

全 国

大学生英语作文竞赛  
获奖作文集

PRIZE ESSAYS OF  
COLLEGE STUDENT  
WRITING CONTEST

**Why**<sup>®</sup>  
外教社

孙 骊 评析  
上海外语教育出版社

全国大学生英语作文竞赛

# 获奖作文集

**Prize Essays of  
College Student Writing Contest**

本社编辑部 选编  
孙 骊 评析

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## 出版说明

培训写作能力是大学英语教学中一项很重要的内容。写作其实是一个学生综合语言能力的反映,它涵盖了词汇、语法、语言的精确使用及理解力等多种因素。因此,可以毫不夸张地说,学生写作水平的高低是评判教学质量的一个重要标准。从我国大学英语教学的现状来看,学生对于写作不够重视,动笔不勤,水平普遍较低,写作相应地成为英语教学中的一个难点,或者说是一个薄弱环节。

我社为了促进大学英语的教学工作,同时也是为了检验新时代大学生的英文综合能力,激发学生对英文写作的兴趣,于1998年夏与全国大学外语教学指导委员会、大学英语教学研究会和大学英语四、六级考试委员会联合举办了全国大学生英语写作征文竞赛,各地学生反响热烈,组委会共收到参赛稿1600余件,经过专家小组的筛选、评定,最后共有46名选手获奖。

本次竞赛命题专家小组在选题时充分考虑大学生的特点,撷取了一些当代青年感兴趣的题材,题材比较多样,为不同潜质的同学提供了较大的选择空间,使他们得以充分展现自己的才能。这次竞赛映照出当代大学生的英语写作水平,不少同学有不俗的表现,但是在批改作文的过程中,专家们指出竞赛中反映出的不足与缺点也是不容忽视的。即使是在获奖作品中,我们也看到为数不少的语法及拼写错误,在有些篇章中汉语式的表达更是俯拾皆是。

此次将获奖作品结集出版,并请写作教学方面的名师对每一

篇作文进行点评,有两重目的:一是使广大师生都有机会了解一下大学生英文写作水平的现状,更加明确写作教学当前的要务;再就是希望读者从篇后点评中有所收益,避免同类错误的发生。为了反映真实情况,本书所选学生作文里的错误我们一律保留。

在此谨向所有参加这次竞赛组织及评选工作的专家、学者表示诚挚的谢意。

## Preface

With pleasure I have accepted the publisher's commission to vet and write something on each of the prize-winning essays submitted to the English Composition Contest sponsored by the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press for students nationwide at all stages of what in China is called the College English Program, that is, the comprehensive set of English courses designed for students of all disciplines other than English Language and literature. I have readily accepted the task because of my awareness of the great significance of such a project in promoting the teaching of writing in English which, as I see it, has long been a weak link in ELT in China, for College English students and English majors alike. However, owing to the limited time and resources allotted to the College English Program, there is perhaps a more urgent need to address the question in this context. It was in answer to such a need that the composition contest was organized. As a teacher of English who has taught composition courses for quite a number of years to English majors, and as someone who has long expressed dissatisfaction with the way composition courses are being handled in our country, it is only natural that a contest of this kind should have aroused in me a tremendous interest

and that I should be ready to do what I can for it. Now that I have said what I think I need to say about each individual essay the jury has decided to give a prize to, it has occurred to me that I still owe it to the readers and to colleagues who are also interested in the teaching of writing to say something more and of a more general nature about the problems that have been revealed in the composition contest, and about the present book too.

It is certainly heartwarming to learn that students nationwide have responded enthusiastically to the contest with, in the end, over 1600 of them sending in their work to the contest organizers, in envelopes that bear the postmark of almost every province and autonomous region in China. But while the students' enthusiasm in seeking participation is overwhelming, the essays that were sent in are in their majority not of good enough quality and even the prize-winning ones are not free from mistakes of one kind or another. In saying this, I may sound too negative and discouraging, but the reality must be faced and after all the written work sent in by the students is but a true reflection of the current state of the teaching of writing in China. Besides, if only we have the courage to admit that the teaching of writing is a weak link in our ELT program and if only we can make consistent and persistent efforts to address this weakness, Chinese students will no doubt be able someday to write in a kind of English which native-speakers of the language will have no trouble identifying with.

However optimistic we may feel about the future, for the moment we must face the reality and admit that the students' ability to use the written form of English is, in general, weak,

although to be sure they themselves are not to blame for this. In writing my comments on the essays, I had wanted to go by the three criteria composition teachers generally use in grading student work, that is, how good and original the ideas incorporated are, how well and effectively the ideas are developed and organized and how correctly, appropriately and meaningfully the ideas are expressed in language. But owing to the presence of a rather large number of language errors and defective expressions in the essays, my attention was sometimes drawn more to the language questions in an essay, more or less to the neglect of the two other criteria. Occasionally I may even have been too annoyed with the language errors and defective expressions I saw to be able to perceive where the true strength in an essay lies. And focused as my attention was on language use, my discussion of the language questions could not, I know, be thoroughgoing enough.

I have used above two different terms, language errors and defective expressions. This is because I want to make a distinction between two types of misuse of the English language in the essays I vetted. A language error is what we usually call a mistake, which may be a misspelling, a wrong use of a punctuation mark, a fault in grammatical form, a wrong choice of word or phrase or whatever of a linguistic or mechanical nature. Defective expression is used to refer to the kind of expression, which sometimes may even be in the form of a full sentence, that does not sound like English or is simply unEnglish although structurally or in form it may seem quite all right. It is also used to refer to unsatisfactory uses of figurative speech in English, where, as I see it, the clash of cultural



differences is often most evident. In the book, I may not have been consistent in using this second term, for I remember having also used, in individual pieces of writing, words like “inadequate”, “faulty” or even some other words in the course of writing my comments. For this inconsistency I should say sorry to readers of this books.

Indeed, the presence of an unacceptably large number of language errors in the essays, even in those that have been given a prize and collected in the present volume, is something we as teachers of English cannot make light of. Even the final copy some participants sent in contains simple spelling mistakes. Conventions of punctuation in written Chinese are followed by some students when they write in English. There are various kinds of grammatical mistakes, the most notable of which are misuses of the English article and the English tense, the present indefinite tense, the perfect tenses and the progressive aspect in especial. The omission of modal verbs where they are necessary is another question and this, I believe, points to the students’ inability to think in English. In not a few of the essays I read there are even serious mistakes in sentence structure, not just mistakes of subject-verb agreement that are common among Chinese learners of English but also sentences so malformed as to make no grammatical sense. In choice of words there is not just the common question of getting confused with words like “lie” and “lay” or “find” and “look for” or even “come” and “go”, but also the more serious one of using words or phrases whose meaning the writer has not made sure of and this points up the need on the teachers’ part to try to help cultivate in the students more desirable

habits of work.

What may strike the eye even more tellingly are the many and almost ubiquitous unEnglish expressions in the student essays whose origin we can readily trace to the influence of the native tongue. This is actually not very surprising considering that the students are all mature adults with fully developed intellectual faculties and with lots of complicated and often abstract thoughts seeking for an outlet and also considering that in their mother tongue they are so very used to giving expression to thoughts of this kind, with facility and sometimes in a kind of jargon peculiar to today's Chinese. For students like these, there is a huge disparity between what they want to say in the foreign language they learn and what they are able to say in that language. What then could be more natural for them than to try to translate what is in their Chinese-dominated minds into English? And because of the limited language resources at their command, the translation will more often than not turn out to be very rigid or literal, characterized by a profusion of what I have called defective or unEnglish expressions. I have already said that the students are not to blame for this and to be frank and honest I really do not think I myself can always be sure how to express correctly and appropriately all they have wanted to say in the essays, although I have spent scores of years trying to perfect my command of English. There seems to be no shortcut to mastering writing skills in a foreign language which some specialists call the last group of skills to master in learning a foreign language. Hence I don't think I could offer in this regard any useful advice except to quote a four-character Chinese phrase from what Pro-

fessor Ji Xianlin of Beijing University has once said about his own experience in language learning and that is the rather trite-sounding phrase “qin xue ku lian”. The reason why I have used the original Chinese phrase here is that interestingly I have failed to find a good enough translation for it in the Chinese-English dictionaries I often have to use. My own rendering, which I know sounds rather cumbersome, is “Study hard and practice as much and as earnestly as possible”. I may seem to have digressed a little here, but this may help us see that Chinese-English dictionaries, which Chinese students often resort to, may not always be dependable in learning to write.

I do not know if any English composition contest has been organized in the past, probably never on such a scale. Eager to see greater progress in our students' writing ability, I do hope that more contests of the same kind will be held in future, for they could be a strong incentive not just to the participants and understandably first of all the winners but also to all students interested in improving their English writing skills. Now that the participants this time, with their enthusiasm and labor, have made it possible for us to bring the present book into existence, we must see how other students can make good use of it. It has occurred to me in the course of writing my comments that the essays included in this selection, together with what comments I have made, could actually be used as materials for discussion by students attending a writing course. What I have said about each essay is far from exhaustive and I may even have made some mistakes myself. But this probably will make the book all the more useful to the students as they can learn from a negative example as well as from a positive one. In lan-

guage education, peer learning has proved very useful and from my own experience this is also true of the development of writing ability.

Before I bring this preface to an end, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the editors of the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, not only for the labor they have expended in organizing the composition contest but also for making me understand that a book like this may be of use to all students of English who wish to improve their writing skills in the language.

*Sun Li*

September, 1999

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