



**An Analysis of Some Errors Committed by  
RSU (Rangsit University) English Major Students  
in *Writing 2* Class**

โดย

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**Rangsit University 2007**

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## ABSTRACT

The writing errors in the final examination compositions of 77 *Writing 2* English major students (2005-2006) are compiled and classified. It is found that they are the combination of interlingual and intralingual errors. There are 406 errors, 13% of which belongs to mechanic, 6% to semantics, 5% to morphology and 76% to syntax. Most of the errors in syntax are in verb (28%), subject (26%) and determiner (21%) categories. Three suggestions to alleviate these errors are given.

### บทคัดย่อ

ความผิดพลาดในการเขียนความเรียงที่พบในการสอบปลายภาควิชา *Writing 2* สำหรับนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต จำนวน 77 คน สามารถแบ่งออกได้เป็น 2 กลุ่ม คือ interlingual และ intralingual error ในขณะเดียวกัน พบว่าความผิดพลาดจำนวน 406 สามารถแบ่งออกเป็น ความผิดพลาดทาง *mechanic* 13%, ความผิดพลาดทาง *semantics* 6%, *morphology* 5% และ *syntax* 76% ซึ่งความผิดพลาดทาง *syntax* ส่วนใหญ่มาจาก *verb* (28%), *subject* (26%) และ *determiner* (21%) ความผิดพลาดเหล่านี้สามารถบรรเทาด้วย 3 คำแนะนำในบทความ

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## SCHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In learning a language, making errors is a natural phenomenon. Errors are deviation from the target-language norm that is usually defined as the standard written dialect (Ellis 1994) in a classroom environment. Appropriate grammar knowledge is necessary to produce a well-written paper, a text which expresses ideas clearly and effectively. Lee (2004) notes that grammatical maturity in addition to appropriate rhetorical styles and appropriate use of vocabulary is also a feature of well-written texts.

There are a lot of studies that show the importance of studying learners' errors in grammar improvement. In the 1940s, 50s and 60s, errors were analyzed using contrastive analysis (CA). CA is a comparative analysis between two languages (Schackne 2002) and is based on the behaviorist position that language learning is simply a matter of imitation and habit formation. Thus, the errors learners make are due to the transfer of the native language (L1) "habits" that are different from the target language. This is called L1 interference. However in the 1970s, there was the introduction of error analysis (EA) through Corder's work. This challenged CA on the basis that not all learners' errors were due to L1 interference as hypothesized in CA. Since EA focuses on the learners' language rather than the interference of L1, it can explain the errors that are not L1 related. In EA, errors are treated not only from L1 transfer but also from developmental errors that occur during the learning process while the learners are trying to familiarize themselves with the rules of the target language.

Error classification depends on the researchers. For example, Richards (1971b), and Dulay and Burt (1974b) in Ellis (1994) classified errors into three categories. Richards has 1) interference (using L1 in speaking the target language), 2) intralingual (incomplete comprehension of the rules of the target language) and 3) developmental (building up hypotheses for the target language with limited experience) errors while Dulay and Burt have 1) developmental (errors similar to L1 learning), 2) interference (errors showing the structure of L1), and 3) unique (errors that are neither developmental nor interference) errors. Most researchers classify errors into two groups, the interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors are due to L1 interference while intralingual errors are due to the unique rules created by the learners while learning the language.

Just like other learners of English, Rangsit University (RSU) English major students also make errors when they use English. These errors are easily recognizable when they write because they affect their writing performance. The extent of these errors depends on their English proficiency.

### **Objectives, Definition and Limitations**

The objectives of this study are to present and classify the errors made by English major students in *Writing 2* final examination compositions for the academic year 2005-2006. Doing these can pinpoint the parts of the language that the students have not mastered yet nor mastered fully. Consequently, it is hoped that the results of this study will be useful in developing a course syllabus and materials that can help minimize these errors. In addition, this paper also discusses the possible sources of errors and their teaching implications.

In this study, errors are evaluated based on deviation in correctness involving rules of usage. They are categorized as errors in syntax, semantics/lexis, morphology and mechanics. Although these four areas are interwoven when writing, they are dealt with separately for better understanding of the learners' errors and for ease of discussion. In this research, syntax refers to sentence structure, morphology to variation in word endings excluding inflections, semantics to the range of meaning associated with words and structures, lexis to choice of individual words, and mechanics to capitalization and spelling.

There are three limitations in this study, which concern categorization. These are categorization in usage, categorization on type of errors, and categorization of errors in Results. Some errors in structures can belong to more than one usage category. For example, errors in inflection can be categorized either in subject-verb agreement or morphology category. Regarding the type of errors, some errors can belong to both interlingual and intralingual because errors that have the same structure as L1 may be developmental errors for the learners. Lastly, the selection of examples for the Results is rather arbitrary since most sentences have more than one errors.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language exists in both written and spoken mode. For modern linguistics, the spoken form is preferable because speech is the primary medium of communication. However, for older school traditions, the written form is worth more considering because it is "more permanent and more clearly defined and regular" (Stern 1984). Thus, writing is a very important aspect in school subjects until now. It is then expected that second language (L2) learners must be able to write too in their target language. Although they are taught how to write well in their target language, it is impossible for them to write it effectively in just a few lessons. They have to pass various stages in learning a language.

### 2.1 INTERLANGUAGE

The late 1960s and early 1970s were the time when behaviorist theory was thought to be inadequate to account for L2 learning. This led to the introduction of interlanguage (IL) theory which was coined by Selinker. It explains the development in L2 learning since it refers to 'the special mental grammars that learners constructed during the course of their language development' (Ellis 194, 44).

#### 2.1.1 Definition of Interlanguage and Interlanguage Continuum

In the interlanguage theory, the acquisition of L2 follows a path referred to as the interlanguage continuum. In this continuum, learners move from the reduced system of L1 (Corder in Ellis 1994) to the target language. As learners move, they receive inputs, create and revise rules based on inputs, and construct their own series of grammars referred to as interlanguages. Input can be in the form of grammar teaching, of correction or of emphasis on particular structures (White, 1987). The learners' grammars are not always similar or nearly similar to the input because they continuously test the rules. They sometimes simplified the rules and sometime complexified them giving both favorable and unfavorable results. There is also backsliding, the reappearance of old unacceptable IL forms thought to have already been learned or mended by the learners. There are also cases when learners never improve in their target

language because they prematurely stopped to absorb L2 irrespective of their exposure to or instruction in this language. This process is known as fossilization.

Interlanguage is systematic and dynamic. It is systematic because the learners know how to organize and use the information they receive. They can adjust according to the task and situation. Interlanguage is dynamic due to the variability of the language learners. Learners can vary in their use of linguistic forms based on linguistic context, in their own speech and task performances based on situational context, and in creating their own form to 'distinguish different functional or semantic meanings that are important to them' (Ellis 1994, 22). Dynamism is also due to the changes in the learners' language system, changes, which according to Bialystok and Smith (1985), the learners are not even aware of. These changes which are brought about by recreation, restructuring, or backsliding contribute to the nonlinearity of this process.

### **2.1.2 The Developmental Sequence in Interlanguage**

The interlanguage theory explains that L2 acquisition follows a developmental pattern that is similar to all learners regardless of their L1 background. Previous studies on learners' errors were one of the bases for this finding.

As noted previously, interlanguage is described as the general pattern of development in continuum. This continuum may start with the silent period which is followed by the processing of non-linguistic items such as formulas and lexical items that are not assigned to grammatical categories. Formulas that are recognized first are the common ones like 'How do you do?' and 'I'm fine. Thank you' followed by the reduced and morphologically simple ones. Then, a series of stages leading to more complex grammatical operations follow. In one of the stages, the learners use the learned formulas in constructing complex structures by substitution and combination. Since there are progress and backsliding in this continuum, 'interlanguage is unstable' (Larsen-Freeman 1997) just like other natural languages. However, this unstable stage usually leads to the gradual mastering of the basic L2 syntax of most learners.

## **2.2 LEARNERS' ERRORS**

Errors occur when learners produced a target language different from the norm. Norm has different definition depending on what skill of the target language is under consideration. For example, in writing, the norm might be the standard written pattern with correct grammar and organization of ideas. On the other hand, in speaking, the norm might be the standard spoken language that has the privilege of not following the written pattern as long as communication is not a failure as in 'You're going with me?' in rising intonation. If in written form, this expression is 'Are you going with me?' following the right grammar structure.

### **2.2.1 Mistakes and Errors**

There is a difference between mistakes and errors. An error is made because the learners do not know the language well. That is, they lack the knowledge of the target language. In contrast, a mistake is committed not because the learners are not knowledgeable of the language, but because there might be something wrong with their processing system. They might have memory lapses or be emotionally disturbed causing communication problem. To alleviate this problem, they try to grope for some alternative rules which might not be correct. Because of the knowledge of the language, committing mistakes is commonly observed with native speakers who fail to show their competence. Making errors, on the other hand, is for language learners who do not have competence in the language yet.

### **2.2.2 Errors and Interlanguage**

In interlanguage, errors made by the learners are part of their language development. It is these errors that give feedback to the learners that there is a need to change the rules they created. Errors can be from L1 (interlingual) or from the unique rules created by the learners (intralingual).

Bialystok and Smith (1985, 115) consider errors due to L1 as transfer error and interference error. Both use L1 to fill the gaps in L2. Transfer error is committed when the gap is due to lack of L2 knowledge and interference error is committed when the gap is due to inadequacy of retrieval procedure. Errors from L1 interference are inevitable since learners are

bound to this language. However, as the learners progress toward the L2, L1 interference becomes less and less.

Intralingual errors occur as learners discover the structure of the language they are learning (Ellis 1994). They are commonly observed from all learners irrespective of L1 background. One supporting evidence is the study of Lightbown and Spada (1993) with French- and Chinese-speaking secondary students. Although they have different L1, many of their errors were similar. Young children who are starting to learn their native language also experience these errors. These are called developmental or creative errors that occur when the learners try to use a rule they have learned but have not mastered fully. There is an inappropriate application of rules without taking into consideration some exceptions to the rules. Dulay, Burt, Krashen (1982) in Ellis (1994) consider this kind of error misinformation or omission. An example of misinformation is having *leaved* and not *left* as the past tense of *leave*. Other researchers refer this error as overgeneralization. An example of omission is the absence of some elements in a sentence. For example, in “There piano in living room” (There *is a* piano in *the* living room), the verb *be* and the articles *a* and *the* are missing.

### 2.2.3 Other Error Classifications

In addition to the error classification given above, Corder has his own classification (Ellis 1994). He categorizes errors into three types. These are presystematic, systematic and postsystematic. Presystematic errors are made by learners when they do not know that there is a particular rule to follow. With this, the learners might not even know that they are wrong. Systematic errors, on the other hand, occur when the learners know that there is a rule but the rule is the wrong one. Postsystematic errors are errors made by learners because they temporarily forget the rule. This means that the learners know the rule before and have used it correctly. However, sometimes they will use it incorrectly.

Another error classification is the surface strategy taxonomy of Dulay, Burt, Krashen (1982) in Ellis (1994). The categories are omissions, additions, misinformation, and misordering. This classification is not so popular because it is only based on the surface and not on the students' creativity in writing a structure.

Richard (1971) in Ellis (1994) has developmental error in addition to interlingual and interference errors and intralingual errors. According to him, developmental errors occur when learners are trying to create their own hypothesis about the target language despite of their limited experience. These errors are sometimes called transfer errors. On the other hand, Chamot (1978; 1979) in Ellis (1994) had omission of constituents, verb forms, sentence formation, articles, and prepositions as the main areas of linguistic errors.

Although there are many classifications of errors, all errors are deviation from the target-language norm. According to Ellis (1994), errors reflect either a problem in performance or in competence. Competence errors are considered central to the study of L2 acquisition. Overall, the sources of learners' errors are interference from L1 and the students themselves. During their learning process, they try to make their own hypothesis while familiarizing with the rules of the target language.

## **2.3 GRAMMAR**

Studying a language is important. It prevents misunderstanding if it is used appropriately and effectively. It also provides additional knowledge to people who can read and speak a certain language. When documents are written in another language, the one who knows that language can read them, but the one who does not has to wait until someone else translate them. The central component of language is grammar. It 'mediates between the system of sounds (phonology) or written symbols (orthography) and the system of meaning (semantics). It also deals with the rules for combining words into larger units' (Greenbaum 1991, 1). This makes communication with one another easy.

### **2.3.1 The Sentence**

The combination of words that gives meaningful meanings is normally referred to as a sentence. There are irregular and regular sentences. Sentences that conform to the major patterns are regular sentences. They are commonly found in the written language. Those that do not conform to regular patterns are irregular sentences that are fragmentary and commonly encountered in spoken sentences. The common expressions like *Hello*, headlines, titles, labels and

notices are considered irregular sentences. When people speak to one another, they only use a word or a phrase because they know what they are talking about. Nevertheless, spoken sentences can be written into regular sentences.

A sentence can be simple or multiple depending on its number of clauses. A simple sentence has one independent clause while a multiple sentence has two or more clauses. A multiple sentence can be compound, complex or compound-complex. Compound sentences are made up of two or more independent clauses joined by coordinators, semicolon or conjunctive adverbs. Complex sentences consist of an independent clause and at least one dependent clause. Compound-complex sentences, on the other hand, are made up of two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

### **2.3.2 Parts of a Sentence**

There are two basic parts in a sentence. These are the subject and the predicate. In imperatives, the subject is usually omitted because it is already understood to be *you*. The predicate has verb as its main element. In addition, it can have objects, complements and adverbials.

**2.3.2.1 Subject (S)** The subject is usually a noun phrase or a pronoun. It appears before the verb in declaratives and after auxiliaries in interrogatives. It agrees with the verb based on person and number. For example, when the subject is singular and in the third person, most verbs end in *-s* or *-es* in the present tense. A noun phrase is a noun or a noun expanded with pre- and post-modifiers.

**2.3.2.2 Predicate/Verb (V)** The predicate has at least one verb as the main element. Verbs can be transitive or intransitive. Transitive verbs need an object while intransitive verbs do not. In addition, verbs are classified as finite and non-finite. The finite verbs appear in the verb phrase of the main clause and are the ones that agree with number and person. They are also tensed. In contrast, non-finite verbs are the opposite of finite verbs; that is, they are non-tensed, and do not agree with the subject of the sentence. These are the infinitives and participles.

**2.3.2.3 Objects (O) and complements (C)** Transitive verbs, as noted above, need an object. The object can be direct object and/or indirect object. A direct object is a person or



thing that is affected by the verb while an indirect object is usually a person that receives something or benefits from something.

The complement can be a noun phrase, an adjective phrase, a pronoun or a subordinate clause. It can be subject complement or object complement. It follows the linking verbs like *appear, become, seem, feel, look, sound*, and verb *be* which is the most common among them.

**2.3.2.4 Adverbials (A)** Adverbials can be a single adverb, an adverb phrase, a prepositional phrase or a subordinate clause. An example of a single adverb is *generally*, of an adverb phrase is *very fast*, of a prepositional phrase is *in the morning* and of a subordinate clause is *after I met him*.

### 2.3.3 The Basic Sentence Structure

Based on the five elements that can be found in a sentence and discussed above, there are seven basic sentence structures (Dadufalza 1992; Greenbaum 1991). They are given below together with their examples.

#### a. SVA

<b>S</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>A<sub>manner</sub></b>
The team	practiced	vigorously.

#### b. SVC

<b>S</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>C</b>
The food	looks	appetizing.

#### c. SVO

<b>S</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>O</b>
A stranger	saved	the boy.

#### d. SVOA

<b>S</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>A<sub>place</sub></b>
The cat	ate	the fish	on the table.

e. SVOC

<i>S</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>C</i>
We	considered	it	wrong.

f. SVOO

<i>S</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>O</i> <sub>(indirect)</sub>	<i>O</i> <sub>(direct)</sub>
Nopadon	sent	Sirimon	flowers.

g. SV

<i>S</i>	<i>V</i> <sub>intransitive</sub>
The car	broke down.

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## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 SUBJECTS

The participants in this study were seventy-seven RSU English major students, ten of whom were male. They were mostly in their third year. They had already studied three English foundation courses and two structure courses (*English Structure* and *Applied Structure*). *English Structure* is the prerequisite course for *Writing 1* which is the prerequisite course for *Writing 2*. These students enrolled in *Writing 2* in the first and second semester of the academic year 2005-2006.

### 3.2 MATERIALS

The materials used in this study were the final examination compositions of the students described above. The final examination had two sections. Section One was writing descriptive-narrative composition and Section Two was writing argumentative composition. Each section had three topics but the students were asked to choose only 1 topic for each.

The students' compositions used in this study were from Section Two. Students were asked to write an argumentative composition with at least two body paragraphs and at least three-hundred words that discussed the pro-argument and counterargument. The topics to choose from for the first semester 2005-2006 were

- 1) Motorcyclists should/should not be allowed to use the expressways
- 2) Rangsit University should/should not allow the students who miss 80% of the class to take the final examination
- 3) The English Language Department should/should not let English major students who cannot speak English well to graduate

The topics for the second semester were

- 1) Thaksin should/should not resign as Prime Minister
- 2) Prostitution should/should not be legalized

3) The English Language Department should/should not allow English major students who get below C in foundation English courses to enroll in the upper level courses

### **3.3 PROCEDURE**

Prior to writing argumentative compositions in the final examination, the students were taught argumentative writing in class and were asked to write their first and final draft on any of the two topics suggested and voted by the class. After writing their first draft, the instructor checked it for grammar errors and organization. Since the students had studied three English foundation and two structure courses, it was assumed that they had strong background knowledge on grammar and mechanics. Thus, explicit grammar and mechanical instruction were not emphasized in class, although they were part of the corrections. The students wrote their final draft based on the instructor's corrections and guidance.

In the final examination, students were asked to write an argumentative composition on one of the given topics above. Since the final examination was for three hours, students were expected to devote one and a half hour for this since the other half should be for narrative-descriptive composition. No dictionary was allowed in the examination room.

### **3.4 COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Data were collected from the first and second semester of the academic year 2005-2006's *Writing 2* final examination. Errors in the compositions were noted down and classified into syntax, morphology, semantics/lexis, and mechanics. They were further categorized into smaller groups. Then, the number of errors in each group was counted and converted to percent.

The same error was counted once per student. That is, when a student had an error in subject-verb agreement in paragraph 1 and again in paragraph 3, this error was counted only one time. Thus, all error categories cannot have more than 77 counts since there were only 77 students in the study.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

In this study, four hundred and six errors were identified and they were classified into syntax, morphological, semantic, and mechanical errors. Their distribution in percent is shown in Fig. 1. Majority of the errors made was on syntax. Examples for each category are given below and their reconstructions have an asterisk (\*) in front. The reconstruction is based on the meaning of the text. When the meaning is rather ambiguous, possible equivalents are given. If a sentence has more than one errors, all the errors are corrected in the reconstruction.

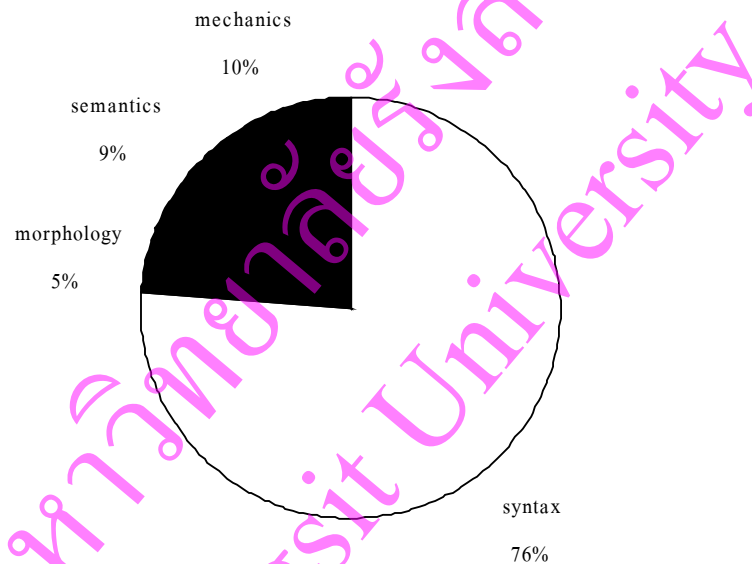


Fig 1. The distribution of students' errors in percent.

### 4.1 MORPHOLOGY

The morphological errors include the use of wrong form of the word as illustrated in (1), (2) and (3). In example (1) *powerful* is used instead of *power*, in (2) *comfortable* instead of *comfort* and in (3) *danger* instead of *dangerous*. Inflection errors are classified under subject, verb, and adjective categories.

- 1) To avoid the tax payment, he used his *powerful* to change some law.

- \* To avoid tax payment, he used his *power* to change some laws.
- 2) Using the car is wanted because it give privacy and *comfortable*.
- \* Driving a car is preferable because it gives privacy and *comfort*.
- 3) But it too *danger* for motorcyclist and people who use the way.
- \* But it is too *dangerous* for motorcyclists and people who use the expressway.

## 4.2 SEMANTICS/LEXIS

There are four common lexical errors in this study. These are the use of inappropriate words which might be due to limited vocabulary, the confusion between *no* and *not*, the interchanging of verb *be*, *do* and *have*, and the confusion of words with similar sound. Example (2) which is written again below as well as examples (4) and (5) shows the use of inappropriate words which have close meaning to the words the students would like to express. In (2) *preferable* is replaced with *wanted*, and in (4) *introduced* with *made* and *treat* with *repair*. The confusion between *no* and *not* is exemplified in (5).

- 2) Using the car is *wanted* because it give privacy and *comfortable*. (*wanted* → preferable)
- \* Driving a car is *preferable* because it gives privacy and *comfort*.
- 4) For example, he *made* 30 baht for *repair* all sickness. (*made* → introduced; *repair* → treat)
- \* For example, he *introduced* the 30-baht medical fee to *treat* all sickness.
- 5) It is *simple* for the expressway that has *not* traffic. (*simple* → typical; *not* → no)
- \* It is *typical* for the expressway to have *no* traffic jam.
- \* It is *typical* for the expressway *not* to have traffic jam.

Example (6) illustrates the interchange of *have* and verb *be* and (7) the interchange of verb *be* and *do*. Examples (8) to (11), on the other hand, show the use of wrong words due to the similarity of sound between the desired word and another word (homophone).

- 6) The English language *has* important for everyone. (*has* → is)
- \* The English language *is* important to everyone.

- 7) In contrast, it is a better way that teacher *is* not allow these students to take the exam.  
 \* In contrast, it is a better way that the teacher *does* not allow these students to take the exam.
- 8) Some people *thing* that Thaksin should resign as Prime Minister. (*thing* → think)  
 \* Some people *think* that Thaksin should resign as Prime Minister.
- 9) All of students would *play* attention to study in the class. (*play* → pay)  
 \* All of the students should *pay* attention in class.
- 10) When they do the examination, they will *fell*. (*fell* → fail)  
 \* When they take the examination, they will *fail*.
- 11) In addition, it can *safe* money. (*safe* → save)  
 \* In addition, it can *save* money.

#### 4.3 MECHANICS

Errors in mechanics are from spelling and capitalization, 67% of which is from spelling. In spelling, most of the errors are due to the presence of double vowels like *ei* (12) and *ia* (13), and double consonants (14). The difference between the spelling and the sound (15) also contributes to spelling errors.

- 12) Thai students always *recieve* the chance from their teacher every times. (*recieve* → receive)  
 \* The teacher always gives the students a chance (to redo their essay).
- 13) When the student not going to class the teacher let them do the exam *agian*. (*agian* → again)  
 \* The teacher lets the students take the exam although they are not always in class.
- 14) However, *ridding* motorcycle on the expressways can be the danger. (*ridding* → riding)  
 \* However, riding a motorcycle on the expressways can be dangerous.
- 15) When people want go to the office in thirty *minites*, it can do in this way. (*minites* → minutes)  
 \* When people want to go to the office in thirty *minutes*, they can do this way.

Another error in spelling is the writing of *themselves* instead of *themselves* (16).

16) So, When they have a knowledge, they can find job by *themselves*.

\* So, when they have enough knowledge, they can find a job by *themselves*.

Regarding capitalization, most students capitalize the first word after subordinators (underlined) (17, 18).

17) Moreover, The foreign don't buy goods in Thailand. (*The* → the)

\* Moreover, foreigners don't buy goods in Thailand.

18) Because If you have high degree, you can get high salary. (*If* → if)

\* If you have a higher degree, you can get a higher salary.

#### 4.4 SYNTAX

The errors in syntax are divided into eight groups: subject, pronoun, verb, adjective, preposition, determiner/quantifier, fragment and subordinate clause. Table 1 gives the percent distribution of various syntax errors.

Table 1. Percent distribution of syntax errors.

Syntax error category	%	Syntax error category	%
subject	26	preposition	8
pronoun	7	determiner/quantifier	21
verb	28	fragment	7
adjective	1	relative clause	2

##### 4.4.1 Subject

Errors under subject include missing subject, double subject, and subject-verb agreement. Most subjects are missing after subordinators (underlined) (19), when it follows *that* (underlined) in a noun clause (20), and an introductory prepositional phrase (underlined) (21).



19) Thaksin should resign as prime minister because ↑ can help to stop the group of protesting.

\* Thaksin should resign as prime minister because *it* can stop the group of protesters.

20) Opponents of this position argue that ↑ should allow the students who miss 80% of the class to take the final examination.

\* Opponents of this position argue that *students* who miss 80% of the class should be allowed to take the final examination.

21) In Thailand, ↑ has a lot of motorcycle because it not expensive like a car.

\* In Thailand, there are a lot of motorcycles because they are not expensive like cars.

The errors in double subjects are usually the combination of pronoun and noun phrase (22-24). With the subject-verb agreement, “s” or “es” is usually missing from the verbs that follow a singular subject in the present tense (25) or the pronouns like *everyone* and *each* take the verbs for plural nouns (26). The distribution of all these errors is shown in Figure 2.

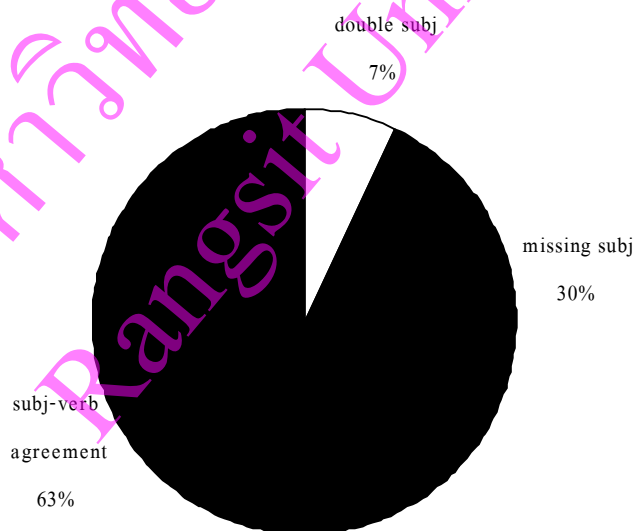


Fig. 2. The distribution of subject errors

22) For example, they *friends* will congratulate in this year.

\* a) For example, *they* will graduate this year.

\* b) For example, their friends will graduate this year.

23) In addition, *getting below C* it's not show the real ability of anyone when they work or do something.

\* a) In addition, *getting below C* does not show the real ability of someone when he/she works or does something.

\* b) In addition, it does not show the real ability of someone when he/she works or does something.

24) *People who drive cars they* always drive very fast on the expressway, too.

\* a) *People who drive cars* always drive very fast on the expressway, too.

\* b) *They* always drive very fast on the expressway, too.

25) Thailand *need* to develop to be a business country and capitalism is very important to take the country to be successful.

\* Thailand *needs* to develop to be an industrialized country and capitalism is very important to make the country successful.

26) Now in *every university* *have* the rule for students.

\* Now every university *has* rules for students.

#### 4.4.2 Pronoun

Pronouns can be subjects or objects. Errors in pronouns are the use of subject pronouns in the object position (27) especially after the catenative verb phrases (28) and wrong anaphoric pronouns (29).

27) There are many problems in South but Thaksin can't destroy *they* to disappear.

\* There are many problems in the South, but Thaksin can't solve *them*.

28) It will make *they* try and boring until they don't want to study.

\* It will make *them* tired and bored until they don't want to study.

29) In conclusion, *Thai student* should come to class as much as *you* can.

\* In conclusion, *Thai students* should come to class as much as *they* can.

#### 4.4.3 Verb

There are eight errors that belong to verb category and their distribution is shown in Fig. 3. Two of the errors are missing verb and missing auxiliary. Verb *be* is commonly missing before the subject complement (30, 31) and the auxiliary *do* in negative structures (32). Another error is the use of double auxiliary verbs (33).

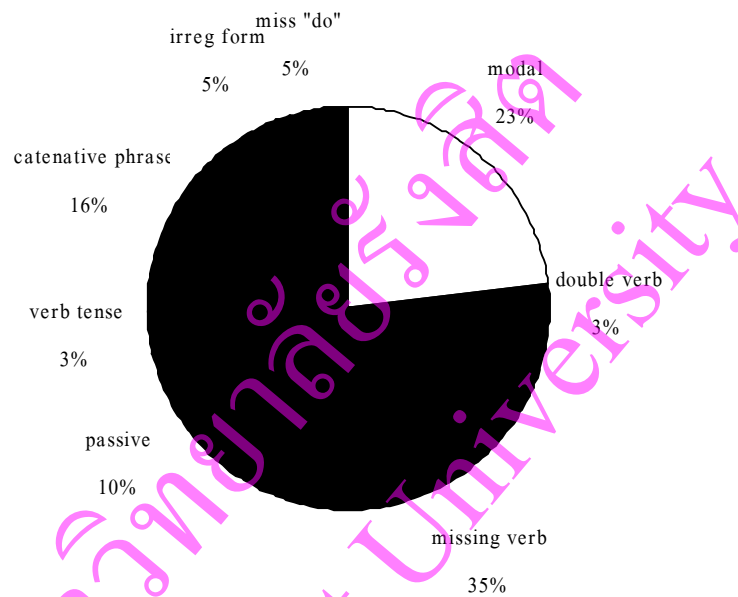


Fig. 3. Percent distribution of verb errors.

30) It is can show that he ↑ very selfish.

\* It can show that he *is* very selfish.

31) They always absent.

\* They *are* always absent.

32) The student who not attend to study not come to classroom always.

\* The students who *do* not like to study *do* not always come to class.

33) They *will don't* know about good cuties for students.

\* a) They *don't* know the duties of the students.

\* b) They *won't* know the duties of the students.

The other errors are in modals and catenative verbs. The students are confused whether the modals, causative verbs, or catenative verbs are followed by base form, infinitive (34-35) or *-ing* form. Some students even follow them with the *-ed*, form (36, 37).

34) When students have an examination, they have to pass and they must *to* have C.

\* When students take an examination, they have to pass it and must  $\emptyset$  get C.

35) He want to show the people that he is a good Prime minister and *want the people*  $\uparrow$  *trust* him.

\* He wants to show the people that he is a good prime minister and *wants the people to trust* him.

36) The conclusion, the student in the university *should prepared* yourself to learn every subject.

\* In conclusion, the students in the university *should prepare* themselves to learn every subject.

37) If the English Language Department *let them graduated*, there'll bring many problems.

\* If the English Language Department let them *graduate*, there'll be many problems.

Other errors are in the verb tense (38), the wrong form of irregular verbs (39) and the use of passive (40). In the passive voice, most errors are in the absence of verb *be* or the use of verb other than the past participle. Figure 3 shows the percent distribution of errors in verb.

38) For example, He *give* the money each village to find job and study about thing that interesting.

\* For example, he *gave* some money to each village to create jobs and for the villagers to use it to study something that interests them.

39) Moreover the lesson in the book and in final examination can't get the question from out of in the book but it's in the classroom that he/she *tached*.

\* Moreover, some lessons and questions in the final examination are not in the book but are *taught* in the classroom.

40) This problem still *cannot* ↑ *solved* until now and there are many people who worked for government try to solve this problem.

\* This problem *hasn't been solved* until now and there are many people/organizations who work with the government **trying** to solve this problem.

#### 4.4.4 Adjective

Errors in adjective are related to form (41) and position (42).

41) Using the expressway is *more safe* their life than using the normal way.

\* Using the expressway is *safer* for their life than using the ordinary route.

42) But each students have *different English basic*.

\* But each student has *different basic English*.

\* But each student has *different English basics*.

#### 4.4.5 Preposition

The percent distribution of errors in preposition is shown in Fig. 4. Two of the errors are missing preposition in multi-word verbs (43) and in adjective-preposition-verb combination (44, 45).

43) If they often absent it means they have no responsibility and no *respect* ↑ their teachers too.

\* If they are often absent, it means that, they are not responsible and have no *respect to* their teachers too.

44) It was a good thing for people that should *hurry* ↑ *go* make a work.

\* It is a good thing for people who are in a *hurry to go* to work.

45) A lot of people thing, it is not *necessary* ↑ *come* to class or not but you can take the exam.

\* A lot of students think that it is not *necessary to go* to class because they can take the exam anyway.

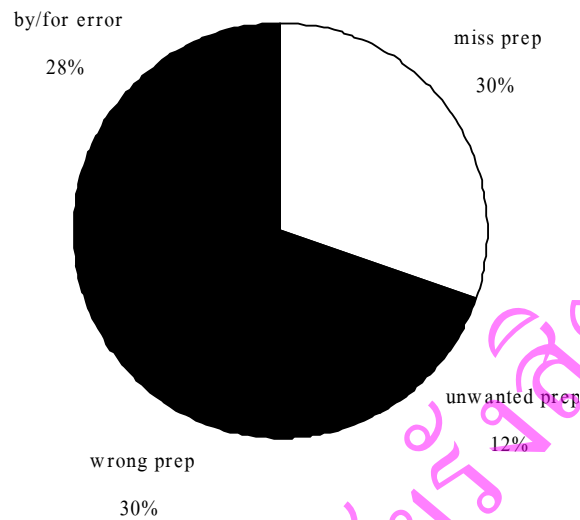


Fig. 4. Percent distribution of preposition errors.

The other errors are the addition of a preposition when it is not needed (46, 47); the confusion on the verb form after *for*, *to* and *by* (48, 49); and the use of wrong preposition (50).

46) Present, people in Thailand *to learn* about various news.

\* At present, the people in Thailand  $\emptyset$  can learn from the news.

47) They *get to hurt*, must go to the hospital.

\* They *get  $\emptyset$  hurt* and must go to the hospital.

48) Moreover, sometime, they cheat the fee by *ride* very fast and don't stop.

\* Moreover, sometimes, they avoid paying the toll by *driving* very fast and not stopping at the toll booth.

49) Every students have different reasons for *miss* the class.

\* Every student has different reasons for *missing* the class.

50) In addition English major students must use speaking skill *for* present their Independent Study.

\* In addition, English major students must use their speaking skills *to* present their Independent Study.

#### 4.4.6 Determiner and Quantifier

Errors in determiners include missing articles (51), adding them when they are not needed (52), interchanging them (53), and using the wrong form of nouns after the indefinites (49). The students are confused with count and non-count nouns. The distribution of these errors together with errors in quantifiers is shown in Fig. 5.

51) *Some job* want ↑ person who can speak English very well.

\* *Some jobs* want a person who can speak English very well.

52) However, Although they come to a class makes you bored and lazy, they shouldn't miss of class always.

\* Although they feel bored when they go to ∅ class, they shouldn't miss the class always.

53) Rangsit University is *an* close university that have a class in every subject.

\* Rangsit University is a regular university that has courses in every field. (Perhaps this student considers Rangsit University as a close university to differentiate it from the open universities that offer courses not in regular class schedule.)

49) *Every students* have different reasons for miss the class.

\* *Every student* has different reasons for missing the class.

Just like the errors in determiners, errors in quantifiers are also related to the noun following them (54). In addition, there is the addition of *of* between a quantifier and a noun or noun phrase (55) or if they do, the omission of a determiner like *the* after *of*.

54) They spend *many moneys* to repair themselves.

\* They spend a *lot of money* to prepare themselves (for the university entrance examination).

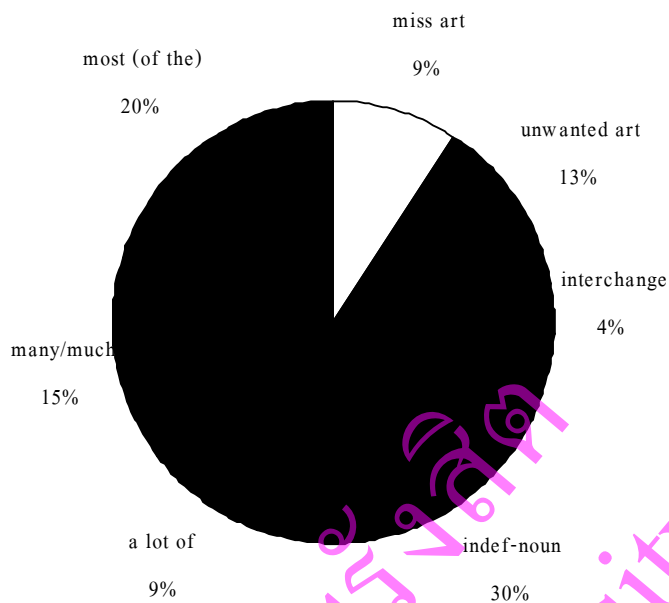


Fig. 5. Percent distribution of determiners and quantifiers' errors.

55) *Most of english language department think if you can not speak english well, you should choose another faculty to study.*

\* a) *Most of the English Language Department teachers think that if the students cannot speak English well, they should study in another faculty.*

\* b) *Most English Language Department teachers think that if the students cannot speak English well, they should study in another faculty.*

#### 4.4.7 Fragment

Most of the errors in fragment are treating dependent clauses as independent clauses (56, 57). The dependent clauses are usually followed by a period.

56) *Because they like his project.*

\* *Because they like his project, they like him to be the prime minister.*

57) *Although the student will have a lot of point.*

\* *Although the students have good scores in the exam, they still have a lot of things to learn.*



#### 4.4.8 Relative Clause

Most of the errors in relative clause are the missing relative pronouns (58, 59) and subject in the object subordination (20, 60).

58) There are many subjects ↑ has been opened for them.

\* There are many subjects *that* have been opened for them.

59) There are many students in Rangsit University ↑ always miss 80% of the class.

\* There are many Rangsit University students *who* miss 80% of the class.

60) Opponents of this position argument ↑ is too dangerous for their lives.

\* Opponents of this position argue *that it* is too dangerous for their lives.

20) Opponents of this position argue that ↑ should allow the students who miss 80% of the class to take the final examination.

\* Opponents of this position argue that *students* who miss 80% of the class should be allowed to take the final examination.

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## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Errors are beneficial to teachers and students. They serve as guides for teachers in preparing their teaching materials as well as the topics that should be emphasized. They inform the students their weaknesses in the language; hence providing them the topics they have to give more attention to or pinpointing them the rules they have misunderstood. For both teachers and students, they provide information about the learning progress.

Errors are committed due to the creation and revision of rules during the learning process. At the beginning, errors are mostly due to L1 interference. This is understandable because the learners have to depend on the language they already know. However, as the learners progress L1 interference becomes less and the errors are usually parts of their language development. This process is followed by the second language learners and is referred to as interlanguage continuum.

Students in this study also follow the interlanguage continuum. Thus, having errors in their writing is inevitable. The errors from their final writing examination are the data used in this study. Since there was nobody who helped them in their writing and there was no dictionary to look at, the errors collected are the reflection of their real writing performance. In addition, it is assumed that they really tried their best since their grades depended on how they wrote well in this examination.

Errors in this study are both intralingual and interlingual. Interlingual errors are from L1 interference that may be due to some differences in structures between English and Thai or to some elements that have no corresponding equivalent in both languages. Sattayatham and Honsa (2007) mentioned these as possible sources of errors in the writings of medical students at Mahidol University, a public university in Thailand. These differences or absence of equivalents seem to interfere in the English learning of the students in this study.

There are three topics that are discussed in this study. The first is the possible causes of interlingual errors and the second is those of intralingual errors. The third deals with the possible ways of lessening if not totally eliminating these errors.

## 5.1 POSSIBLE L1 INTERFERENCE

### 5.1.1 Differences in Structure

Some of the differences between Thai and English structures are in the order of adjectives, the SVC (subject verb complement) pattern, the use of relative clauses and the composition of subjects. In Thai structure, adjectives are positioned after the items they modify; whereas in English, they are positioned before the items (61, 62).

61) Thai: *rot* (car) *deng* (red)

Literal translation: car red

Correct translation: red car

62) Thai: *rongrian* (school) *yai* (big)

Literal translation: school big

Correct translation: big school

One example that shows this transfer error is illustrated in (42) and is shown again below.

42) Student's statement: But each student has different **English basic**.

Expression used: English basic

Correct expression: basic English

Just like English, Thai can be written following the SVC pattern as in (63). However, since adjectives are considered as verbs when they are placed after verb *be* in Thai structure, verb *be* is usually omitted ( $\emptyset$  = omission). Thus, (63) can be written as (64) which is different from the English pattern.

63) Thai: *khaw* (he/she) *pen* (be) *dii* (good)

Literal/Correct translation: He/She is good.

64) Thai: *khaw* (he/she)  $\emptyset$  *dii* (good)

Literal translation: He/She  $\emptyset$  good.

Correct translation: He/She is good.

The omission of *be* by the students is illustrated in (30, 31).

30) Student's statement: It is can show that he ↑ very selfish. (↑ = missing item)

Correct statement: It can be showed that he **is** very selfish.

31) Student's statement: They ↑ always absent.

Correct statement: They **are** always absent.

Another omission error observed in this study is the absence of relative pronouns in adjective clauses. It is common in Thai structures to omit the relative pronouns when the meaning is already understood. Thus (65) can be modified to (66) that has relative pronouns omitted.

65) Thai: *khon (person) thii (who) chana (win) ku (is) khon (person) thii (who) Wipa (a girl's name) chob (like)*

Literal translation: Person who win is person who Wipa like.

Correct translation: a) The person who won is the person who Wipa likes.

b) The person who won is the person Wipa likes.

66) Thai: *khon (person) ∅ chana (win) ku (is) khon (person) ∅ Wipa (a girl's name) chob (like)*

Literal translation: Person ∅ win is person ∅ Wipa like.

Correct translation: a) The person who won is the person who Wipa likes.

b) The person who won is the person Wipa likes.

The error of this kind is found in (58) which again is shown below.

58) Student's statement: There are many subjects ↑ has been opened for them.

Correct statement: There are many subjects that/which have been opened for them.

Some of the errors are not only caused by the differences between the Thai and English written structures, but some students also used the Thai spoken structure. The use of a noun

followed by its pronoun as subject is acceptable in spoken Thai for emphasis. However, this is not possible in written English. This is reflected in (23).

23) Student's statement: In addition, **getting below C it's** not show the real ability of anyone when they work or do something.

Correct statement: a) In addition, **getting below C**  $\emptyset$  does not show the real ability of someone . . .

b) In addition,  $\emptyset$  **it** does not show the real ability of someone . . .

### 5.1.2 The Absence of Inflection

In the English structure, inflection is important in subject-verb agreement, tense, and meaning. For example, the addition of "es" or "s" to the verbs shows that the subject is in the third person and singular. It also indicates present tense. However, inflection is absent in Thai structure as illustrated in (67), (68), (69), and (70). In (67) and (68), both the subjects "you" (*khun*) and "he/she" (*khaw*) have the same form of the verb "go" (*pay*) and in (69) and (70), both the subjects "I" (*chan*) and "we" (*raw*) have the same form of verb *be* (*pen*). In contrast with English, the subject "you" takes "go" while "he/she" takes "goes," and "I" takes "am" and "we" takes "are."

67) Thai: *khun* (you) *pay* (go)

Literal/Correct translation: You **go**.

68) Thai: *khaw* (he/she) *pay*

Literal translation: He/She **go**.

Correct translation: He/She **goes**.

69) Thai: *chan* (I) *pen* (be) *khru* (teacher)

Literal translation: I **be** teacher.

Correct translation: I **am** a teacher.

70) Thai: *raw* (we) *pen* (be) *khru* (teacher)

Literal translation: We **be** teacher.

Correct translation: We **are** teachers.

The absence of inflections in Thai structures may be the reason for the errors in subject-verb agreement found in (25).

25) Student's statement: Thailand **need** to develop to be an business country . . .

Correct statement: Thailand **needs** to develop to be an industrialized country . . .

The absence of inflection in Thai language can also bring confusion to students' learning English tense and aspect. Thai structures use the same verb in all the tenses because their time situation is indicated by adding Thai adverbs of time such as *tukwan* (everyday), *muawan* (yesterday) or *prungnii* (tomorrow) at the beginning or at the end of the sentence (underlined once). As illustrated in (71), (72), and (73), the verb *pay* (go) (underlined twice) is used regardless of the subject, tense and aspect. However, in English, *go* can be *go*, *went*, *will go*, *is going*, etc.

71) Thai: *chan* (I) *pay* (go) *rongrian* (school) *tukwan* (everyday)

Literal translation: I go school everyday.

Correct translation: I go to school everyday.

72) Thai: *chan* (I) *pay* (go) *rongrian* (school) *muawan* (yesterday)

Literal translation: I go school yesterday.

Correct translation: I went to school yesterday.

73) Thai: *chan* (I) *pay* (go) *rongrian* (school) *prungnii* (tomorrow)

Literal translation: I go school tomorrow.

Correct translation: a) I'll go to school tomorrow.

b) I'm going to school tomorrow.

In addition to the use of Thai adverbs, some words are used to indicate time i.e. *ja* (for future and perfect tense) (74), *day* (for past) (75), *kamlang* (for continuous aspect) (76), and *leew* (for perfect aspect) (77). With the examples below, all the verbs are *pay* regardless of aspect and time. This is different in English in which the tense and aspect are indicated by adding -s, -d, -ed, -ing to the verbs, using irregular forms, or with the added auxiliaries "be" and "have".

74) Thai: *raw* (we) *ja* (will) *pay* (go) *rongrian* (school)

Literal translation: We will go school.

Correct translation: We will go to school.

75) Thai: *raw* (we) *dai* *pay* (go) *rongrian* (school)

Literal translation: We ? go school. (? – no corresponding word)

Correct translation: We went to school.

76) Thai: *raw* (we) *kamlang* *pay* (go) *rongrian* (school)

Literal translation: We ? go school.

Correct translation: We are going to school.

77) Thai: *raw* (we) *pay* (go) *rongrian* (school) *maa* *leew*

Literal translation: We go school ?.

Correct translation: We have been to school.

One student's error that might be due to this is the use of the present tense *give* instead of the past tense *gave* in (38).

38) Student's statement: For example, He **give** the money each village to find job and study about thing that interesting.

Correct statement: For example, he **gave** some money to each village to create jobs and for the villagers to use it to study something that interests them.

### 5.1.3 The Absence of English Equivalent

Students' errors in this study may also be due to the absence of English equivalents in Thai structures. For example, Thai has no articles, no distinction among pronouns, and no differences in the use of *no* and *not*. The absence of articles is reflected in (51) wherein the article "a" is missing. This type of error was also found in the study of Sattayatham and Honsa (2007).

51) Student's statement: Some job want ↑ person who can speak English very well.

Correct statement: Some jobs want **a** person who can speak English very well.

The pronouns in Thai language are not classified according to case. For example, “I” and “me” correspond to *chan* (78) and “they” and “their” to *phuakkhaw*. Likewise, *khaw* is used for “he/she” (68) and “him/her” (79). In addition, the Thai possessive determiners *my*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *their*, etc. also take pronouns similar to their corresponding subjective, genitive and objective cases.

78) Thai: **chan** (I/We/Me/Us/Mine/Ours/My/Our) *ja* (will) *maa* (come) *thaa* (if) *khun* (you) *thongkaan* (want) **chan** (I/We/Me/Us/Mine/Ours/My/Our).

Literal translation: **I/We/Me/Us/Mine/Ours/My/Our** will come if you/yours/your want **I/We/Me/Us/Mine/Ours/My/Our**.

Correct translation: **I** will come if you want **me** to.

68) Thai: **khaw** (he/she/his/her/etc.) *pay* (go).

Literal translation: He/She **go**.

Correct translation: **He/She** goes.

79) Thai: *chan* (I/We/Us/etc.) *rak* (love) **khaw** (he/she/his/etc.).

Literal translation: I/We/Me/Us/Mine/Ours/My/Our love **he/she/his/hers/her/it/its/they/their/theirs**.

Correct translation: I love **him/her**.

This similarity of usage might be the cause of the confusion in (27).

27) Student's statement: There are many problems in South but Thaksin can't destroy **they** to disappear.

Correct statement: There are many problems in the South, but Thaksin can't solve **them**.

The Thai negative sentences use the word *mai* to correspond to both “no” or “not” as illustrated in (80), (81), and (82) and is added before the verb or in some cases, after it.



80) Thai: *chan* (I/etc.) *mai* (no/not) *pay* (go) *rongrian* (school)

Literal translation: I/etc. **no/not** go school.

Correct translation: I will/do/did **not** go to school.

81) Thai: *khaw* (He/etc.) *mai* (no/not) *dii* (good)

Literal translation: He/etc. **no/not** good.

Correct translation: He/She is **not** good.

82) Thai: *chan* (I/etc.) *mai* (no/not) *mii* (have) *ngern* (money)

Literal translation: I/etc. **no/not** have money.

Correct translation: a) I do/did **not** have money.

b) I have **no** money.

Since there is no distinction between "no" and "not," some students are confused with their use as in (5) which is again given below.

5) Student's statement: It is *simple* for the expressway that has **not** traffic.

Correct statements: a) It is *typical* for the expressway **not** to have traffic jam.

b) It is *typical* for the expressway to have **no** traffic jam.

In addition, there is no equivalent for "do," "does" and "did." So, this might be the reason for the absence of these items in some of the students' negative construction as illustrated in (32).

32) Student's statement: The student who ↑ not attend to study ↑ not come to . . .

Correct statement: The student who **does** not like to study **does** not come to . . .

## 5.2 POSSIBLE INTRALINGUAL ERRORS

The intralingual errors found in this study are due to the students' creating their own rules when they fail to comprehend fully the rules of the target language. Richard calls this false concepts hypothesis and it includes overgeneralization, omission, mis-ordering and

misinformation. One example of overgeneralization is illustrated in (39), wherein the student used “tached” instead of “taught” for the past tense of “teach”.

39) Moreover the lesson in the book and in final examination can't get the question from out of in the book but it's in the classroom that he/she **tached**.

The addition of “-ed” to the base form of the verb to form the past simple has been overgeneralized. The student failed to recognize or forgot that there are irregular verbs and as such do not follow the regular addition of “-d” or “-ed” to form the past tense. Another example is the addition of “-self” to “them” to form “themsself” (16) instead of “themselves”.

16) So, When they have a knowledge, they can find job by **themsself**.

Possibly, the students are familiar with the addition of “self” to “her” and “him” to form “herself” and “himself”.

Errors in omission and mis-ordering had been discussed in L1 interference. These errors, although discussed in L1 interference, cannot be ruled out to be part of the learners' developmental stage. It was also observed that some errors exist and sometimes not indicating possible backsliding which is common to learners who are still mastering the rules of the target language.

The three other areas that show the students have not fully comprehended the rules of the target language are in the use of determiner, the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns, and the use of prepositions in combination with adjectives and verbs. For example in (49), the determiner “every” is followed by a plural count noun instead of a singular count noun and in (51) “some” is followed by a singular count noun instead of a plural count noun.

49) Every **students** have different reasons for miss the class.

51) Some **job** ↑ want ↑ person who can speak English very well.

Regarding countable and uncountable nouns, sometimes “s” is added to uncountable nouns as illustrated in (54).

54) They spend many **moneys** to repair themselves.

With prepositions, the students are not familiar with their use in combination with certain nouns, verbs and adjectives. For example, a couple of students do not add “to” after “respect” (44) and “necessary” (45).

44) If they often absent it means they have no responsibility and no respect ↑ their teachers too.

45) A lot of people thing, it is not necessary ↑ come to class or not but you can take the exam.

### 5.3 DIFFICULTY OF MORPHOSYNTAX

Different languages have their own rules to be followed. Some are easy for the students to remember and apply but some are not. As discussed above, the difficulty can be caused by L1 interference or the inability to comprehend the rules of the target language. Difficult structures are those that have been exposed to the learners several times but cannot be learned.

According to DeKeyser (2005), there are at least three factors that make learning L2 grammar difficult. He noted the complexity of form, complexity of meaning, and complexity of the form-meaning relationship. These three factors seem to play the role in the learning of the students in this study. The complexity of form is related to the selection of right morphemes and allomorphs and their position to express these meanings. This is especially difficult to Thai learners because the Thai morphemes and allomorphs do not function similarly to those of English as discussed in the possible L1 interference. With regard to meaning, the complexity lies in its abstractness that is very hard to infer from the input. The problems in form-meaning are “due to at least three factors: redundancy, optionality, or opacity” (DeKeyser 2005, 8). Based on the results of this study, opacity is the common cause of difficulty for these students. For example, there are words that have the same sound but different meaning like “there,” “their,” and “they’re.” Some

of the errors that are related to these are (8, 45) and (11) wherein "thing" replaces "think" and "safe" replaces "save" respectively.

8) Some people **thing** that Thaksin should resign as Prime Minister.

45) A lot of people **thing**, it is not necessary ↑ come to class or not but you can take the exam.

11) In addition, it can **safe** money.

There is also the difficulty of choosing the right word from the list of synonymous words as in (4) where "repair" is used instead of "treat" and in (25) "business" instead of "industrialized."

4) For example, he *made* 30 baht for **repair** all sickness.

25) Thailand need to develop to be an **business** country . . .

In addition, the presence of irregularities in nouns, verbs, and adjectives also poses problems. For example, the formation of plural "child" is not "childs" but "children," the past tense of "leave" is not "leaved" but "left," and the comparative for "good" is not "gooder" but "better." These inconsistencies as well as some exceptions to the rules make the English language hard for the second language learners to understand and master. In addition to these three factors, there is still the psycholinguistic difficulty of acquisition which is 'the difficulty of grasping the form-meaning relationship while processing a sentence in the L2' (DeKeyser 2005, 3).

#### 5.4 PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR RSU

Studying foundation courses in RSU does not totally equip students for upper level writing and reading courses. Thus, after English Foundation III, which is the last foundation course prior to major courses, English major students have to study Structure 1. This course is supposed to provide students strong background in their English structure. It is even taught by Thai teachers so that teaching can be done in Thai with the hope that the explanation in Thai can help them understand the lesson better. Structure 1 is the prerequisite course for the first three starting major subjects: Reading, Writing 1 and Applied Structure. Having passed all of these

lower level major courses, the students are expected to be able to write simple, compound and complex sentences with few errors in *Writing 2* compositions. However, this is not the case as found in this study. There are many errors in the students' writing even though most of their sentences are only simple and compound ones. Sometimes too, there are more than two errors in one sentence as can be observed from the examples used in this study. It seems that they have not learned much or cannot apply what they learned in their previous English subjects. Below are some suggestions that might help the students in improving their English.

a) Give tutorial sessions to remedy the missed stages in the learners' development

Pienemann and associates in Lightbown and Spada (1993) noted that not all the things taught can be acquired. Explicit knowledge of grammatical rules and perhaps vocabulary can be taught any time but variational features which Ellis (1994) termed implicit knowledge, depend on the learners' stage of development. Implicit knowledge is acquired sequentially as explained in the Multidimensional Model of Meisel *et al.* in Ellis (1994). This model predicts that instruction can only promote language acquisition if the interlanguage is close to the point when the structure to be taught is acquired in the natural setting (so that sufficient processing prerequisites are developed). This can possibly explain the resistance of some students to the teaching process. As Krashen (1987) in Schackne (2002) noted, students can only be taught 'what is learnable, portable (that which can be carried around in the students' heads) and has not been acquired.'

The refusal of some students' mind to understand some grammatical structures might be due to the next stage being taught when they had not fully understood the previous stage during their early years of schooling. Perhaps their teachers did not recognize that they were not ready for the next stage and proceeded to the next lesson. This is expected since it is impossible for the teachers to favor a certain group of students who cannot catch up with the lesson because the teachers have to follow the teaching schedule for the whole term. The premature movement to the next stage makes these students unresponsive to other following stages. So, no matter what the teacher taught, no matter how long they were exposed, lessons could not be absorbed because they skipped one stage in their development. It is mentioned in Lightbown and Spada (1993, 94) that learners have their own internal schedule and 'that no amount of instruction can change their 'natural' developmental course'. As Ellis (1994) mentioned, this is particularly true in grammar

instruction which is the emphasis in most Thai elementary and secondary schools as well as in the two structure courses mentioned here.

To help students who possibly had skipped certain parts of their developmental stage, teachers should have tutorial sessions for weak students to give them more exercises to work on. Although some findings revealed that practice does not help the students much in their achievement, it can raise their consciousness. The success of implementing this course lies not only with the teacher but also with the students. Students should be willing to exert extra effort too so that the teachers' help will not be futile.

b) Provide formal instruction

According to Ellis (1994, 657), 'there is general recognition that much of the language learning that takes place in the classroom takes place 'naturally', as a result of learners processing input to which they are exposed'. In this case, there is no need for formal instruction. White et al (1991) even noted that L2 learners can achieve considerable success in context when they are exposed to meaningful, naturalistic input. However, the students in this study have no or limited chance to receive this kind of input. They rarely interact with the native speakers of the target language except for their native speaker teachers. Because of this, they need formal instruction that can supply them the needed input for their development.

As Davies (1989) noted, learning a foreign language in most cases requires teaching because of the inadequacy of the input. So, instruction helps the learners in deciding whether they have to accept or reject the rules they have created. Besides, they always have uncertainties which can lead to simplification and overgeneralization. It is only through formal instruction that these errors can be pinpointed. Although the effect of instruction cannot be seen at once as observed in backsliding, again, it can raise learners' consciousness. In addition, it can serve as a guide in clearing doubts on the learners' mind and mapping out strategies that can be useful to them. When the doubt is clear, the learners can integrate and coordinate the old and new rules, accelerating their natural process of development. Instruction in RSU does not only facilitate learning but also give them the chance to use the language they are studying. Continuous application of the things taught can help the learners remember them.

c) Adjust the course syllabus to emphasize the language items that have not been mastered

In some cases, tutorials might not work for some students. Since it is not part of the curriculum, these students, even they are weak, will not attend the session because there is no incentive for them to go to class. Their learning has to be tied to scores or grades because some of the weak students are not so motivated to learn English even though they are English majors. Thus, the hard-to-learn structures for many should be part of the course syllabus and should be emphasized in the classroom. Since the students in this study are homogenous; that is, they are all Thai English major students and in their third and fourth year in the university, it is easy to customize the course syllabus that can give them practice in the errors that appear most often in this study. The fact that the majority of the students have errors in such items showed that they have not mastered or acquired them fully. The inclusion of and the emphasis given to these problematic items in the syllabus can help the students pay close attention to them especially that they are part of the examination they have to take.

Most errors of the students are in syntax so their learning of grammar needs reinforcement in the syllabus. However, according to Carter (1996) in Mei Lin Ho (2003), grammar should not be taught in isolation but it should be taught as part of a bigger chunk such as in paragraph writing or in the 'creation of contextual meanings' rather than taking it sentence by sentence. With this method, students can see clearly the importance of grammar especially in reading and writing.

In preparing this syllabus, the sequence of the lessons should depend on the students' needs. The "natural order of acquisition" of the group of learners should be taken into consideration rather than the sequencing based on grammatical simplicity which most books do. As Schackne (2002) noted, "grammatical simplicity" may vary from country to country.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There are so many factors that affect the learning of a second language. Some factors are helpful but some are not. The transfer of skills from L1 to L2 is one good factor but the interference of L1 to learning L2 is not. In this study, the errors from the final examination of *Writing 2* English major students during the academic year 2005-2006 are compiled and classified. There are 406 errors, 13% of which belongs to mechanic, 6% to semantics, 5% to morphology and 76% to syntax. Most of the errors in syntax are in verb (28%), subject (26%) and determiner (21%). These errors are both interlingual and intralingual. The interlingual errors are possibly due to some differences between the Thai and English structures, and the absence of equivalents. These are reflected in some errors found in the writing of the students in this study. Other errors are intralingual and they include overgeneralization, omission, misordering and misinformation.

The findings in this study can be helpful in looking for the right ways to reduce if not completely eliminate these errors. There are some suggestions in this paper which may be useful in the preparation of syllabus and teaching L2 learners.

This study is only based from a small group of learners. It might be worthwhile to undertake similar studies using students' writing from other universities in Thailand. This can provide further information on the errors made by Thai students, which can help teachers in preparing the lessons and exercises for Thai learners.



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มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต  
Rangsit University

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

### 1. TITLE

**An Analysis of Some Errors Committed by RSU (Rangsit University) English Major Students in *Writing 2* Class**

**Researcher:** Rosario Nuchnoi (โรซารีโอ นุชน้อย)

### 2. ABSTRACT

The writing errors in the final examination compositions of 77 *Writing 2* English major students (2005-2006) are compiled and classified. It is found that they are the combination of interlingual and intralingual errors. There are 406 errors, 13% of which belongs to mechanic, 6% to semantics, 5% to morphology and 76% to syntax. Most of the errors in syntax are in verb (28%), subject (26%) and determiner (21%) categories. Three suggestions to alleviate these errors are given.

#### บทคัดย่อ

ความผิดพลาดในการเขียนความเรียงที่พบในการสอบปลายภาควิชา Writing 2 สำหรับนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต จำนวน 77 คน สามารถแบ่งออกได้เป็น 2 กลุ่ม คือ interlingual และ intralingual error ในขณะเดียวกัน พบว่าความผิดพลาดจำนวน 406 สามารถแบ่งออกเป็น ความผิดพลาดทาง *mechanic* 13%, ความผิดพลาดทาง *semantics* 6%, *morphology* 5% และ *syntax* 76% ซึ่งความผิดพลาดทาง *syntax* ส่วนใหญ่มาจาก *verb* (28%), *subject* (26%) และ *determiner* (21%) ความผิดพลาดเหล่านี้สามารถบรรเทาด้วย 3 คำแนะนำในบทความ

### 3. KEYWORDS

Errors, Interlingual, Intralingual, L1 interference, Interlanguage continuum

### 4. INTRODUCTION

In learning a language, making errors is a natural phenomenon. Errors are deviation from the target-language norm that is usually defined as the standard written dialect (Ellis 1994) in a classroom environment. Appropriate grammar knowledge is necessary to produce a well-written

paper, a text in which ideas are expressed effectively and clearly. Lee (2004) notes that grammatical maturity in addition to appropriate rhetorical styles and appropriate use of vocabulary is one of the features of well-written texts.

There are a lot of studies that show the importance of studying learners' errors in grammar improvement. In the 1940s, 50s and 60s, errors were analyzed using contrastive analysis (CA). CA is a comparative analysis between two languages (Schackne 2002) and is based on the behaviorist position that language learning is simply a matter of imitation and habit formation. So, in CA, the errors learners make are due to the transfer of the native language (L1) "habits" that are different from the target language. This is called L1 interference. However in the 1970s, there was the introduction of error analysis (EA) through Corder's work. This challenged CA on the basis that not all learners' errors were due to L1 interference as hypothesized in CA. Since EA focuses on the learners' language rather than the interference of L1, it can explain the errors that are not L1 related. In EA errors are treated not only from L1 transfer but also from developmental errors which occur during the learning process while the learners are trying to familiarize themselves with the rules of the target language. Most researchers classify errors into two groups: the interlingual or intralingual. Interlingual errors are due to L1 interference and intralingual errors are due to incomplete comprehension of the rules of the target language.

Just like other learners of English, Rangsit University (RSU) English major students also make errors when they use English. These errors are easily recognizable when they write because they affect their writing performance. The extent of these errors depends on their English proficiency.

The objectives of this study are to present and classify the errors made by English major students in *Writing 2* final examination compositions for the academic year 2005-2006. Doing these can pinpoint the parts of the language that the students have not mastered yet nor mastered fully. Consequently, it is hoped that the results of this study will be useful in developing a course syllabus and materials that can help minimize these errors. In addition, this paper also discusses the possible sources of errors and their teaching implications.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

**Participants:** The subjects in this study were seventy-seven RSU English major students who were mostly in their third year. They had already studied three English foundation courses and two structure courses (*English Structure* and *Applied Structure*). These students enrolled in *Writing 2* in the first and second semester of the academic year 2005-2006.

**Instrumentation:** The materials used in this study were the students' argumentative compositions written in the final examination. The topics for the first semester 2005-2006 were 1) Motorcyclists should/should not be allowed to use the expressways, 2) Rangsit University should/should not allow the students who miss 80% of the class to take the final examination, and 3) The English Language Department should/should not let English major students who cannot speak English well to graduate. The topics for the second semester were 1) Thaksin should/should not resign as Prime Minister, 2) Prostitution should/should not be legalized, and 3) The English Language Department should/should not allow English major students who get below C in foundation English courses to enroll in the upper level courses.

**Data Collection and Statistical Method:** Data were collected from the first and second semester of the academic year 2005-2006's *Writing 2* final examination. Errors in the compositions were noted down and classified into syntax, morphology, semantics/lexis, and mechanics. They were further categorized into smaller groups. Then, the number of errors in each group was counted and converted to percent.

The same error was counted once per student. That is, when a student had an error in subject-verb agreement in paragraph 1 and again in paragraph 3, this error was counted only one time. Thus, all error categories cannot have more than 77 counts since there were only 77 students in the study.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, four hundred and six errors were identified and they were classified into syntax, morphological, semantic, and mechanical errors. Majority of the errors made was on syntax. They are both intralingual and interlingual errors.

## Interlingual Errors

The interlingual errors can be due to the differences between Thai and English structures. One difference between Thai and English structures is the order of adjectives. In Thai structure, adjectives are positioned after the items they modify; whereas in English, they are positioned before the items. Another difference is the SVC (subject verb complement) pattern. Although Thai can be written following the English SVC pattern, its verb *be* is usually omitted since adjectives can be considered as verbs when they are placed after verb *be*. Another omission error observed in this study is the absence of relative pronouns in adjective clauses. It is common in Thai structures to omit the relative pronouns when the meaning is already understood.

Some of the errors are not only caused by the differences between the Thai and English written structures, but some students also used the Thai spoken structure. The use of a noun followed by its pronoun as subject is acceptable in spoken Thai for emphasis. However, this is not possible in English.

Another possible cause of interlingual error is in inflection. Inflection which is important in subject-verb agreement, tense, and meaning in English structure is absent in Thai structure. In Thai, the same form of the verb is used for different subjects and different time. For example, the subjects “he”, “you”, “we”, “she”, “they”, etc. can all be followed by the verb “go”. In addition, the verb “go” can represent *go*, *goes*, *went*, *is/are going*, *will go*, etc. Thai structures use the same verb in all the tenses because their time situation is indicated by adding Thai adverbs of time such as *tukwan* (everyday), *muawan* (yesterday) or *prungnii* (tomorrow) at the beginning or at the end of the sentence (underlined once) or some words that indicate time i.e. *ja* (for future and perfect tense), *day* (for past), *kamlang* (for continuous aspect), and *leew* (for perfect aspect).

Students’ interlingual errors may also be due to the absence of English equivalents in Thai structures. For example, Thai has no articles, no distinction among pronouns, and no differences in the use of *no* and *not*. The pronouns in Thai language are not classified according to case. For example, “I” and “me” correspond to *chan* and “they” and “their” to *phuakkhaw*. Likewise, *khaw* is used for “he/she” and “him/her”. In addition, the Thai possessive determiners *my*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *their*, etc. also take pronouns similar to their corresponding subjective, genitive and objective cases. The Thai negative sentences use the word *mai* to correspond to both “no” or “not” which is added before the verb or in some cases, after it. Some students’ sentences show

confusion on this. In addition, there is no equivalent for "do" so some students' negative constructions do not have it.

### **Intralingual Errors**

Intralingual errors are due to the students' creating their own rules when they fail to comprehend fully the rules of the target language. Richard called this false concepts hypothesis and it includes overgeneralization, omission, mis-ordering and misinformation. One example of overgeneralization found in this study is the use of "tached" instead of "taught" for the past tense of "teach". The addition of "-ed" to the base form of the verb to form the past simple has been over generalized. The student failed to recognize or forgot that there are irregular verbs and as such do not follow the regular addition of "-d" or "-ed" to form the past tense. Another example is the addition of "-self" to "them" to form "themself" (16) instead of "themselves". Possibly, the students are familiar with the addition of "self" to "her" and "him" to form "herself" and "himself."

Errors in omission and mis-ordering have been discussed in L1 interference. These errors, although discussed in L1 interference, cannot be ruled out to be part of the learners' developmental stage. It was also observed that sometimes some errors exist and sometimes not indicating possible backsliding which is common to learners who are still mastering the rules of the target language.

The three other areas that show the students have not fully comprehended the rules of the target language are in the use of determiner, the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns, and the use of prepositions in combination with nouns, adjectives and verbs. For example, the determiner "every" is followed by a plural count noun instead of a singular count noun and "some" is followed by a singular count noun instead of a plural count noun. Regarding countable and uncountable nouns, sometimes "s" is added to uncountable nouns like "moneys". With prepositions, a couple of students do not add "to" after "respect" (44) and "necessary" (45).

### **Difficulty of Morphosyntax**

According to DeKeyser (2005), there are at least three factors that make learning L2 grammar difficult. He noted the complexity of form, complexity of meaning, and complexity of

the form-meaning relationship. These three factors seem to play the role in the learning of the students in this study. The complexity of form is related to the selection of right morphemes and allomorphs and their position to express these meanings. This is especially difficult to Thai learners because the Thai morphemes and allomorphs do not function similarly to those of English as discussed in the possible L1 interferences. With regard to meaning, the complexity lies in its abstractness that is very hard to infer from the input.

The problems in form-meaning are “due to at least three factors: redundancy, optionality, or opacity” (DeKeyser 2005, 8). Based on the results of this study, opacity is the common cause of difficulty for these students. For example, there are words that have the same sound but different meaning like “there,” “their,” and “they’re.” Some of the errors that are related to these are the use of “thing” instead of “think” and “safe” instead of “save”. There is also the difficulty of choosing the right word from the list of synonymous words. This brings to the students using “repair” instead of “treat” and “business” instead of “industrialized.” The presence of irregularities in nouns, verbs, and adjectives as well as some exceptions to the rules also make the English language hard for the second language learners to understand and master. In addition to these three factors, there is still the psycholinguistic difficulty of acquisition which is ‘the difficulty of grasping the form-meaning relationship while processing a sentence in the L2’ (DeKeyser 2005, 3).

### **Pedagogic Implication for RSU**

Studying foundation courses in RSU does not totally equip students for upper level writing and reading courses. Thus, after English Foundation III, which is the last foundation course prior to major courses, English major students have to study Structure 1. This course is supposed to provide students strong background in their English structure. It is even taught by Thai teachers so that teaching can be done in Thai with the hope that the explanation in Thai can help them understand the lesson better. Structure 1 is the prerequisite course for the first three starting major subjects: Reading, Writing 1 and Applied Structure. Having passed all of these lower level major courses, the students are expected to be able to write simple, compound and complex sentences with few errors in *Writing 2* compositions. However, this is not the truth as found in this study. There are many errors in their writing even though most of their sentences are



only simple and compound ones. Sometimes too, there are more than two errors in one sentence as can be observed from the examples used in this study. It seems that they have not learned much or cannot apply what they learned in their previous English subjects. There are three suggestions that might help the students in improving their English:

- 1) Give tutorial sessions to remedy the missed stages in the learners' development
- 2) Provide formal instruction
- 3) Adjust the course syllabus to emphasize the language items that have not been mastered

## **7. RECOMMENDATION**

This study is limited since they are only based from this group of learners. It might be worthwhile to undertake similar studies using students' writing from other universities in Thailand. This can provide further information on the errors made by Thai students, which can help teachers in preparing the lessons and exercises for Thai learners.

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