



Understanding some common English errors and how to overcome them

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In this workshop, I will discuss a number of English errors which are commonly found among intermediate Hong Kong Chinese users of English. These errors have one thing in common: they are most likely due to the users' knowledge of their first language: (spoken) Cantonese and (written) Chinese. Four error types will be discussed in detail:

Error No.	Error Types	Examples	Downloadable files
2	too + Adj + to + VP	He is <i>too</i> happy <i>to see you</i> .	Teacher's Notes Student's Notes
6	Independent clause as Subject	<i>Snoopy is leaving</i> makes us all very happy.	Teacher's Notes Student's Notes
9	Pseudo-tough movement	<i>I am difficult</i> to learn English.	Teacher's Notes Student's Notes

All of the errors are listed in the following website:
http://personal.cityu.edu.hk/~encrproj/error_types.htm

This website contains detailed information about the nature of the errors as well as guidelines to help local teachers and learners to overcome those errors.



Student's Notes for WEC Workshop

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too + Adj + to + VP

1. Look at the following two sentences. They have the same structure.
 - (i) Mary is too tired to walk.
 - (ii) John is too busy to go to the party.
2. Circle the verb *to be* and underline the words after the verb *to be*.
3. The underlined words consist of two smaller units. Draw a line between the two units to separate them and write the two parts in the following table.

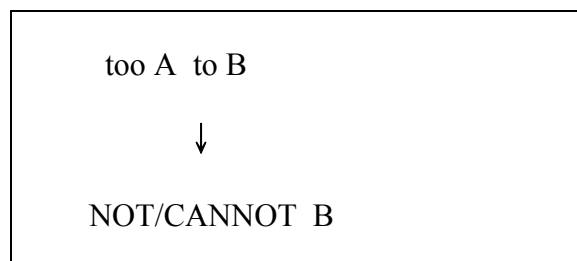
4. What is the adjective used to express Mary's feelings in sentence (i)?

5. Mary is *tired*. Can she *walk*? _____
6. Why can't Mary walk? She is too_____

If A = the adjective *tired*
 B = the verb *walk*

then too A to B ➔ NOT/CANNOT B

i.e. too tired to walk ➔ NOT/CANNOT walk



7. Now, look at sentence (ii). What is the adjective used to express John's feelings? _____



8. John is *busy*. Can he go to the party? _____
9. Why can't John go to the party? _____
i.e. too busy to go to the party → NOT go to the party
10. Now look at sentence (iii). It has a similar structure as sentences (i) and (ii).
(iii) Peter is too happy to see his girlfriend.
11. Underline the words after the verb to be.
12. Separate the underlined words into two units by drawing a line between them.
13. What is the adjective used to express Peter's feelings? _____
14. Peter is *happy*. Do you think he will *see his girlfriend*? _____
15. Does sentence (iii) have a similar meaning as sentences (i) and (ii)? _____
16. The *too A to B* structure is not appropriately used in sentence (iii). To correct sentence (iii), we can change the word *too* to *very* or *so*.
i.e. (iv) Peter is *very* happy to see his girlfriend.
(v) Peter is *so* happy to see his girlfriend.
17. Now determine whether the following sentences are acceptable and correct the unacceptable ones.
- e.g. a. John likes chocolates. ✓
Correction:
/
-
- b. John do not like chocolates. ✗
Correction:
John does not like chocolates.
- a. Ann is too weak to take the suitcase. □
Correction:



b. John is too excited to have a chance to go to Japan next week. □

Correction:

c. I am too happy to be the winner of the race. □

Correction:

d. Mary is too busy to talk to you. □

Correction:

e. Susan is too glad to receive your letter. □

Correction:

f. Peter is too eager to do the work. □

Correction:

g. Carmen is too young to get married. □

Correction:

18. How would you say the following sentences in English?

a. 約翰見到你太高興了.

b. 美玲太傷心了, 以致不能入睡.

c. 知道你考試失敗我太失望了.

d. 聽到這件意外我太傷心了.



Independent clause as Subject

1. How would you say the following sentence in English?

(i) 史諾比將會離開令我們很開心。

2. Would you say the following?

(ii) Snoopy is leaving makes us very happy.

(iii) Snoopy will leave makes us very happy.

3. Are the above sentences correct? _____

4. Why are the sentences wrong? Now let us look at sentence (ii) again.

(ii) * Snoopy is leaving makes us very happy.

5. Look at the sentence again. What *makes us very happy*? _____

⇒ [Snoopy is leaving] makes us very happy.

6. Do you know the function of *Snoopy is leaving* in (ii)? Is it a Subject, Direct Object, or an Indirect Object? _____

7. Sentence (ii) is wrong because the Subject *Snoopy is leaving* is an independent clause, and

An independent clause CANNOT be the subject of a sentence.

8. How can we revise sentence (ii) to make it grammatical?

9. **Solution 1:** Make the independent clause dependent by adding the word “that” to the beginning, i.e.

That + Snoopy is leaving



That Snoopy is leaving



10. The whole sentence now becomes

(iv) \surd *That Snoopy is leaving* makes us very happy.

Rule of thumb:

*** Independent Clause + Verb + ...**

but

\surd **That + Independent Clause + Verb +**

11. Now revise sentence (iii) to make it grammatical.

(iii) * Snoopy will leave makes us very happy.

12. Now, can you determine whether the following sentences are correct? Give a \surd if you think so, and a * if you don't think so. Correct the unacceptable ones.

e.g. a. John likes chocolates. \surd

Correction:

/

b. John do not like chocolates. *

Correction:

John does not like chocolates.

a. Snoopy has left makes us very happy. \square

Correction:

b. That she was eager to quit embarrassed her boss. \square

Correction:

c. He objected to your plan was totally unreasonable. \square

Correction:



d. I can't get better marks makes her disappointed. □

Correction:

e. David can read German is something everybody knows. □

Correction:

f. We read the passage aloud can help us improve our pronunciation. □

Correction:

g. You park your car here is illegal. □

Correction:

h. That she got A in her chemistry examination is very surprising. □

Correction:

13. Now you have a better idea how to correct a sentence with an independent clause as subject. There is another way to do so. Take sentence (ii) again as an example.

(ii) Snoopy is leaving makes us very happy.

14. **Solution 2:** Change the independent clause to a noun phrase “The fact that ...”

The fact that Snoopy is leaving makes us very happy.

15. Now correct the erroneous sentences below by changing the independent clause into a noun phrase “The fact that ...”.

a. Snoopy has left makes us very happy.

b. He objected to your plan was totally unreasonable.

c. I can't get better marks makes her disappointed.



d. We read the passage aloud can help us improve our pronunciation.

e. You park your car here is illegal.



Supplementary Handout: What is an independent clause?

1. Look at each of the following clauses and decide whether it is a complete sentence. Write the sentences in the appropriate boxes provided below.

- (a) he is rich
- (b) although he is rich
- (c) he is leaving
- (d) as he is the tallest student in the class
- (e) John is a diligent student
- (f) because John is a diligent student#
- (g) Mary does not love John
- (h) although Mary does not love John
- (i) until the rain stops
- (j) we understand this grammar rule
- (k) since it is raining outside
- (l) that he is leaving
- (m) he finished his work

Complete sentences	Incomplete sentences



2. Circle the conjunctions in the above clauses.
3. Which clauses have a conjunction at the beginning? _____
4. Which clauses do NOT have a conjunction at the beginning? _____
5. Complete sentences are sentences which can stand on their own. That is, they are independent clauses. What is the characteristic of an independent clause?

An independent clause does NOT begin with a _____

A clause which begins with a conjunction is NOT an independent clause. An independent clause can stand on its own.

6. Change the following independent clauses to dependent clauses:

a. I don't love her.

b. He failed the examination.

c. John is taller than me.

d. They understand this grammar rule.

Note:

A clause introduced by "because" as in 1(f) is usually a dependent clause. But notice that it may behave like an independent clause when responding to a question.

e.g. Father : Why do you like James so much?
Daughter : Because he is very kind.



Pseudo-tough movement

1. Are the following sentences correct? Give a \checkmark if you think so, and a \times if you don't think so. An example has been done for you.

Sentences	\checkmark or \times
Example: He study Form 5.	\times
Example: He studies Form 5.	\checkmark

i. I am difficult to learn English.	
ii. Graduates are not easy to find a job.	
iii. Boys are easier to get their parents' permission to go camping.	
iv. You are impossible to stay here overnight.	
v. They are inconvenient to go out now.	
vi. Hong Kong students are common to go to school late.	

2. Can you identify and circle the adjectives in these sentences?
3. Let's look at sentence number (i):
 (i) I am difficult to learn English.
4. Can you work out **what** is difficult?
 (a) _____ is difficult.
5. Now, can you work out **for whom XXX is difficult**?
 (b) for _____.
6. Okay, can you put (a) and (b) together and say what is difficult, and for whom?
 (c) for _____ is difficult.
 (c) is correct; can you identify the subject?
 \checkmark for me to learn English is difficult.
7. But English sentences with long subjects are not preferred. They are usually avoided. How can this be improved?

To improve (c), move the subject to the right, after the adjective, resulting in (d):

i.e. (for me to learn English) _____ is _____ difficult↓

(d) _____ is difficult for me to learn English.



8. Then put the word 'It' in the subject position, resulting in (e):
(e) It is difficult for me to learn English.
9. Now, let's try to correct another sentence, say, number (v):
(v) They are inconvenient to go out now.
10. Can you work out **what** is inconvenient?
(f) _____ is inconvenient.
11. Now, can you work out **for whom XXX is inconvenient**?
(g) for _____.
12. Okay, can you put (f) & (g) together and say what is inconvenient, and for whom?
(h) for _____ is inconvenient.
13. (h) is correct; can you identify the subject?
√ for them to go out now is inconvenient.
14. But English sentences with long subjects are not preferred. They are usually avoided. How can this be improved?
- To improve (h), move the subject to the right, after the adjective, resulting in (i):
- (i) _____ is inconvenient for them to go out now.
15. Then put the word 'It' in the subject position, resulting in (j):
(j) It is inconvenient for them to go out now.
16. Now can you work out the correction of one more sentence, say, number (iv)?
(iv) You are impossible to stay here overnight.
- Step 1: what is ADJ? _____
Step 2: for whom? _____
Step 3: put Steps 1 & 2 together (what should the VERB be, 'is' or 'are'?) _____
Step 4: move the subject to the right, after the VERB and ADJ.
Step 5: put 'It' at the beginning of the sentence.
17. Now decide whether the sentences in the following text is grammatically correct. Rewrite only the wrong sentences. Make the corrections in the space provided.

(a) I am a very lazy student, but I have been suffering from short-sightedness for two years.
(b) Sometimes I am difficult to read without glasses. (c) I decided to go and buy a pair of glasses. (d) I called my friend, John. (e) However, John was inconvenient to go with me. (f) He said he was possible to go with me on Friday, but I was impossible to go on that day. (g) So, he asked me to call Nancy. (h) I am easy to find Nancy and she said she was willing to go with me.



- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____

18. This usage problem frequently occurs with the following adjectives:

*easy, difficult, common, necessary, convenient, inconvenient,
possible, probable, impossible, improbable, etc.*

19. Read the information. Then make a sentence by using the given words. The first one has been done for you.

- a. Accidents are often caused by careless driving. (important/drivers/drive)
It is important for drivers to drive carefully.
- b. We can't pass the examination if we don't work hard. (necessary/us/work hard)
_____ to pass the examination.
- c. She has no difficulty expressing herself in English. (easy/her/express)
_____ herself in English.
- d. You can climb the mountain from this side. (possible/you/climb)
_____ the mountain from this side.

20. Translate the following Cantonese/Chinese sentences into English.

- a. 我不方便告訴你他的名字. (inconvenient)

- b. 你們是很難坐計程車到羅湖去的. (difficult)

- c. 他必須再寫一次. (necessary)



d. 她不可能知道吧! (impossible)

e. 我們不需要立刻想出解決的方法. (unnecessary)

21. Now, look at the following sentences.

(vii) Mary is difficult to convince.

(viii) John is easy to please.

(ix) This exercise is easy to do.

22. Are they correct? _____

23. Why are they correct? Although they look similar to the incorrect sentences (i) to (vi) above, they are actually different in structure.

Sentences with verbs such as “convince”, “please” and “do”, etc. require an **object** to complete them, i.e. *convince somebody*, *please somebody* and *do something*.

24. What is the object of *convince* in (vii)? _____

25. What is the subject of sentence (vii)? _____

26. What is the object of *please* in (viii)? _____

27. What is the subject of sentence (viii)? _____

28. What is the object of *do* in (ix)? _____

29. What is the subject of sentence (ix)? _____

30. What is the relationship between the **objects** of these verbs and the **subjects** of the sentences?

31. A rule of thumb is

if **missing Object of Verb = Subject**

then ✓ . . *Subject + is (are) + ADJECTIVE + to + VERB*

e.g. Mary is difficult to convince.

This exercise is easy to do.



32. Now, can you determine whether the following sentences are correct or not?

- a. Maths is easy to learn.
- b. John is easy to learn Maths.
- c. John is easy to teach.
- d. This lesson is hard to understand.
- e. I am difficult to understand this lesson.