clause or is different from those main clause, “which” should be used to introduce this clause; if the content of the relative clause is similar to those of main clause, “as” should be used to introduce this relative clause.

He did nothing but sit there, which showed his laziness.

8) When “as” and “which” are used to introduce relative clause, “as” is usually used in the passive voice, while “which” is usually used in active voice.

He didn’t pass the exams, as is expected.

He didn’t pass the exams, which we have expected.

The rate of errors of students using “as” is 39.73%. The error statistics of “as” is shown in the table below:

Table 8. Error statistics of “as”

Items	I		II
	8	17	10
Numbers of errors	34	25	28
Rates of errors	46.58%	34.25%	38.36%

(I) 8 “___ is known to all, China is a developing country. A. As B. It C. That D. Which” Eighteen students chose B, sixteen students chose D, but obviously A is right. (I) 17 “He is not such a man ___ would leave his work half done. A. that B. which C. who D. as”. It is used to examine the structure “such...as”; (II) 10 “John, ___ you know, is a famous writer. ”, in this case, only “as” is right to introduce a non-restrictive relative clause, acting as object of “know”.

4.2.2 Incorrect Use of Relative Adverbs

The relative adverbs used to introduce a relative clause are “when, where, why”. They act as adverbial in the relative clause replacing the antecedents. They can’t be omitted. Sometimes it can be replaced by structure “preposition + which”. “Where, when” can be used to introduce restrictive relative clause and non-restrictive clause while “why” can only be used to introduce restrictive relative clause. The rate of errors of “where” is 67.12%; the rate of errors of “when” is 44.75%; the rate of error of “why” is 28.57%.

1) Errors of “where”

“Where” refers to place, and it act as adverbial of place in the relative clause. “Where” can express the place in general. It can also be used to express the abstract concept, for example, some kinds of situation, some cases etc. Students are likely to make errors in this case.

We will discuss a number of cases where beginners of English fail to use the language properly.

I can think of many cases where students obviously knew a lot of English words and expressions but couldn’t write a good essay.

He has to face the condition where pressure was heavy.

I’ll show you the point where you fail.

We have not been able to produce enough vaccine to the point where (at which) we would feel confident.

They developed their friendship to a stage where (at which) they often shared sorrow and happiness

The police are looking into a case where (in which) the suspect is a cat.

The error statistics of “where” is shown in the table below:

Table 9. Error statistics of “where”

Items	Types of errors	Numbers of error	Rates of errors	
I	2	General use of “where”	40	54.79%
	7	“where” refers to abstract concept	61	83.56%
	13	“where” refers to abstract concept	63	86.30%
II	3	Where\in which	40	54.79%
	14	Where\in which	41	56.16%

(I) 7 “It’s said that he’s looking for a new job, one ____ he can get more money to support his family” and (I) 13 “We will discuss a number of cases ____ beginners of English fail to use the language properly” are used to test the abstract use of “where”, indicating “in some cases”.

2) Errors of “when”

Relative adverb “when” used to express time. It acts as adverbial in the relative clause and can be transferred into the structure “preposition + which”.

We are living in an age when many things are done on computer

I still remember the days when (during which) we studied together.

The error statistics of “when” is shown in the table below:

Table 10. Error statistics of “when”

Items	I	II	
	16	6	17
Numbers of errors	34	30	34
Rates of errors	46.58%	41.10%	46.58%

From table we can see that over half of the students have mastered the use of “when” to introduce a relative clause.

3) Errors of “why”

Relative adverb “why” express reason, acting as adverbial of reason in the relative clause. Its antecedent is “reason”. It can only be used to introduce restrictive relative clause and can be transferred into the form “for which”. For example:

Is this the reason why he was late for school?

= Is this the reason for which he was late for school?

(II) 7 “Please tell me the reason _____ you missed the plane” and (IV) 11 “The reason was he missed his train. For that reason he was late” is used to test the use of “why” as relative adverb indicating “reason.” Fifty-five students chose the right answer for (II) 7. It shows that most students have mastered the use of “why to introduce a relative clause. As for (IV) 11, students’ errors mainly come from the word order.

4.3 Causes of Errors

4.3.1 Overemphasis on Language Forms

Students in the process of learning grammar rules, sometimes only focus on the form of a language. In practice, there exists the phenomenon of rotta of the grammar. Students ignore the meaning of the language and specific context.

For example, (I) 19 “Is this the reason ____ at the meeting for his carelessness in his work? A. he explained B. what he explained C. how he explained D. why he explained”. There are fifty-nine students chose “D”. In their mind, if antecedent is “reason”, relative word “why” should be used to introduce a relative clause. Perhaps, the sentence they usually contact is this kind of situation. But any grammar rules should be established in certain circumstances. In using these grammar rules, we should pay attention to the specific language environment. When studying grammar, students shouldn’t only notice the surface of the rules, but find the correct grammar rules according to the specific environment.

4.3.2 Not Having Enough Grammar Knowledge

In the survey of the questionnaire, 70 percent of the students think that the errors they made were mainly due to the fact that they didn’t mastered the grammar so solid. Not grasping grammar so solid and comprehensively will lead to the wrong understanding of the relative clause. For example, (II) 12 “Who is the woman ____ was praised at the meeting?” it is used to test in compound sentences (including a relative clause) beginning with question words, “that” should be used to introduce a relative clause. Its error rate is 58.90 percent. Many students don’t know this grammar rule. Other examples, (I) 14 “The bike and its rider ____ had run over an old man were taken to the police station.” (I) 18 “Is oxygen the only gas ____ helps fire burn?” (II) 8 “Is there anything ____ I can do

for you?” These three problems are used to test the usage of “that”. But many students only know the basic rules of the relative clause. They in their spare time didn’t sum up and generalize the use of “that”, not forming comprehensive and systematic knowledge system and easily forgetting and ignoring some language points. Therefore, summing up and remember grammar rules is very important for students to learn relative clause.

4.3.3 Lacking Necessary Basic Vocabulary and Grammar Knowledge

In the questionnaire, 73 percent of the students believe that their errors are caused by lacking basic knowledge, not knowing the basic necessary vocabulary and grammar knowledge. This has negative effect on their learning of relative clause. Questionnaire 9 “Why do you make errors? (Multiple Choice) A. not grasping the grammar rules so well. B. Not understanding meaning of the sentences. C. Not understanding the structure of the sentences. D. Not spending enough time reviewing the grammars after class. E. Carelessness. F. Others”. Among them, 41 students chose B and 43 students chose C. This shows that these students didn’t know the meaning of the sentence, let alone to fill in the right answer.

For example, (I) 11 “He made another wonderful discovery, ____ of great importance to science. A. which I think is B. which I think it is C. which I think it D. I think is”. It is used to examine the language points that there is a parenthesis in the non-restrictive attributive clauses introduced by “which”. There are 36 students who made error on this problem. If students know parenthesis doesn’t influence the sentence composition, they will ignore the parenthesis and will know that A conforms to the grammar rules.

Another examples, (II) 3 “He is unlikely to find the place ____ he lived forty years ago.” (III) 5 “This is the scenic spot where we visited ten years ago.” Over half of the students failed to give the right answer. This is due to the fact that they weren’t able to judge “live” is an intransitive verb while “visit” is transitive verb. As a result, they didn’t know what element relative word acted as in the relative clause and they made errors inevitably.

4.3.4 Language Transfer

Researchers point out that emphasis should be placed on the research of language transfer of the foreign language learners. In the research of reasons of the errors, language transfer is one of the reasons that let learners make errors. Language transfer can be called Interlanguage interference, referring to that fact that the rules of mother tongue interfere with the second language learning, causing learners errors on using target language. In the process of learning a second language, learners can’t do without the help of their mother tongue. Mother tongue plays an important role in learning the target language. Because mother tongue is the most used means of expressing and has reached the level of automation, so in the process of learning, mother tongue language forms and structures will unconsciously be migrated to learners, especially the interlanguage of beginners. This will affect learners’ acquisition of the target language rules, bringing about all sorts of errors.

In the questionnaire, 41.43 percent of the students think that relative clause is difficult and 32.86 students believe that it is a bit difficult while among teachers, 66.67 teachers think relative clause is difficult and 33.33 percent of the teachers think it is a bit difficult. On the whole, we can see it is difficult to master relative clause. For (IV) sentence combination, students didn’t give right answers on the whole. They made errors either on the choice of relative words or on sentence composition or on the sequence of main clause and subordinate clause. Only 21.95 percent of the students combine the sentences correctly. One of the reasons is that there are not any relative clauses in Chinese language. Although there are attributes in Chinese, it is distinct from the relative clause in English language. As a result, Chinese students can’t understand the rule of relative clause so well. They don’t form the habit and consciousness of using relative clause, making errors frequently when using relative clause.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Findings

Based on the theory of Error Analysis, senior high students’ learning of relative words was investigated. By collecting students’ test paper, students’ questionnaire, and teachers’ questionnaire and by analyzing these data, students’ errors on use of relative words are known to us all. The causes of errors are these following aspects: Firstly, mother tongue interference. It makes students feel much more difficult in learning relative clause. Secondly, students are not able to grasp the grammar so thoroughly and they pay too much attention to the form of the language; they apply language rules mechanically and ignore the inner meaning of the language; they are not able to master the grammars of relative clause systematically, so they can’t choose the grammar rules that should be used. Thirdly, they lack English basic knowledge. They don’t know the English basic grammar, can’t understand the sentence structure correctly and they fail to grasp enough vocabulary.

5.2 Implications to Teachers

5.2.1 Strengthen the Training of the Students' English Basic Knowledge

The learning of English grammars is a gradual process. The learning of relative clause is based on solid knowledge of vocabulary and syntactic structure. So students should know the sentence components, for example, subject, object, predicate, adverbial etc. if they don't know these components and know the relationship of the components, they will find it difficult to judge which relative word should be chosen. In addition to that, if students have not enough vocabulary, they can't understand the sentence, let alone to analyze the sentence further. On the condition that students have a good grasp of necessary basic knowledge of English, they can successfully learn more knowledge of grammars of relative clause.

So it requires teachers continue to strengthen the students' basic knowledge training in English classroom. Teachers can set up necessary context to help students grasp vocabulary effectively. Teachers should also help students to strengthen the learning of syntax, especially for five kinds of simple sentences in English. There are five teachers in the questionnaire who point out this point.

5.2.2 Grammar Teaching Should Be Comprehensive, Systematic and Thorough

In questionnaire survey, 32.86 percent of students think that teacher lecture of relative clause is not so specific or is not systematic and clear. 26.67 percent of teachers think that their interpretation of relative clause is general. Many students make errors because teachers' interpretation is not systematic and clear enough, as a consequence, students cannot get a comprehensive understand of the relative clause and cannot form a strong knowledge system in their minds. This will cause them to forget or confuse some similar grammatical rules.

Teachers should pay attention to sum up knowledge in time in addition to finishing language points of each class in order to help students establish knowledge system. As for the usages that are easily confused, teachers should give a clear explanation and compare the difference between these usages and let students practice using them correctly. Comparison is an effective way to deepen students' impression. For example, when teaching relative pronouns, teachers should compare the usages of "that" and "which" and make it clear that when "that" should be used and when "which" should be used. In addition to that, teacher should let students know the difference between "as" and "which" and difference between relative clause and appositive clause and so on.

5.2.3 Strengthen the Students' Learning Strategy Instruction

Modern foreign language teaching has shifted from "knowledge-centered" "teacher-centered" education to "student-centered" education. Teaching philosophy has also changed: students are the main body of the teaching and teachers play the leading role in teaching. The main task of foreign language learning is to teach students how to "learn". This requires teachers should always put students on the main body status, understand students, follow students' cognitive law of development, show concern for students' emotional development and cultivate students' ability of self-direct learning. Teachers' task no longer stays on the content of teaching, but cultivates students' good study habits and methods. Teachers should also give instruction on student's learning strategies, help students master what they have learned and improve learning efficiency.

In the survey, 45.71 percent of the students have noticed their errors, but they don't know how to avoid. This shows that students don't know how to reflect on their own learning and find out why they make errors. Long influenced by teacher-centered model, students autonomous learning ability is poor, they don't know how to adjust their learning. This requires that teachers should pay attention to the guidance of learning strategy and pay attention to training students' correct learning methods. In the survey, 76.67 percent of the teachers think that teaching method is very important.

Teachers can guide students' self-reflection, find out the deficiency of study, encourage students to collect wrong questions, establish bank of wrong questions and reflect on why they make errors; encourage students to learn to sum up and make up for weakness of teachers' teaching. Teachers should clarify the importance of learning English in their daily English teaching, stimulate students' enthusiasm on English learning, help them to get rid of bad learning habits and help them correct their study attitude. In this way, student can plunge into their study efficiently and effectively.

5.2.4 Increase the Students' Language Input and Output and Train the Students to Think in English

Students find it difficult to learn English. One of the reasons is that they are affected by their mother tongue language. Therefore, training students to think in English way can help to improve students' language awareness. The training of thinking in English depends on language input. Chinese students English input mainly comes from text book and classroom. In order to try to increase students' classroom language input, teachers should

encourage students to read all kinds of materials extensively after class. Reading extensively can not only help students expand their vocabulary, contact more language forms, but also can help exercise students' logical thinking and strengthen their understanding of discourse structures. Reading extensively helps increase students' English cultural knowledge and perfects their knowledge system.

In addition to increasing language input, teachers should encourage students to use the language and improve their ability of using language. The aim of language learning is language use. So teachers should try every way to have students use relative clause either in oral or written form. Practicing using relative clause can not only motivate students' knowledge in their mind, train them think in English, but also give students opportunity for self-examination and give students opportunity to realize their weaknesses. Only when they are able to use of the attributive clause correctly, does it show they have really mastered the relative clause.

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Appendix

Test Paper of Relative Clause

I. Multiple Choice Questions

Directions: there are four choices in each item, choose the best one to fill in the blanks.

- The pen _____ he is writing is mine.

A. with which	B. in which
C. on which	D. by which
- Can you lend me the book _____ the other day?

A. about which you talked	B. which you talked
C. about that you talked	D. that you talked
- Is there anyone in your class _____ family is in the country?

A. who	B. whom
C. which	D. whose
- I lost a book, _____ I can't remember now.

A. which title	B. its title
C. the title of whose	D. the title of which
- Do you know the man _____ is talking with your mother?

A. which	B. when
C. where	D. who

6. English is the most difficult subject _____ you will learn during these years.
A. which
B. what
C. where
D. /
7. It's said that he's looking for a new job, one _____ he can get more money to support his family.
A. when
B. where
C. that
D. which
8. _____ is known to all, China is a developing country.
A. As
B. It
C. That
D. Which
9. Those _____ respect others are usually respected by others.
A. whom
B. who
C. that
D. /
10. He told me everything _____ he knows.
A. which
B. that
C. what
D. from which
11. He made another wonderful discovery, _____ of great importance to science.
A. which I think is
B. which I think it is
C. which I think it
D. I think is
12. I like the person to _____ the teacher is talking.
A. that
B. who
C. from who
D. to whom
13. We will discuss a number of cases _____ beginners of English fail to use the language properly.
A. which
B. as
C. why
D. where
14. The bike and its rider _____ had run over an old man were taken to the police station.
A. which
B. that
C. whom
D. what
15. She is one of the girls who _____ very hard.
A. studies
B. study
C. studying
D. are studying
16. We live in an age _____ more information is available with greater ease than ever before.
A. why
B. when
C. to whom
D. on which
17. He is not such a man _____ would leave his work half done.
A. that
B. which
C. who
D. as
18. Is oxygen the only gas _____ helps fire burn?
A. that
B. /
C. which
D. it
19. Is this the reason _____ at the meeting for his carelessness in his work?
A. he explained
B. what he explained
C. how he explained
D. why he explained

20. She is no longer the sweet little girl _____ she used to be.

- A. who
B. that
C. whom
D. as

II. Blank Filling

Directions: Fill in the blanks with proper relative words.

1. Last summer we visited the West Lake, _____ Hangzhou is famous in the world.
2. The river _____ they crossed is two miles wide.
3. He is unlikely to find the place _____ he lived forty years ago.
4. These apple trees, _____ I planted three years ago, have not borne any fruit.
5. Our school has five English teachers, two of _____ are from the United States.
6. I still remember the day _____ I first came to this school.
7. Please tell me the reason _____ you missed the plane.
8. Is there anything _____ I can do for you?
9. Recently I bought a beautiful vase _____ price was quite reasonable.
- 10 John, _____ you know, is a famous writer.
11. The way _____ he answered the questions was surprising.
12. Who is the woman _____ was praised at the meeting?
13. The plane _____ has just taken off is for London.
14. I paid a visit to company last month, _____ my brother is working.
15. I miss the time _____ we were together

III. Error Correction

Directions: there is only one error in each item, please find it out.

1. I have bought two ball pens, neither of them writes well.
2. He is the only one of the students who are never late.
3. Do you remember the day on when you joined our club?
4. Did you see the young man whom was chosen the League secretary?
5. This is the scenic spot where we visited ten years ago.

IV. Sentence Combination

Directions: combine the sentences, making it into compound sentence including attributive clause.

1. The new library is not far from the school. The library was built two years ago.
-

2. The beautiful woman is Lin Ling's mother. We met her at the hotel yesterday.
-

3. I have never seen the dolls. She bought them in Paris last year.
-

4. She is a nurse. Her work is to take care of the patients.
-

5. Books are our good friends. We can learn a lot from them.
-

6. We visited the place last winter vacation. Mao Zedong was born in this place.
-

7. He has two sons, and both of them are teachers.
-

8. There are many old buildings, and many of them have been pulled down.

9. This is the village. I was born in the village.

10. I will never forget the day, and on that day I joined the army.

11. The reason was he missed his train. For that reason he was late.

12. I don't like the way. She treats her children in that way.

13 He failed the examination again. We had expected it.

14. He completed college at 15, and I could hardly believe it.

15. I will never forget the day. I spent it with you last summer.

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