

An Error Analysis of Paragraphs Written in English by Freshmen of Higher Education Level

Pisit Jittisukpong¹, Bundit Anuyahong²

^{1,2} English Department, College of General Education and Languages,

^{1,2} Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Thailand

¹E-mail: smart_ping@hotmail.co.th, ²E-mail: bundit@tni.ac.th

Abstract

The purposes of the research were to 1) to investigate the writing errors occurring in written English paragraphs of freshmen of higher education level and 2) to identify the frequency of writing errors made by freshmen of higher education level. The sample in the study was 30 first year students who studied English Foundation Course in the first semester of the academic year 2017 at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI). Thirty pieces of students' written paragraphs were analyzed and it was found that the most frequent type of errors that students made was punctuation (12.67%), followed by the errors in wrong use of article (11.3%), spelling (10.9%), subject-verb agreement (10.3%), sentence fragments (9.6%), capitalization (9.4%), word order (8.9%), verb tense (7.2%), using singular and plural forms (6.4%) irregular verbs (6.1%), and wrong use of preposition (5.4%), respectively.

Keywords: Error Analysis (EA), Paragraphs



1. Introduction

English is used as an international language among all nations in the world. It prevails in almost all perspectives of people's life, for example, transportation, media, business, diplomacy, education, house and home products, and so on. As a result, English is the globally taught language. Moreover, Savignon (2002) stated that languages are composed of four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Undoubtedly, English learners should experience all of the skills that have been mentioned about in order to become competent in English. However, the skill of writing English is thought to be the most complicated skill of the four skills of speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Consequently, it is a very hard task for learners when they are trying to produce sentences or to write English paragraphs. Therefore, it is unavoidable to find errors made by ESL/EFL learners.

In addition, writing skill takes on a higher degree of importance in global correspondence, competency in the rhetorical, generating ideas, planning, goal setting, and assessing what has been produced. Therefore, writing in English has been perceived as the most difficult skill (Kitjaroonchai, 2012). Considering the difficulty of writing English as a skill, the associated that come with the acquisition of that skill should be understood (Hammad, 2012).

Error Analysis is a useful and preferred tool in helping ESL/EFL students to overcome problems involving composing sentences. James (1998) also advocated that Error Analysis (EA) is the most effective tool of the study of linguistic studies. Error Analysis (EA) also enables the teachers to focus on the learners' errors. Moreover, Hinnon (2014) asserted that Error Analysis (EA) is useful after following a long period of study of literature related to Error Analysis (EA). She points out that Error Analysis (EA) can enable teachers to prepare effective teaching methods which are applicable to the needs of their students.

Primary and secondary schools in Thailand have both taught English as a foreign language while, in universities, it is a compulsory subject (Khamput, 2004). Although English has been learned for many years by Thai students, their English proficiency is relatively low. English levels among Thai students continue to be low, especially their ability to write in English (Bennui, 2008). Additionally, a lot of previous papers on this research have found that writing is one of main obstacles that EFL learners encounter. A number of criteria have an effect on the rate of learning including: age, motivation, teachers, learners' attitude, environment and parents' attitude. (Iamsui, 2014). According to the preliminary survey relating to the students' writing ability, it was found that they use ungrammatical structures to generate the sentences or even paragraphs. There were some fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences. Moreover, the mother tongue affects their sentence creation. That is to say, they often translate the words from their own mother tongue, then make sentences. This shows that the language transfer make their English sentence structures incomplete. Therefore, the students' writing of analyzing errors in English paragraphs is necessary.

It would be beneficial for EFL teaching in order to develop the students' English writing and raise their awareness when they are writing English paragraphs. Therefore, this study reveals the mistakes made by Thai university students in Thailand at Thai – Nichi Institute of technology (TNI). This study aims to identify the types of errors made by Thai university students and frequency of committing these types. To achieve the purposes of this study, Thai teachers would be well placed to find and recognize the students' writing errors, which can be corrected by using the correct teaching methods.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the study were as follows:

1. To investigate the writing errors occurring in written English paragraphs of freshmen of higher education level of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.
2. To identify the frequency of writing errors made by freshmen of higher education level of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology.

2. Method

Research Design

The present study aimed at investigating the types and frequency of writing errors made by Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students. The study adopted the quantitative research design in order to achieve its objectives. Nunan (2001) stated that the methods used to collect vast numbers of data or, in fact, anything that can be measured is called quantitative research. Also, this type of research is valuable in allowing us to summarize and compare large amounts of data with other material or research.



Participants

The population of the study was undergraduate students at Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology. The samples were 30 first year students who studied English Foundation Course at TNI in the first semester of the academic year 2017. All of them were non - English major students and they were selected for purposive sampling based on the class assigned for the researcher by the university registrar's office.

Research Instrument

The main source of data used was the written paragraphs of 30 participants who studied English Foundation Course at TNI in the first semester of the academic year 2017. They were asked to write a short paragraph about "The Importance of Internet to Our Daily Life" Then, the written paragraphs were collected in order to be analyzed. The Scheme of Error Classification was applied from Chanquoy (2001). These errors include the following:

1. Spelling errors: this category deals with the errors related to orthography errors.
2. Grammatical errors: this category discusses the errors related to gender and number, agreement of nouns, verbs and adjectives, and subject-verb agreement.
3. Punctuation errors: this category deals with punctuation and capitalization errors.

Research Procedures

All of the 30 participants were administered a writing assignment included paragraph writing. The participants were required to write a short paragraph about "The Importance of Internet to Our Daily Life" within a period of 30 minutes and minimum of 80 words. The corpus used in this study was collected from written paragraphs of 30 students who were enrolled in English Foundation Course.

Data Collection

All of 30 pieces of the students' written works were marked by the researcher. Each sentence was examined word by word. Then, each error was recorded according to its type in an individual error record form.

Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

The data collection for this study was to analyze the classification of writing errors based on Chanquoy (2001). These writing errors are included to the followings:

1. Spelling errors

They are related to orthography errors.

2. Grammatical errors

They are involved with gender and number, agreement of nouns, verbs and adjectives, and subject-verb agreement.

3. Punctuation errors

They are punctuation and capitalization errors.

Then, all of the collected errors were analyzed and labeled according to the types of errors to get the frequency and percentage.

3. Results

There were two findings found in this study:

1. To investigate the writing errors occurring in written English paragraphs of freshmen of higher education level of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology

This results obtained from this study revealed that the students made many writing errors when writing paragraphs in the English language (see Table 1).

Table 1: Writing Errors Made by Students when Writing Paragraphs in the English Language

Type of Writing Error	
1.	Punctuation
2.	Wrong Use of Articles
3.	Spelling
4.	Subject-Verb Agreement
5.	Sentence Fragments
6.	Capitalization
7.	Word Order
8.	Verb Tense
9.	Using Singular and Plural Forms
10.	Irregular Verbs
11.	Wrong Use of Preposition

As shown in Table 1, the results revealed that TNI students have made several errors when writing paragraphs in the English language. The errors comprised punctuation, wrong use of articles, spelling, subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, capitalization, word order, verb tense, using singular and plural forms, irregular verbs, and wrong use of preposition.

2. To identify the frequency of writing errors made by freshmen of higher education level of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology

The results obtained from this study revealed that the students made writing errors in a frequent way. The table below demonstrated types, frequency, and percentage of the errors (see Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency of Writing Errors Made by Students

	Type of Writing Error	Frequency	Percentage
1.	punctuation	82	12.67%
2.	Wrong Use of Articles	74	11.3%
3.	Spelling	71	10.9%
4.	Subject-Verb Agreement	67	10.3%
5.	Sentence Fragments	63	9.6%
6.	Capitalization	61	9.4%
7.	Word Order	59	8.9%

Table 2: Frequency of Writing Errors Made by Students (Cont'd)

	Type of Writing Error	Frequency	Percentage
8.	Verb Tense	55	7.2%
9.	Using Singular and Plural Forms	46	6.4%
10.	Irregular Verbs	40	6.1%
11.	Wrong Use of Preposition	35	5.4%
	Total	653	100%

As shown in Table 2, the students made several errors when writing paragraphs in the English language. Punctuation was the most frequently-made error type (12.67%). Other error types were wrong use of article (11.3%), spelling (10.9%), subject-verb agreement (10.3%), sentence fragments (9.6%), capitalization (9.4%), word order (8.9%), verb tense (7.2%), using singular and plural forms (6.4%) irregular verbs (6.1%), and wrong use of preposition (5.4%), respectively.



Table 3: Most Frequent Errors and Examples of Errors

Error Classification and definition	Error Identification	Error Correction
<p>1. Punctuation Marks: any one of the marks (such as a period, comma, or question mark) used to divide a piece of writing into sentences, clauses, etc.</p>	<p>For example you can find any kind of information.</p>	<p>For example, you can find any kind of information.</p>
<p>2. Use of Articles: an article is a word that is used with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun.</p>	<p>It is useful tool.</p>	<p>It is a useful tool.</p>
<p>3. Spelling: the forming of words from letters according to accepted usage.</p>	<p>My writting is bad.</p>	<p>My writing is bad.</p>
<p>4. Subject-Verb Agreement: wrong combination of subject and verb.</p>	<p>My friend have friends from Japan and Malaysia.</p>	<p>My friend has friends from Japan and Malaysia.</p>
<p>5. Sentence Fragments: the sentences misses a verb or a subject so it becomes disconnected.</p>	<p>The Internet is very useful. Make everyone like it.</p>	<p>The Internet is very useful. It makes everyone like it.</p>

Table 3: Most Frequent Errors and Examples of Errors (Cont'd)

Error Classification and definition	Error Identification	Error Correction
6. Capitalization: is writing a word with its first letter as a capital letter and the remaining letters in lower case in writing systems with a case distinction.	the internet is important in our life.	The Internet is important in our life.
7. Word Order: the sequence of words in a sentence, clause, or phrase.	I play game computer.	I play computer game .
8. Verb Tense: error of constructing a verb.	I am using the Internet every day.	I use the Internet every day.
9. Using Singular and Plural Forms: a mistake with number (singular and plural).	I like to work many job.	I like to work many jobs .
10. Irregular Verbs: verbs in which the past tense is not formed by adding the usual -ed ending.	I send many emails before	I sent many emails before
11. Use of Preposition: a preposition is a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence.	I can apply a job on the Internet.	I can apply for a job on the Internet.



4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the writing error made by Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology students when writing paragraphs in the English language. These results revealed that TNI students have made several errors when writing paragraphs in the English language. The errors comprised punctuation, wrong use of articles, spelling, subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, capitalization, word order, verb tense, using singular and plural forms, irregular verbs, and wrong use of preposition. These results were supported by Bennui (2008) who stated that the mistakes made by students when writing in English is due to not enough exposure to the necessary subject language. Moreover, the results of the study showed that punctuation, wrong use of articles, spelling, subject-verb agreement, and sentence fragments were among the most frequent errors made by the students. These results were consistent with the findings of previous studies (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013; Iamsui, 2014; Rattanadilok Na Phuket & Othman, 2015). One reason for these results might be related to Thai interference and negative transfer of mother tongue rules (Noojan, 1999). Additionally, Weigle (2002) denoted that lower level abilities in English grammar and vocabulary are another important area of student errors. Consequently, students' writing can be improved by preparing lessons well, especially in term of grammar, vocabulary and frequently found errors. Finally, writing created by students should be talked about in English writing classes, as pointing out their careless mistakes would lead to better results in writing.

5. Acknowledgements

This research is supported by College of General Education and Languages, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand. I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Intensive Course of New Generation Researcher Development Project 2017 for developing my research ability.

Moreover, I would also like to gratefully acknowledge to my research project leaders, Assistant Professor Dr. Bundit Anuyahong and Assistant Professor Dr. Wipanee Pengante, for their commitment of time and instructive guidance and comments through all the stages of my research writing and all my work and for being their mentors and supervisors.

Special thanks to Associate Professor Dr. Bandhit Rojarayanont, the President of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, Associate Professor Dr. Pichit Sukcharoenpong, Deputy of President of Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology, and Assistant Professor Dr. Wanwimon Rongtheera, the Director of College of General Education and Languages for their supporting in the research funding and publishing my research.

6. References

- Bennui, P. (2008). A Study of L1 Interference in the Writing of Thai EFL Students. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 4, 72-102.
- Chanquoy, L. (2001). How to Make It Easier for Children to Revise Their Writing. *British Journal of Education Psychology* 5 (4), 161-170. Retrieved August 08, 2017, from <https://doi.org/10.1515/irl.2001.5.1-4.16>.
- Hammad, A., E. (2012). *Teaching and Learning English Reading in Gaza Prep School: A Descriptive Study*. A PhD dissertation, Cairo University, Egypt.
- Hinnon, A. (2004). Common Errors in English Writing and Suggested Solutions of Thai University Students. *Journal of Humanities*, 31 (2), 165-180.
- Iamsui, C. (2014). *An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Srinakharinwirot University Students' Writing*. Bangkok: Graduate School. Srinakharinwirot University. Photocopied.
- James, C. (1998). *Errors in Language Learning: Exploring Error Analysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Khamput, P. (2004). *First Language Interference on Second Language Writing of Mattayomsuksa 5 Students*. Khon Kaen: Graduate School. Khon Kane University. Photocopied.
- Kitjaroonchai, N. (2012). Motivation toward English Language Learning of Students in Secondary and High School in Education Service Area Office 4, Saraburi Province, Thailand. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* 1 (1): 22-33.



- Noojan, K. (1999). *Errors Analysis of Errors in English Abstracts of Srinakharinwirot University Graduate Students*. Bangkok: Graduate School. Srinakharinwirot University. Photocopied.
- Nunan, D. (2001). *Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rattanadilok Na Phuket, P., & Othman, N.B. (2015). Understanding EFL Students' Errors in Writing. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6 (32),99-106.
- Savignon, S., J. (2002). Communicative Curriculum Design for 21st Century. *English Teaching Forum*, 14 (40) 2-7.
- Watcharapunyawong, S., & Usaha, S. (2013). Thai EFL Students' Writing Errors in Different Text Types: The Interference of the First Language. *English Language Teaching*, 6 (1), 67-68.
- Weigle, S. C. (2002). *Assessing Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bio Data

Assistant Professor Pisit Jittisukpong is an English lecturer at College of General Education and Languages, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology. He obtained a double-degree for his master. One is a Master of Arts in TEFL from Srinakharinwirot University. The other one is a Master of Arts in Teaching French from Kasetsart University. His research interests include English language teaching, classroom participation, student engagement, and classroom discussion.

Assistant Professor Dr. Bundit Anuyahong is an English lecturer at College of General Education and Languages, Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology. He got Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction-Teaching English at Silpakorn University. He also received three degrees for his master. The first one is a Master of Education in TEFL from Silpakorn University. The second one is a Master of Education in Educational Administration from Naresuan University. The Third one is a Master of Educational and Communication Technology from Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, Thailand. His research interests include English language teaching, content-based Instruction, qualitative inquiry and teacher training.