

Common Errors in English Writing and Suggested Solutions of Thai University Students

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บทความนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อทบทวนการศึกษการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดในงานเขียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในประเทศไทยในทศวรรษที่ผ่านมา ซึ่งจากการรวบรวมข้อมูลและทบทวนงานวิจัยเกี่ยวกับการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดในงานเขียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในประเทศไทยพบว่า มีข้อผิดพลาด 3 ด้านในงานเขียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษา ได้แก่ ด้านไวยากรณ์และคำศัพท์ ด้านการแทรกแซงจากภาษาแม่ และด้านโครงสร้างของงานเขียน และในบทความนี้ ยังจะได้กล่าวถึงอุปสรรคในการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ ความสำคัญของการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด การศึกษาเกี่ยวกับการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดในงานเขียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในประเทศไทย รวมถึงคำแนะนำเกี่ยวกับแนวทางการสอนการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในประเทศไทยอีกด้วย

คำสำคัญ: การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด งานเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ นักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาของไทย

Abstract

This paper aims to review the studies of errors analysis in English writing of Thai university students during the past decade. After studying and reviewing the studies of errors analysis in English writing of Thai university

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students during the past decade, it was revealed that the errors of grammar and lexis, first language interference and writing organization are three main errors detected from Thai university students' writing. The paper will also review the difficulty in English writing, the significance of error analysis and the error analysis in English writing studied in Thailand. The implications for English writing teaching for Thai university students are also discussed.

Keywords: Errors analysis, English writing, Thai university students

Introduction

Writing is a complex process requiring language skills to express ideas. Knowledge of grammar structures, idioms, vocabulary, including the effort to express ideas and the constant use of eyes, hands, and brain are required when composing writing (Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong, 2008). In addition, Canale and Swain (1980) cited in Hyland (2003) mentioned that in order to produce effective writing tasks, competence in various areas is required, namely grammatical competence: the competence in grammar, lexis and language system knowledge; discourse competence: the competence in genre and rhetorical pattern; sociolinguistic competence: the competence in using appropriate language in different contexts and strategic competence: the competence in using various communicative strategies. Myles (2002) and Hyland (2003) also agreed that practice is required to improve the skills of writing. However, not only practice can allow the writers to produce effective writing compositions, but experiences and the communicative approaches used in writing are also essential. Therefore, producing English writing is difficult, especially for EFL learners since the learners are required to have competence in the target language

and they must be able to communicate their thoughts towards appropriate language use and communicative strategies (Kenworthy, 2004; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Richards & Renandya (2002) also claimed that as content, organization, and language are needed when composing writing, writing has been considered the most problematic difficulty for EFL learners because of their limited language proficiency or limited linguistic knowledge (Weigle, 2002).

However, in order to write an effective piece of English writing, learners should not only learn how to write, but they should also know their weak points, so the analysis of errors is needed. The study of errors takes on great significance in the field of language learning since the error analysis is the study of the process of language acquisition (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 2002). It is also believed to contain information on the strategies which are used by learners to acquire language, so errors can be used to measure the language performance of learners.

As mentioned above that error analysis plays an important role in language learning and learning to write in English is difficult for EFL learners, so this paper reviews the studies focusing on the errors analysis in English writing of Thai university students during the past decade. The paper will also discuss the significance of error analysis, error analysis in English writing studied in Thailand, implications of error analysis studies for English writing teaching and conclusion.

Significance of error analysis

Error analysis is defined by Corder (1967) as a procedure used by teachers and researchers which involves five steps: collection of a sample of learner language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors and error evaluation. Moreover, Dulay, Burt and Krashen, (1982)

and Ellis, (2002) mentioned that error analysis is the study of the language acquisition process, and it is able to indicate the strategies used by learners to acquire language. Therefore, errors can be used to measure the language performance of learners.

Corder (1981) also discussed the advantages of error analysis for learners, teachers and researchers. For learners, it is the learning instruments of language learning. For teachers, it indicates what types of errors learners make, what skills learners have achieved and what remains for them to learn. Also, for researchers, errors provide evidence of how learners acquire the language and what strategies they employ to achieve the learning goal. Certainly, error analysis has become an essential part in EFL teaching and learning.

Regarding errors in language learning, scholars had discussed about the sources and levels of errors as follows.

Richards (1974) defined the sources of errors as follows:

1. Interlingual errors: Mother-tongue interference (L1) is the cause of this error type. Learners use L1 to learn and produce the target language.

2. Intralingual errors: These errors occur during the learning process of the target language. False analogy, misanalysis, incomplete rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking co-occurrence restrictions, hypercorrection and overgeneralization in the target language are the causes of errors.

Dulay & Burt (1974) cited in Sattayatham and Honsa (2007) stated that 90 percent of the errors made in the target language are intralingual errors.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) had also distinguished the sources of errors into 6 sources as follows:

1. The omission of grammatical morphemes: It is the omission of some morphemes in a sentence, but the meaning of the sentence is not affected:

- *I need some flower to decorate the room.*

2. The double marking of a given semantic features: It is the use of repeated words in a sentence when it is not needed.

- *He doesn't wants to buy a house.*

3. The regulation of irregular rule: It is the incorrect use of irregular verbs.

- *He teached me last year.*

4. The use of archiform: It is the selection of one member of a class of forms to represent others in the class.

- *Him goes with me, so I love him.*

5. The alternating use of two or more forms:

- *There are little people but few water.*

6. The misordering of item in constructions requiring the reversal of word order like in indirect question sentences:

- *I just wonder what is she doing.*

Four levels of errors were categorized by Odin (1989) as the followings.

1. Grammar level: It can be divided into 3 aspects as:

1.1 Word order:

- *They were all day working.*

1.2 Relative clause:

- *I cannot express my feelings, what makes me sad.*

1.3 Negation:

- *I no have time.*

2. Phonetic level: Some alphabets in L2 are not normally used in L1, so learners misspell as some alphabets in L1 are used to spell when writing in L2.

3. Lexical level: It can be divided into 2 aspects as follows:

3.1 Morphology: For example, use the word "*began*" in the sentence "*When did the match began?*" while "*begin*" is correct.

3.2 Semantics: it is incorrect use of lexical semantics. For example, "*A rocket drives a car to the city.*"

4. Discourse level:

4.1 Politeness: For example, use the sentence "*Close the door now.*" instead of using the sentence "*Would you please close the door?*"

4.2 Coherence: it is the errors of using incorrect transitional words. For example, "*I don't like singing. In short, I like reading.*"

From the reviews, it was found that intralingual errors which are the errors occur during the learning process of the target language and interlingual errors which are the errors caused by first language interference (L1) have been mostly used as the sources of errors in the studies of the errors produced by Thai university students. Also grammar level and lexical level are the levels of errors mostly detected from the study of Thai university students' writing errors.

It can be concluded that error analysis is essential as it can be the identification of language understanding and the tool for acquiring language of the learners during the process of language learning. It is also be able to identify the problems and weak points of the learners. Therefore, it is beneficial for teachers in selecting teaching approaches and appropriate materials for enhancing the writing ability of learners. It is also valuable information for learners in order to understand their problems. That is the reason this review is needed to be undertaken.

Error analysis in English writing studied in Thailand

Writing skills are certainly required by students, especially university students since it is a tool for acquiring knowledge. Also, an analysis of errors in writing is believed to be one way to improve learners' writing skills as it can be the indicator of the achievement in language learning, and it can be the information for teachers to prepare appropriate teaching approaches to enhance students' writing skills. As a result, an error analysis has been a growing research interest conducted with learners in order to examine the errors committed by the learners. In Thailand, there also were studies focusing on errors in English writing committed by university students during the past decade. Therefore, this paper reviews the studies on errors of Thai university students. The three main errors found from the studies are grammatical-lexical errors, first language interference and writing organization errors.

Grammatical-lexical error analysis

Most studies of the analysis of errors in English writing of the university students in Thailand have focused on grammatical-lexical errors. After reviewing the studies, the participants of the studies can be grouped into 2 groups: first year students and third year students.

There are two studies studying the errors in English writing of first year students. First, Sattayatham & Honsa (2007) investigated the grammatical errors in English paragraph writing of first year medical students at Mahidol University. Forty four percent of the medical students were asked to translate thirty-two sentences and one paragraph from Thai to English. They were also required to write an opinion paragraph towards the reading that they had read. Most errors found from the students' tasks were wrong choice of words, articles, punctuations, spelling, connectors and conditional sentence. Also, Nonkukhetkhong (2013) investigated

grammatical errors made by first year English major students at Udon Thani Rajabhat University. It was found out that the errors made by the students were the errors of verbs, nouns, possessive case, articles, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, sentence structure, ordering, coordination/subordination, capitalization, spelling, punctuations, word selection, word formation, ambiguous communication and miscommunication.

Three studies focus on the errors of third year students' English writing. Likitrattanaporn (2002) studied the grammatical errors of ninety third year students majoring in Accounting and Marketing, Faculty of Social Sciences, Srinakarinwirot University. The results revealed that the percentage of general grammatical, morphological, syntactic, and semantic errors were fifty-seven percent, eleven percent, twenty-eight percent and four percent respectively. Using grammatical omission, wrong grammar, grammatical replacement and grammatical commission were the characteristics of errors found from the study. Likewise, Lush (2002) also examined writing errors of the third year undergraduate Thai students of Thammasart University, and the study revealed that the grammatical errors in essay writing of Thai students mostly presented into ten major categories which were misuse of articles, singular/plural nouns, present/past simple interchanged, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, incorrect tenses, word order, be/have interchanged, have/be interchanged and sentence fragment. Finally, in 2009, Jenwitheesuk studied the syntactic errors in English writing of third year English for International Communication Program students at Rajamangala University of Technology Sirijaya through six pieces of writing. The results of the study revealed that the four highest frequency areas of writing errors found from the students' writing tasks were determiners, subject and verb agreement, tenses and prepositions.

The errors detected from grammatical-lexical error analysis carried out by Thai university students both first year and third year students are mostly syntactic errors, lexical errors and semantic errors. Regarding the syntactic errors, most of the errors are subject-verb agreement, tenses, word order, prepositions, determiners, omission of subjects, verbs, objects and complement including the incorrect use of sentence structure. Also, wrong choice of words, word formation, translation from Thai words into English and use of Thai words are categorized into the lexical errors. Moreover, ambiguous communication and miscommunication are the examples of semantic errors.

First language interference error analysis

First language interference is another source of errors studied by the researchers. From the review, there are three studies related to first language interference as follows.

Bennui (2008) discovered the effects of first language interference in paragraph writing of 28 third year students at Thaksin University. Three levels of L1 interference which are word, sentence and discourse were analyzed. The results revealed as follows.

1. L1 lexical interference was found from the translation of Thai words into English and the use of Thai words.
2. Syntactic interference was presented via the structural borrowing from Thai language such as word order, tense, subject-verb agreement, the infinitive, the verb “have”, prepositions and noun determiners.
3. L1 discourse interference was shown in the form of language style level and cultural knowledge level.

Bootchuy (2008) also explored the ill-formed sentences from the transfer of Thai into the academic English writing. The data were collected from a writing task and final term papers of forty-one first year graduate

students studying in an English Master program at a university in Bangkok.

Three most frequent type of ill-form sentences were:

- 1) omission of subjects, verbs, objects and complement,
- 2) incorrect form of compound and complex sentence structures

and

- 3) word-order errors.

Similarly, Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) investigated first language interference of Thai language in narration, description and comparison/contrast writing of forty second year English major students. The results revealed that the first language interference errors fell into sixteen categories: verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, article, preposition, modal/auxiliary, singular/plural form, fragment, verb form, pronoun, run-on sentence, infinitive/gerund, transition, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, and comparison structure, respectively.

It is obvious that the use of Thai words and the structures of Thai language such as tenses, subject-verb agreement, fragment, run-on sentence, articles and prepositions are used when Thai students compose English writing. In addition, language style and L1 cultural knowledge are also clearly shown as language interference in the students' compositions.

Writing organization error analysis

There is only one study focusing on writing organization errors. Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong (2008) studied writing organization errors in English paragraph writing of first year medical students from four medical schools at Mahidol University. The students were assigned to read 3 medical ethnics passages and chose one to write the opinions about ethnics. The study's results revealed top four errors of the format of paragraph writing which were 1) no transitional words, 2) lack of organization, 3) no introduction and 4) no conclusion. The students did not write an

introduction and a conclusion and they also did not use transitional words to link their ideas among the sentences.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the findings from the error analysis in English writing studied in Thailand according to three main error points: grammatical-lexical errors, first language interference and writing organization errors conform to the studies of English writing errors in other EFL learners. For example, Orozco (2002) had found that grammar, spelling, lexical and punctuations are the errors found in EFL learners' writing. The errors of verbs, punctuations, articles, singular/plural nouns, present/past simple interchanged, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, incorrect tenses, word order and sentence fragment are common errors found in EFL learners' writing (Mourtaga, 2004; Peña, 2009).

In addition, most scholars agree that limited second-language knowledge and the differences in both vocabulary and the structures of mother tongue and the target language (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982; Selinker, 1985; Corder, 1985 cited in Wen, 1994, Weigle, 2002) are the main causes of language errors. The causes of English writing errors of Thai university students which the researchers had discussed in their studies are inadequate knowledge of lexis, grammatical rules, ignorance of the rules, incomplete application of rules and construct own assumptions in new language which cannot be applied (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007; Bootchuy, 2008; Jenwitheesuk, 2009; Nonkukhetkhong, 2013).

Implications of error analysis studies for English writing teaching

According to the error analysis of English writing studied in Thailand, the findings have shown that grammatical, lexical, semantic and writing organization errors are the main errors detected from the students' writing tasks. Also, talking about improving writing skills of students,

teachers mainly play an important role. Therefore, in order to improve writing teaching, the learners' process of language learning is needed to explore in order to increase the understanding of learners' errors. Apart from considering the learners' errors, the teaching objectives, students' linguistic competence, their affective factors and the effectiveness of the error correction should be taken into consideration (Fang & Xue-mei, 2007). Therefore, error analysis should be conducted in order to allow teachers to get overall knowledge about the students' errors so that they can prepare remedial teaching based on the errors.

There are many ways proposing to solve errors in English writing both from scholars and from the researchers studied English writing errors of Thai university students.

For solving grammatical errors, Krashen and Terrell (1983) suggested that learners' grammar skills can be improved by extensive reading as the learners will become familiar with the English grammatical structure.

Additionally, the researchers from these reviewed studies also suggested ways to solve the errors committed by the students.

First, to solve the problems of grammatical errors, the students should be taught about the grammar rules (Likitrattanaporn, 2002; Lush, 2002), especially the uses of subject-verb agreement, tenses, parts of speech, word order, prepositions, determiners and omission of subjects, verbs, objects and complement including sentence structure.

Second, the approaches to select appropriate words in certain contexts and teaching of the correct use of bilingual and English - English dictionaries (Bennui, 2008) are essential for solving lexical errors.

Third, the students should also be taught how to write a standard paragraph or essay such as how to write a topic sentence, support-

ing details and concluding sentences, and the use of transitional words should be emphasized (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007; Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong, 2008).

Finally, the use of the writing process approaches: pre-writing, actual writing and post writing should also be taken into consideration. Bennui (2008) also recommended the use of communicative approach by intensive use of English as the instructional medium in writing class room to enhance the writing skills of the students.

Conclusion

Regarding the reviews of the studies on the errors in English writing of Thai university students, most of errors detected from the students' writing are grammatical-lexical errors, first language interference and writing organization. Syntactic errors, lexical errors, semantic errors, the use of Thai words and the structures of Thai language, not writing an introduction and a conclusion and writing without transitional words to link their ideas among the sentences are the errors carried out by Thai university students.

The causes of errors are from inadequate knowledge of grammatical rules. First language interference is also another major cause of errors. Also, writing organization should also be emphasized as the students do not know the format of writing. The process of writing is another point that teachers should take into consideration.

Finally, these reviewed studies will contribute to improving teaching and learning of English writing since teachers can realize the reasons why the students are making errors and then appropriate remedial lessons and materials can be planned. Also, it is beneficial for planning and designing proper curriculum for the students because to improve writing skills of Thai university students, appropriate teaching approaches, materials and

curriculum based on the errors types committed by the students are needed.

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