

托福新题型 “Write an Email” 的任务真实性与交际效度研究

——基于语用学与体裁分析视角

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摘 要

本文以托福新题型 “Write an Email” 为研究对象, 基于任务型测试理论, 探讨其在测评考生书面交际能力中的交际效度。研究引入语用学(礼貌原则、言语行为)和体裁分析(Genre Analysis)框架, 系统剖析该题型对语用策略和语篇结构的考查逻辑。通过对大量学生样本的系统偏误分析, 归纳出语用失误和体裁偏误是学习者面临的主要挑战。研究结果为语言测试效度验证与教学实践提供参考, 并提出以功能性语块习得和情境化语用意识培养为核心的分层教学框架。

关键词

Write an Email, 交际效度, 任务真实性, 语用学, 体裁分析, 系统偏误分析

A Study on the Authenticity and Communicative Validity of the TOEFL New Task “Write an Email”

—Perspectives from Pragmatics and Genre Analysis

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Abstract

Based on Task-Based Language Testing theory, this study investigates the communicative validity

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of the new TOEFL “Write an Email” task in assessing test-takers’ written communicative competence. By adopting frameworks from pragmatics (Politeness Principle, Speech Acts) and Genre Analysis, it systematically examines how the task evaluates pragmatic strategies and discourse structure. Through an analysis of recurrent errors in a large corpus of student responses, the study identifies pragmatic failures and genre-related inaccuracies as the primary challenges for learners. The findings provide valuable insights for language test validation and pedagogical practice, leading to the proposal of a tiered teaching framework centered on the acquisition of functional lexical chunks and the cultivation of contextualized pragmatic awareness.

Keywords

Write an Email, Communicative Validity, Task Authenticity, Pragmatics, Genre Analysis, Systematic Error Analysis

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1. 引言

随着全球语言测试体系向真实性、交际性评估方向发展，对写作的考查日益融入语用情境。托福考试最新改革中推出的“Write an Email”题型，要求考生在限定时间内完成特定情境下的书面交际任务，是任务型语言测试理念在大型标准化考试中的具体实践[1]。本文旨在结合测试学原理、语用学和体裁分析理论，深入剖析该题型的设计逻辑、测试价值和潜在难点，并基于实际学生产出，提出针对性的教学策略与启示。

2. 题型描述与设计原则

2.1. 题型描述

“Write an Email”任务通常由一段简短的背景描述和三条明确的写作指令构成。背景信息设定了具体场景，如向客服投诉、向编辑投稿或向朋友咨询建议等。三条指令则限定了邮件的三个核心交际目的，要求考生在一定时间内(7分钟)完成信息描述、情感表达、请求/建议等功能。

下面是官方给出的部分样题(图1、图2)[2][3]:

A new poetry magazine has asked its readers for submissions, and you decided to submit two of your poems. However, you had a problem using the online submission form, and you are not certain that your submissions were received.

Write an email to the editor of the magazine. In your email, do the following.

- Tell the editor what you like about the new magazine.
- Describe the problem you experienced.
- Ask about the status of your submissions.

Write as much as you can and in complete sentences.

Your Response:

To: editor@sunshinepoetrymagazine.com
Subject: Problem using submission form

Cut

Paste

Undo

Redo

Hide Word Count

0

Figure 1. Official sample question 1

图1. 官方样题示例1

Write an Email

You will read some information and use the information to write an email.
You will have 7 minutes to write the email.

Your coworker, Kevin, recently recommended a new restaurant for your team to visit. You took the team there, but everyone was disappointed. The food was not as good as expected, and the service was slow. You need to inform Kevin about the situation and discuss future lunch options.

Write an email to Kevin. In your email, do the following.

- Explain what was wrong with the restaurant.
- Describe the team's reaction to the visit.
- Suggest alternative lunch arrangements.

Write as much as you can and in complete sentences.

Your Response:

To: Kevin

Subject: Team Lunch Experience

Figure 2. Official sample question 2
图 2. 官方样题示例 2

2.2. 设计逻辑与真实性原则

该题型的设计遵循任务真实性原则[1]，旨在模拟实际生活和学术环境中的书面沟通。其设计逻辑聚焦于：(1) 情境匹配：要求考生根据收件人身份(教授、经理、朋友)调整语言正式度(Register)和语气；(2) 信息组织：考查考生能否在有限时间内，高效、有逻辑地组织信息，并回应所有指令；(3) 功能实现：要求考生运用功能性语言实现特定的言语行为[4]，如道歉、投诉、询问或感谢。

3. 测试学原理与书面交际效度

3.1. 构念效度与书面交际能力

该题型测量的核心构念是书面交际能力(Written Communicative Competence)。它超越了传统的句法测试,涵盖了 Bachman 和 Palmer (1996)交际能力模型中的:组织能力(语法与语篇)和语用能力(功能性语言、语境适配) [5]。因此,该题型具备较高的构念效度,能有效地反映考生在真实书面语境中的综合运用水平。

3.2. 任务真实性与内容效度

“Write an Email”任务要求产出物是真实的电子邮件体裁,而非脱离语境的作文。其内容效度体现在:(1) 体裁真实:邮件的格式、开头、结尾要求符合国际书面沟通惯例;(2) 功能真实:样题中的“请求退款”、“询问提交状态”等功能是学习者在日常生活中高频使用的。任务的真实性(Task Authenticity)确保了测试结果对实际应用场景的有效预测力[1]。

3.3. 评分维度与任务完成度

托福对该题型的评分侧重任务完成度和语用合理性。除了传统的语言准确性与词汇多样性,评分标准更加关注:是否完整回应三条指令,邮件逻辑结构是否清晰,语气是否符合收件人身份和交际意图。官方给出的评分标准中要求:

- Elaboration that effectively supports the communicative purpose

也就是说，每个任务点不仅要覆盖，还要用简短细节、理由或背景信息去支撑。比如“Could you recommend some restaurants?”可以扩展成：I'd prefer somewhere close to the conference center because I won't have much time between sessions. 这样细节既支撑了交际目的，又展示语言能力。

- Effective syntactic variety and precise, idiomatic word choice

要求考生句式有变化且自然；词汇准确到位、合乎语体，常用地道搭配。不是炫技，而是“好用、好读、专业”。比如考生可以使用下面的表达：

请求：Could you please..., Would it be possible to..., I'd appreciate it if you could...

说明问题：I encountered..., The payment was double-charged, The form didn't go through

建议：You might consider..., It could help to..., I suggest + -ing / that...

感谢与缓冲：Thanks for looking into this, I appreciate your time, I understand you're busy

与此同时，考生还需要做到句式多样的有效组合，比如：

简单句承载关键信息：I'm writing about my order #A1294.

并列句补充平行信息：The food was delayed, and the bill was incorrect.

复合句表达因果/条件/让步：If possible, could we move the meeting to Thursday so everyone can attend?

定语从句精确界定：The technician who came yesterday couldn't fix the problem.

被动语态用于客观陈述：The wrong size was delivered yesterday.

情态与委婉：I was wondering if you could confirm the pickup time.

- Consistent use of appropriate social conventions

这就要求全篇保持与收信人匹配的称呼、语气、礼貌与组织方式：合适的抬头结尾、得体的请求与批评、信息顺序清楚。

4. 核心语言学与体裁理论支撑

4.1. 语用学：言语行为与礼貌原则

邮件写作是典型的言语行为(Speech Act)集合[4]。考生需运用语言实现表述(描述问题)、承诺(提供新方案)、指令(请求退款或帮助)等功能。根据 Leech (1983)的礼貌原则[5]，尤其在投诉、请求或拒绝类任务中，考生必须使用间接、委婉的表达(如虚拟语气、情态动词)来维护收件人面子(Face)，降低表达的直接性，确保交际成功。

4.2. 体裁分析(Genre Analysis)与结构规范

Email 是一种具有特定体裁规范(Genre Conventions)的文本类型。体裁分析认为，特定情境下的沟通需要遵循特定的结构。对于 Email 体裁而言，其结构包括：主题行(Subject Line)、称谓(Salutation)、开篇语(Statement of Purpose)、主体段落、结尾语(Closing Statement)和落款(Sign-off)。考生对这些体裁知识的掌握，是能否写出得体邮件的关键。

4.3. 构式语法与功能性语块

从构式语法角度看，考生在写作中依赖的是储存在大脑中的形式-功能对，即功能性语块[6]。例如，表达目的使用“I am writing to inquire about...”，表达感谢使用“I would be grateful if you could...”。这些语块有助于考生在有限时间内，自动化地生成符合交际功能和体裁规范的句子，提高写作的流畅度和准确性。

5. 学习者系统偏误分类与归因

对现有学生写作样本的分析显示,学习者的偏误不局限于简单的句法错误,而是集中在语用策略和语篇结构的失当。

5.1. 语用失误(Pragmatic Failure)

这是最普遍且影响评分最高的错误。学生的失误主要体现在正式度失当和礼貌原则违反[7]。

正式度失当:样本中出现“Dear manager,”“Hi Editor,”等非正式或不完整的称谓,以及使用“I wanna”等口语化表达,未能根据收件人身份(经理、编辑)选择合适的语境。

礼貌原则违反:在请求或投诉邮件中,语气过于直接生硬。例如:“I want a refund.”(应使用“I would appreciate it if you could issue a refund.”);“Could you give me a explain?”(应使用更委婉地表达)。学生在表达不满时往往缺乏缓和标记(Hedge),直接表达负面情绪,影响了人际功能的实现。

5.2. 语篇 - 体裁偏误(Discourse-Genre Error)

这类错误显示出学生缺乏对 Email 这一体裁规范和信息组织逻辑的意识。

体裁结构缺失/混淆:邮件缺少明确的主题句或目的声明,或者称谓和落款不规范(如“Your sincerely”)。例如,学生在投诉信中过度描述与投诉无关的积极体验(如赞扬酒店风景),造成信息冗余,分散了交际核心。

逻辑跳跃与指令混杂:邮件主体段落信息混乱,缺乏过渡和衔接词(如 However, In addition)。学生常未能遵循任务指令,将感谢、描述问题、请求帮助等信息混杂在一个段落中,或未完整回应三条指令。例如,在投诉信中,有些学生在请求退款的同时额外索要折扣,这种不当的言语行为组合可能适得其反。

5.3. 句法 - 词汇精确性偏误

这类错误影响了文本的清晰度,集中在书面语用法和复杂句结构上。

书面语词汇与搭配:出现“refound”(应为 refund)、“apperciate”(应为 appreciate)、“restraurant”(应为 restaurant)等拼写错误;或使用简单词汇“problem”反复指代“issue”“mistake”。

复杂句生成:简单句使用过多,缺乏定语从句、名词性从句等复杂结构来组织信息。许多错误是由于主句与从句的句法粘连造成的逗号句(Comma Splice)或流水句(Run-on Sentence)。

6. 基于语用意识与体裁习得的教学策略

基于上述偏误分析,有效的教学应侧重于培养学生的语用意识和体裁结构化加工能力。

6.1. 强化体裁结构与格式规范

教学中应显性讲解 Email 的体裁模板。通过范文分析和结构分解,训练学生掌握主题行拟定、称谓与落款选择的规范。训练学生将邮件内容严格划分为开篇语(目的声明)、主体段落(问题描述)、总结语(期待回复)三个部分,确保逻辑清晰。

6.2. 语用功能与礼貌策略训练

引入情境化教学,让学生通过角色扮演(如学生对教授、顾客对经理),训练语言的正式度微调[7]。系统教授功能性语块[6],尤其针对投诉、请求、建议等高频功能。例如:教授学生使用虚拟语气和情态动词来表达委婉请求:“I was hoping you might consider granting me an extension.”,而非直接的“Give me more time.”。

6.3. 构式习得与语块整合练习

通过高频的语块配对练习, 让学生将 “I am writing to inquire about...” “Thank you in advance for your help.” 等功能性表达作为整体习得[6], 提高写作的自动化水平。针对错误频发的语篇连接词(e.g., However, In addition, As a result), 进行集中训练, 帮助学生理清句间和段落间的逻辑关系。

7. 结论

新托福 “Write an Email” 题型通过模拟真实书面交际, 有效整合了语用、体裁、语篇和句法等多重测试功能, 展现出良好的任务真实性[1]与交际效度[5]。然而, 学生在实际产出中, 普遍存在语用失误和体裁规范违反等系统性偏误。因此, 教学应超越单纯的语法矫正, 转向以语用意识和体裁知识为核心的综合训练。未来研究可进一步探索机器评分(Automated Scoring)对 Email 写作教学的反拨效应, 并验证功能性语块教学法在提升书面交际能力中的有效性。

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