

**An Analysis of Inflectional Morpheme Errors using IMs Test
with Chiang Rai Rajabhat University Students**

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Abstract

The research, A Study of Inflectional Morpheme Errors using IMs Test with Chiang Rai Rajabhat University Students, has two main objectives which are to analyze IMs errors used by CRRU English Major students; and to identify the errors in using IMs as perceived by Chiang Rai Rajabhat University English Major students. The sample group of this study was 31 volunteer students, who enrolled in the academic year 2023, and have not enrolled in any linguistic courses related to the concepts of IMs. There were two instruments used in this study: the IMs test which consisted of 40 multiple-choice questions, and 40 sentence correction questions, including structured interview. The Descriptive statistic and content analysis were used to analyze the data collected.

The results of the study revealed the total percentage score of volunteer students from both the multiple choice and sentence corrections tests which has the average range from below 49% to 59%. The volunteer students with the highest score are 58.57%, whereas the lowest scored 13.75%. Upon considering each test, volunteer students scored the multiple-choice questions test higher than that of the sentence correction test which is 92.5% and 40% respectively. The data from the interview illustrated that the IMs types that students struggled most during the test were Third person singular verb, past participle verb, plural noun, present participle, and past simple.

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Introduction

Learners who can understand various meaning of words can apply it appropriately in their communication, their academic writing, and also teaching profession effectively. A number of people are capable of using English to communicate fluently but may not be able to use correct grammar or know the rules of English, including grammar rules in words and sentences. Grammar is essential in learning English language, and if the learner masters the grammatical structure, they will be able to understand whether the sentence is well-formed or not. (Sunandar, 2022, p. 38).

When it comes to the study of the grammatical structure of words or morphology, inflectional morphemes, which can be shortened as IMs, are the study of part of speech in a word or the element, and it does not form a new word but also the meaning of the word. However, inflectional morphemes, or IMs, become an obstacle for some students. Poor language skills or a lack of basic English grammatical knowledge can have an impact on a student's performance in their numerous academic fields as well as their academic advancement. (Wornyo, 2016, p. 23). To ensure that English language learners master the concept of inflectional morphemes in morphemic languages, a certain kind of grammatical measurement need to be employed.

Inflectional Morpheme errors seem to be problematic around the world, with many studies being conducted in various contexts, and the outcomes found from the studies were quite different (Adam & Nada, 2020; Chumkamon, 2017; Yordchim & Gibbs, 2014; Tewarat, 2020; Ibrahim & Abdelrady, 2015; San, 2016; Navaz & Sama, 2016).

A study conducted at Sudan University by Adam & Nada (2020) revealed that students had problems using inflectional morphemes such as irregular nouns, irregular verbs, irregular adjectives, and polysyllabic adjectives. Whereas the Indonesian scholar Tewarat (2020) has done with university students, and found different result from

others. He found that three types of inflectional morpheme being considered the most accurate level while the rest were not. Furthermore, Ibrahim & Abdelrady (2015), a scholar from Saudi Arabia, has analyzed the inflectional morpheme error from writing tests by selecting the student's final examination as a tool. While the other similar instrument was used by Navaz & Sama (2016) from Sri Lanka, she also used a writing test as the main tool, but the method was quite different where this scholar created his own writing composition task and grammar-based activity. When it comes to this method, the inflectional morpheme errors found in the student's writing were third person singular and past tense. Despite using writing tasks as the main tool, some scholars use tests designed to find errors from students. San & Soe (2016) applied a questionnaire and grammatical judgement test including 17 grammatical items with Burmese first-year university students, which focus only on four inflectional morpheme items, for instance, plural -s, third-person singular -s, past tense -ed, and progressive aspect -ing. The result revealed numerous errors from the test on target inflectional morpheme type.

Additionally, inflectional morphemes are considered to be a crucial problem in Thailand. Morphology is one of the most difficult subjects in linguistics for Thai learners (Rungrojsuwan, 2015). Yordchim & Gibbs (2014) used test papers from 83 Thai students to analyze the errors related to sentence writing, and eight inflectional morphemes were included. The analysis found that the student had problems with all of the inflectional morpheme types, which can be caused by language interference.

Objective of the Research Project

1. To analyze IMs errors used by CRRU English Major students.
2. To identify the errors in using IMs as perceived by CRRU English Major students.

Benefits of research

The research tapped into the most common mistakes that keep occurring in the teaching and learning of English in Thai context. The cause of the problem shall be looked into. Once the research is conducted, it will be important to the world out there in terms of academic knowledge and also in general of people learning English in a Thai situation or specifically in a Thai situation. Furthermore, it will provide the IMs instructor a glimpse to analyze and prepare the solution to overcome the IMs errors before they start the IMs class.

Scope of Research

Content: This research studied only the eight IMs error and the problem that created the errors which were made by CRRU English Major students using IMs test and Structured interview as a tool to find out.

Sample group: There were 31 volunteer students chosen from the first year, majoring in English program, faculty of Humanities.

Setting: The research was conducted in Faculty of Humanities, and social science Western languages program, Chiang Rai Rajabhat University.

Related concepts, theories and research

Inflectional morphemes, according to Finegan (2004, p.43), it influences the structure of a word, but not its lexical category or fundamental meaning. They develop numerous forms of a word to correspond to the various roles in a sentence or discourse. On nouns and pronouns, inflectional morphemes used to indicate semantic concept which are number or grammatical categories on verbs, they indicate such categories as tense or number, whereas adjectives indicate degree.

According to Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2011, p.47), English has eight inflectional suffixes and they indicate the following:

1. -s third-person singular (Example: She wait-s at home.)
2. -ed past tense (Example: She wait-ed at home.)
3. -ing progressive (Example: She is eat-ing the donut.)
4. -en past participle (Example: Mary has eat-en the donuts.)
5. -s plural (Example: She ate the donut-s.)
6. -'s possessive (Example: Lisa's hair is short.)
7. -er comparative (Example: Dina has short-er hair than Karin.)
8. -est superlative (Example: Jenny has the short-est hair.)

Regarding IMs errors, it occurred when students were unable to apply its affixes in a correct form (Akande, 2003). In addition, Norrish (1987, p.7) states that when a student repeatedly make mistake and has not learned it, it is called an error, a systematic departure. According to the reasoning given above, errors happen when students are unable to create target language accurately due to the lack of target language expertise which is a representation of the language. The morphological errors that made by the EFL students usually appear in their interlanguage. In relation with the English language, the errors usually appear because of the interference from the first language (L1) of the EFL students and they do not understand the systems of inflectional morpheme of English language (Voresti S, Ulil A, 2022, p.5).

Research Methodology

Populations and Sample Groups

The population is all the first-year students in the English major at Chiang Rai Rajabhat University who enrolled in the academic year 2023. The population group was purposively selected to be the first year as they have not enrolled in any linguistic courses, which will give them exposure to knowledge and concepts of inflectional morphemes. After purposively selecting the population group, the researcher advertised for volunteer students to participate in the research and got a total of 31 volunteer students among the population.

Research Instruments

Following the research objective, the researcher conducted the experiment using two main instruments. The first instrument was IMs test, which is a tool to measure students' performance regarding IMs types and it a self-designed test. The second instrument is called a structured interview. To make the result more reliable, the researcher had asked the experts in the university to view and give feedback and made correction accordingly. The researcher also created a trial test using the same designs on an English major student from the Faculty of Education. The test was then adjusted to minimize the problem foreseen such as timing of the test and the addition of a clearer directions of the test and in Thai language.

IMs Test

In order to answer the first objective, the researcher applied the IMs test on the volunteer students to investigate the error. The IMs test consists of two types which are multiple choice design and sentence correction design. There were 40 questions for each test which is divided in to five questions per each type of IMs. Both of the test was put in Microsoft Form.

Structured Interview

Another instrument used after finishing the test and also helps answer the second objective is structured interview. The structured interview was a tool to help researcher to specify student's perspective after doing the test. There was a total of six questions for this process. the difficulty level of each IMs types, the obstacle found during the test, and the additional question about test design were the main information to ask. This method seems to improve the authenticity of the data collection process since students were asked to provide their points of view. The following were the six interview questions:

1. After doing the test, which type of question did you find it difficult to understand?
2. Do you think learning grammatical suffix is difficult? Why?
3. Do you find it difficult to do sentence correction test? If yes, why?
4. Do you find it difficult to create sentence using grammatical suffix (-ed, -er, -est)? If yes, why?

5. What factors do you think affect your sentence correction scores?
6. Did you read and review the test questions carefully when taking the test?

Data Collection Procedure

This study began with the discovery of the literature review related to books, and documents about IMs types of experience from both the Thai context and international context. The process was later continued by drafting the multiple-choice and sentence correction test. Both of the test design has been sent to experts and received feedback to edit. After the test design has already been approved, the sample group was contacted and made an appointment to do the test. The IMs test was later sent as a link since the platform was MS Form. After obtaining the results from the sample group, interviewees were selected based on high and low percentage from the score range and then scheduled for the interview. The following figure illustrates the procedure for collecting the data:

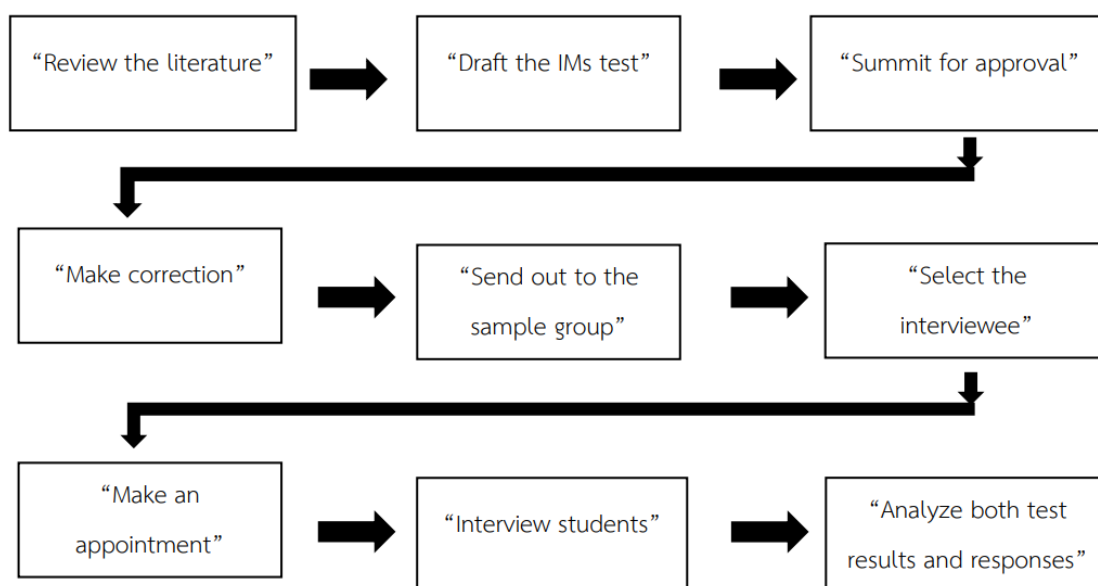


Figure 1 Data Collecting Procedure

Data Analysis

All test score was converted automatically in MS Form and then brought out to arrange in order using descriptive statistics. The table of each IMs error was made to answer the first objective which is to analyze the IMs errors from student. In order to find the answer to the second objective, the researcher has brought the interview responses to analysis using a content analysis approach. After finishing the content analysis process, the researcher arranged the data in the table to illustrate the analysis with the given keyword.

Research Results

The result of this research relied on two sources which are the IMs test and the structured interview. Regarding the result of the IMs test, the researcher used three tables including the multiple-choice result table, sentence correction result table, and the total result which is the combination of multiple-choice and sentence correction results.

IMs test Results

The IMs test is used to analyze the IMs error found in students' test questions. There was a total of 80 questions which were divided into two sets 40 multiple-choice questions and 40 sentence correction questions. While each test consists of all eight types of IMs with five questions per each type. Regarding the total score, 80 was considered the full score when it comes to the combination of both tests. The result of both tests presented in the following table:

Table 1 The Total Score from Both Test Types

No	Student Name	Plural noun (-S)	Possessive (S')	Third person singular (-S)	Past Tense (-ed)	Present Participle (-ing)	Regular Past Participle (-en)	Comparative (-er)	Superlative (-est)	Total score	Percentage (%)
1	F1	5	6	6	5	7	6	6	6	47	58.57%
2	F9	6	6	3	6	6	5	7	8	47	58.57%
3	F5	6	5	5	5	6	5	8	6	46	57.5%
4	M6	4	4	5	5	7	4	5	7	41	51.25%
5	F13	6	4	4	6	4	5	8	4	41	51.25%
6	M2	5	7	3	4	6	5	5	5	40	50%
7	M1	4	4	5	2	4	7	5	5	36	45%
8	M9	3	4	5	3	6	4	5	6	36	45%
9	F8	6	4	4	3	7	2	4	5	35	43.75%
10	F14	4	7	1	4	4	7	4	4	35	43.75%
11	F22	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	35	43.75%
12	M3	5	4	3	6	4	5	4	3	34	42.5%
13	F10	5	4	2	4	3	5	7	4	34	42.5%
14	F20	3	4	5	2	4	4	6	5	33	41.25%

15	F2	5	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	31	38.75%
16	F4	4	4	5	2	4	5	5	2	31	38.75%
17	F11	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	30	37.5%
18	M8	3	5	4	5	3	4	2	3	29	36.25%
19	F19	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	28	35%
20	F12	1	5	3	5	4	4	3	2	27	33.75%
21	M7	2	5	2	4	2	3	5	3	26	32.5%
22	F21	3	2	3	2	4	3	3	3	23	28.75%
23	M5	4	4	1	1	1	3	3	5	22	27.5%
24	F18	2	4	5	2	3	3	2	0	21	26.25%
25	M4	3	2	1	3	3	3	3	1	19	23.75%
26	F7	1	3	1	4	1	2	3	2	17	21.25%
27	F15	4	3	0	2	3	2	1	1	16	20%
28	F17	2	3	2	3	0	2	2	2	16	20%
29	F3	1	2	4	0	2	0	4	1	14	17.5%
30	F6	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	14	17.5%
31	F16	4	0	1	2	1	1	0	2	11	13.75%

Table 1 shows data of the total score. The total score of each IMs question was 10 with five points per test. Some students seem to score high mostly on three type of IMs which are present participle, comparative and superlative with the score of seven and eight out of ten. Whereas possessive, third person singular, plural noun and regular past participle seem to be the problematic for students with most of them score less than five. Regarding the highest and lowest total score, there were two students whose score was the highest with 47 out of 80. Whereas the lowest score was 11 out of 80.

Structured Interview Results

To answer the second objective, the researcher applied Structured Interview on six volunteer students selected from the total test score. Those six students have been divided into two group which were the group that got the percentage over 50% and the other group were below 50% or the lower percentage students. Six questions were used during the interview based on the difficulty level of each IMs types, the issue of using IMs during the test, some additional question related to test design, and the approach of how they do the test. According to the response from each student, it can be illustrated in six aspects which are the difficulty of each IMs type question, the way of learning IMs, the difficulty level of sentence correction, the difficulty of writing sentence using IMs, how the sentence correction test affects their score, how they review the test question and answer.

The Difficulty of Each IMs Type Question

The first question focused on the difficulty of each IMs type in question. According to the response from the interview, it could be summarized that the person Singular type was considered the most complicated, followed by past participle, present participle, and plural noun. The problem could be the difference between Thai grammar and English grammar function, lack of basic understanding of that grammar, and more importantly unable to remember the function since there are too many to learn.

The Perspective on Learning IMs

The second question related to their perspective on learning IMs whether it is considered a complicated subject or not. All of them came up with the same

response which is complicated. Additionally, some students think it is not too complicated if they work hard to overcome it. After analyzing the response, the reason was quite similar to the first question which was the difference and lack of basic grammatical knowledge. Moreover, the other aspect that leads students to struggle is language interference.

The Difficulty of Level of Sentence Correction

Sentence Correction was also included in the interview since many students scored low on this part. This question is related to the difficulty level of sentence correction questions. Most students responded that it was difficult for them. The test requires students to read the given sentence carefully, find the error, and rewrite it. Some students have done this test before and still find it difficult. There are many aspects that make sentence correction become difficult for a lot of students who lack writing skill, knowledge about sentence structure, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. Furthermore, when it comes to long sentences, students tend to lose passion and some even spend time analyzing the meaning of the sentence.

The Difficulty of Writing Sentence Using IMs

This question has been connected from the previous one since students have to rewrite the sentence using the correct IMs. Surprisingly, some students think it was not too difficult and some was too complicated. Both responses have been brought to analysis. Lack of grammatical knowledge, sentence structure or not being trained to compose sentences were considered the problem found in the response. Language interference was also a problem for them when they used their mother tongue language with English sentences.

How the Sentence Correction Test Affects Their Score

Regarding sentence correction scores, all of the volunteers were not able to score more than 50%. Therefore, this question aims to find out from the student's point of view about what make their sentence correction score really low. They seemed to know the reason why this test design was an obstacle for them. All six interviewee gave similar response which are low-level understanding of grammatical suffixes, vocabulary, sentence structure and meaning of the sentence.

The Way Student Review the Test Question and Answer

This question aimed to survey the approach of how each of them did the test since the time limit for each test was enough for them. According to the approach, students always check the answers after they finish the test. However, some of them seemed to check the answer before and also after they finish in case there was still enough time. Some of them check after they finish everything.

Discussion of results

Based on the result of the IMs test and structured interview, it can be concluded that Thai students faced a huge issue regarding their understanding of IMs. When it come to the aspect that make their score range become low, there are two aspects to mention including the test design and their IMs knowledge. They seem to struggle with possessive, third-person singular, plural noun and regular past participles. Additionally, they also struggled with the knowledge of composing and understanding sentence structure, especially with sentences with IMs. Whereas the test design occurs when students get used to the multiple-choice test structure rather than sentence correction structure. Furthermore, when it comes to the time limit of the test, students spend much time on sentence correction than the multiple-choice design since students only need to select the given answer to fill the sentence. Regarding interview results, most interviewee admitted that the only cause, besides limited vocabulary and semantic issue, which was an obstacle for them to do the sentence correction test, there was also the low-level understanding of the verb tenses. Language interference was also the main cause for them as they are the second language learner and their first language is not English.

Recommendation

Implications of the study

Teachers should apply longer and more meaningful sentences in everyday classroom teaching in order to help student get used to the long sentences and

understand the sentence structures more effectively. Moreover, Teachers should provide student the understanding with variety of context in sentence not just the made-up context which make student realized that grammars have been used in many types of contexts in daily life. According to Brown (1973), Learner may acquire certain IMs element or its function earlier than the other. Basic context should also be included in the classroom. Classroom writing activity is also beneficial for students because when students have an opportunity to practice writing sentences, students will understand how to create a grammatically correct or appropriate sentence. The context students necessarily need to know should be real and possibly nearer to the lives of student or world context.

Recommendation for Future Research

The future research should find out more about inflectional morpheme errors in other contexts to complete an understanding of how English learner from the other country acquire Inflectional morpheme. it should also explore the teaching methods of inflectional morpheme in the classroom. It is to investigate the effective teaching technique to help students reduce errors on inflectional morpheme.

Limitations

Even though this research provides some experimental guidelines for teaching and learning IMs. There were a few limitations occur during the data collection procedure. Firstly, this research has been done with only 31 volunteer students which has been taken from more than 100 students with the same major. Most of Thai students afraid of volunteer with other people and some even did not want to express their opinion for themselves which was the reason why it took so long to get the target sample group. Secondly, since the data collection has been conducted during the university vacation, some volunteers were not able to come on the exact same time. Lastly, when it comes to the interview process during vacation, some interviewee did not available on the same time and some of them struggles with internet connection which was difficult to contact them.

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