

การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดในการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 6

AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH WRITING OF MATHAYOM SUKSA 6 STUDENTS

Natjirath Boonrod^{*} Nakonthep Tipayasuparat^{**} and Pawarisorn Sornsilp^{***}

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาข้อผิดพลาดในการเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ และสาเหตุของข้อผิดพลาดในการเขียนของนักเรียนไทย เพื่อรวบรวมข้อมูลอันจะเป็นแนวทางในการพัฒนาการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับนักเรียน กลุ่มตัวอย่างในการศึกษาได้แก่นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 6 โรงเรียนเอกชนแห่งหนึ่ง จังหวัดปทุมธานี จำนวน 61 คน การเก็บข้อมูลแบ่งออกเป็น 3 ขั้นตอนกล่าวคือ ในขั้นที่ 1 ให้นักเรียนทั้งหมดทำแบบทดสอบปรนัยในการหาข้อผิดพลาดของประโยค (Error Identification Test) เพื่อแยกนักเรียนที่มีความรู้ความสามารถด้านภาษาอังกฤษออกจากประชากรทั้งหมด ขั้นที่ 2 ให้นักเรียน 15 คนที่ได้คะแนนทดสอบสูงสุดในขั้นแรกเขียนอนุเฉท ภาษาอังกฤษเรื่อง “อาชีพในฝัน” เพื่อนำมาวิเคราะห์หาข้อผิดพลาดทางด้านการเขียน และขั้นที่ 3 คือการสัมภาษณ์ โดยคัดเลือกนักเรียนที่ได้คะแนนสูงสุด 3 อันดับแรกจากขั้นที่หนึ่งมาสัมภาษณ์เพื่อหาสาเหตุของการเกิดข้อผิดพลาดนั้นๆ ผลการวิจัยพบว่าจากการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดในการเขียนรวม 4 ด้าน ได้แก่ 1) ไวยากรณ์ 2) โครงสร้าง 3) การสะกดคำ และ 4) การใช้เครื่องหมายวรรคตอน พบว่าข้อผิดพลาดทางด้านไวยากรณ์มีความถี่สูงสุดคิดเป็นร้อยละ 66.83 ซึ่งประกอบไปด้วยประเด็นด้าน การใช้คำนำหน้านาม รูปกาล และคำสันธาน คิดเป็นร้อยละ 15 ร้อยละ 8.68 และร้อยละ 8.42 ตามลำดับ ผลการสัมภาษณ์แสดงให้เห็นว่าข้อผิดพลาดเกิดขึ้นเนื่องจากการแทรกแซงของกฎเกณฑ์ด้านโครงสร้างและไวยากรณ์ของภาษาไทย นอกจากนี้นักเรียนยังใช้การสรุปเกินการณ์ในระหว่างที่เขียนด้วย

คำสำคัญ: การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด การเขียนภาษาอังกฤษ นักเรียนมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 6

^{*} Graduate Student of Master Degree Program “English for Professions”, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University

^{**} Head of Master Degree Program “English for Professions”, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University

^{***} Lecturer in English Language Department, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University

Abstract

The objectives of this research were to investigate the specific types of errors occurring in grade 12 Thai students' writings and to examine causes of the errors in writings. The study was divided into 3 phases: 1) an error identification test to distinguish the student having strong background of English knowledge from the population; 2) free writing; and 3) interview. The instruments were an Error Identification Test, a paragraph-writing worksheet. Regarding Phase 2, 15 students who got the highest scores in phase 1 were selected to write a paragraph, the topic of which was "My Dream Career". And in Phase 3, the interview was conducted among 3 students getting the highest score in Phase 1 to investigate the perceived causes of making the errors. The result of the study indicated that among four main types of errors: grammar, structure, spelling and, punctuations, it was found that the errors in grammar was most frequently found (66.83%). This included 14 types of errors in the order of frequency found as follows: articles, tenses, conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliaries, word form, singular and plural nouns, pronouns, word order, subject-verb agreement, infinitives, relative clauses, word choices, and the use of there-be. Among the grammar errors, articles, tenses, and conjunctions were found the most frequently (15%, 8.68%, and 8.42% respectively). The errors found in their writing process could be attributed to the fact that the students applied the rules of the mother tongue to the second language while writing. In addition, the overgeneralization and the language transfer caused the errors while the second language learners were writing.

Keyword: Error analysis, English writing, Mathayomsuksa 6 students

1. Introduction

Currently, the Thai educational system is developing during the age of information technology, communicating with people around the world is both borderless and rapid (Office of the National Primary Education Commission, 2000). Thai students study English at primary school, high school and university (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, their English proficiency is not good, as demonstrated by the results of the following national examinations: The Ordinary National Educational Test (ONET), The General Aptitude Test (GAT), and The Professional and Academic Aptitude Test (PAT). Average scores over the past three years have been lower than 50 percent. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Development at the Ministry of Education (2008) reported that Thai students at primary, secondary, and university level could not use English well in their daily lives.

Researchers (Angwatanakul, 1975; Chanhom, 2006; and Watcharajinda, 2009) have noted that the causes of the problem included the students' ignorance of English as a subject, a lack of teachers, and a lack of appropriate media. Walberg (1989) indicated that English achievement in Thailand was dependent upon intelligence, aptitude, motivation, and the students' study techniques. From four skills, writing is the most complicated skill because it depends on many components (Sai-Udom, 1998: 1). Pooklek (1993) and Chandaprom (1987) found that Mathayomsuksa 6 students' writing skills were poor. A similar problem was identified at Saint Joseph Muaeng Ake School in Pathumthani Province, where it was also established that students had problems with writing assignments.

Learning a language requires four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing skills are the focus of this research because the thought process required to produce written language is the most complex. Wattanapat (1997) observed that to write precisely and properly, students needed to have knowledge of grammar rules, vocabulary, and punctuation. Language learners needed to know how to select words to use in context, and how to organize each word grammatically to convey ideas effectively to readers (Heaton, 1975; Asaranukrao, 1989; Nunan, 1990; and Kowitwatee, 1994). Suthisawaskul (2003) mentioned that learners needed to know vocabulary because it is the foundation of language learning. Recently, Gogoi (2015) identified two types of vocabulary: active and passive. Active vocabulary was defined as the vocabulary used correctly and effectively by learners while passive vocabulary was defined as vocabulary, which learners knew but could not use effectively. Kowitwatee, (1994) and Holmes (2006) implied that writing was a difficult and complicated skill, errors occurred because learners did not know how to use language. Besides, learners could not correct their errors themselves (Richard, 1992). In Thailand, L2 students make writing errors because most students do not study an English program. Students study English for a few hours each week; therefore, there could be a variety of reasons for their errors. When students produce errors, those errors must be analyzed. Holmes (2006) noted that error analysis meant identifying, describing, and explaining particular errors to students. This is necessary because an analysis of errors could result in learners correcting their errors.

One cause of errors could be related to the use of interlanguage. Corder (1981: 66) defined interlanguage as a language system that a language learner creates while they are

learning a foreign language. Moreover, he referred to it as “a language learner’s language”. Selinker (1978) found the use of interlanguage to be a cause of errors. The first factor he considered was Language Transfer, which occurs when learners try to transfer the rules of their mother tongue to the target language while they are writing. Ellis (1997) explained that errors caused by the mother tongue were a result of Interlingual Transfer. Additionally, Norrish (1987) believed that First Language Interference caused errors. The second factor considered was Second Language Learning Strategies. Selinker (1972) observed that learners used second language rules carelessly. For example, learners placed –ed at the end of all verbs to express the past tense, they were not concerned that some irregular verbs took different forms. Ellis (1997) defined this as Intralingual Transfer, which occurs when learners attempt to apply a rule from their second language to language learning. Learners set up a hypothesis of the language they are studying. For example, by the addition of –ed to all past form verbs. The next factor investigated was Overgeneralization. Sangwirach (1995) and Norrish (1987) discovered that when learners study a foreign language, they learn some rules of the language. However, when they lack knowledge they create their own rules. Corder (1981) noted that when learners did not know exact language rules they used the target language incorrectly. He referred to this factor as the Overgeneralization of Target Language Linguistic Material.

Errors that occurred in the compositions can be classified systematically. There are many types of errors made by EFL/ESL learners in general; however, 19 errors can obviously identified. In this research, error classification frameworks created by several scholars (Etherton, 1977 & Hudson, 1971 cited in Norrish, 1983; Pengpanich, 1986) were combined and classified errors into the following aspects: grammatical, articles; tenses; conjunctions; prepositions; auxiliaries; word forms; singular and plural nouns; pronouns; word order; subject-verb agreements; infinitives; relative clauses; word choices; the use of there + be, and structural: sentence fragments; run-on sentences; spelling, capitalization; spelling and punctuation.

Writing is the most complicated skill in English learning. Many research studies above can be applied to this study to find out the error types found among the students and can be used to explain the cause of the error in their writing. The errors among Thai learners can be divided into 3 types; these are words: semantics error, syntactic error, collocational error, and error in loan word; structure: errors in parts of speech, to-be omitting, comparison,

relative clause, noun clause, word order, tenses, and run-on; and discourse: errors in reference words. (Pengpanich, 1986)

2. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to investigate grade 12 students' English writing errors at a private school in Pathumthani Province and to examine the causes of the errors found. With this, 2 research questions were posed:

1. What types of errors are found frequently in compositions written by Thai students?
2. What factors cause Thai students to make those writing errors?

3. Materials and methods

Subjects

The data were collected from 61 grade 12 (Mathayom Suksa 6) students who attended a private school in Pathumthani Province, during the 2016 academic year. The school had an English Program: Mathematics, Science, Health and Physical Education, and Careers and Technology were all taught in English. The subjects were Mathayomsuksa 6 students studying at Saint Joseph Mueang Ake School in Pathumthani Province, Thailand.

Data collection instruments

The data collection process was divided into 3 phases. Phase 1 was an analysis of error identification tests given to all the students. It contained 30 items: 10 items from previous O-NET tests and another 20 items taken from a textbook. The reason of producing the test is to filter students without strong background of English language from those who did. Phase 2 was free writing. Fifteen students who achieved the highest scores in Phase 1 were assigned to write a paragraph containing 100-120 words on the topic "My Dream Career". Phase 3 was an interview to find the causes of the errors. Three students who achieved the highest scores in Phase 1 were interviewed to find out the causes of their writing errors. The data collected from the interview were analyzed by qualitative content analysis.

Data Analysis

After the data collection, 15 writing samples were analyzed using Norrish's framework (1983) to find the errors. Initially, each composition was examined word by word and sentence by sentence. Then, the categories were generated based on all the writing samples. Finally, the number of errors was calculated and converted into percentages. For

the second research question, after the error analysis, the factors that caused these errors were identified, and the collected data were analyzed by both frequency and percentage.

4. Results

The results of the study are based on the two research questions posed. The answer to the first question focuses on errors found with grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. The results are presented according to the frequency, and the percentage of each type of error.

Phase 1 of this study was an error identification test. The test was conducted to ensure that only the students who achieved the highest scores were considered for the writing session because there was no need to study the students who had a limited knowledge of English. The result was shown in the table below.

Table 1: Scores of Error Identification Test

Scores	Number of students
9	1
8	2
7	4
6	4
5	7
4	11
3	4
2	11
1	14
0	3

Out of 30 items in the form of error identification, only 1 student got 9 scores while the majority (14 of them) got 1. The mean scores of the participants were 3.31.

To answer the first question: “What types of errors are frequently found in the compositions written by Thai students?” errors in terms of grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation were categorized. Frequency, percentage, and the ranking of each error type were considered, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Types of Errors

Types of Errors	Error Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar	1. Articles	57	15
	2. Tenses	33	8.68
	3. Conjunctions	32	8.42
	4. Prepositions	22	5.79
	5. Auxiliaries	20	5.26
	6. Word Forms	20	5.26
	7. Singular and Plural Nouns	13	3.42
	8. Pronouns	11	2.89
	9. Word Order	10	2.63
	10. Subject-Verb Agreements	9	2.37
	11. Infinitives	9	2.37
	12. Relative Clauses	8	2.11
	13. Word Choices	6	1.58
	14. The Use of There + Be	4	1.05
Structure	15. Fragments	50	13.18
	16. Run-on Sentences	5	1.32
Spelling	17. Capitalization	24	6.32
	18. Spelling	16	4.21
Punctuation	19. Punctuation	31	8.16
Total		380	100

From the analysis of grammatical, structural, spelling, and punctuation errors, most of the errors found were grammatical errors. From the 19 categories of errors identified, it was found that the students had the greatest problem with the use of articles (15%). The second and the third most frequently found errors were with sentence fragments and tenses (13.18% and 8.68%, respectively). The fourth and the fifth most frequently found errors were

with the use of conjunctions and punctuation (8.42% and 8.16% respectively). Other types of errors, such as capitalization (6.32%) and prepositions (5.79%) were also recorded.

Examples of the students' writing pieces:

...My Dream Career is chef cooking because I like cooking Sometimes, In children I will cooking with my mom. I think It happy times and make food bakery Drink. It can make food give people to eat. and I eat everything new thing.

...My dream career is Economist. Why I want to be a economist? The answer is, I want to be a rich people. I think about something that can make money like a stock.

...Although my mom would me to be a dentist but () I think I can not study in science subject as well.

...I am not good in (at) English.

...Why (do) I want to be a economist?

The examples above show that the students omitted articles where they were necessary and that they used articles erroneously. Furthermore, the students used the wrong verb tense, incorrect punctuation marks, and they made errors with capitalization. The possible explanation is the influence of their first language. In Thai, the use of pre-noun articles is not similar to that of the English language and verb does not change its form when used in different tenses. Therefore, they were not aware of changing the verb form in English.

According to the interview session, the causes of the errors are divided into four parts: grammatical, structural, spelling, and punctuation. The first factor considered is errors with grammar. These occurred when students got confused with the differences between Thai and English grammar. The students translated sentences from Thai to English directly. They did not change the verb to relate to the tense. The students tended to put -ed at the end of most verb in past tense. They were not concerned about the differences between the regular verbs and the irregular verbs which can be labeled "overgeneralization". In addition, the students did not put articles in front of nouns because Thai nouns do not require articles. For the structural aspect, the students made 50 errors with sentence fragments. In some cases, the participants did not use a subject or a verb because in some Thai sentences the subject can be omitted. The students also made errors with run-on

sentences because they did not know how to separate individual ideas. One possible explanation could be the transfer from Thai grammatical rules, and did not have comprehensive knowledge on the use of conjunctions to connect different clauses. They commented that Thai sentences did not require full stops to separate complete thoughts. Spelling was also a problem for Thai students as they made both capitalization and spelling errors (10.53%). They forgot to use capital letters at the beginning of a sentence because there is no use of the capital letters in Thai. Students spelled words incorrectly because they wrote as they pronounced. When they mispronounced, they misspelled. Finally, for punctuation, the students made 31 errors (8.16%). This is because Thai and English punctuation rules are applied differently.

5. Discussion

After the students' work was analyzed, 19 error categories were defined. According to the analysis of 15 one-paragraph papers, 380 errors were found. The four most frequently found errors were with articles, sentence fragments, tenses, and conjunctions (15%, 13.18%, 8.68%, and 8.42%, respectively). For these four error types, the total was 172 out of 380 errors (45.28%).

The results show that grammar was the most problematical writing skill. The errors found in the 15 one-paragraph papers written by the participants were divided into 4 aspects: articles, tenses, conjunctions, and prepositions. These errors can be classified as persistent errors because they were the most frequently found errors (45.28%). The students made errors with these four aspects the most often, and it is interesting to note that many of them produced the same four errors. After the interview, the students stated that they had directly translated Thai sentences to English sentences without taking into account the differences between Thai and English language. These results concur with Swartz (1980), and Pringjamras (1976) who recognized that students made grammatical errors with articles, subject-verb agreements, and the use of tenses. The errors occurred because there were differences between the first language and the target language (Corder, 1981 cited in Sangwirach, 1995: 20-22, 24-25). The students did not understand and were unconcerned with the differences between Thai and English language structure. The following example of an error with articles: "...Some people want to be a Police" shows that there are no articles required before Thai nouns. When the learners created an English sentence, first, they created a sentence in Thai, and then they translated the sentence directly to English.

Consequently, articles were omitted because Thai nouns do not require articles. These results are in accordance with Chalitanon, Niamsiri and Tansakul (2003: 9) who found that interference errors occurred when the mother tongue was transferred to the target language. The results also correspond to Sereebenjapol (2003) who established that the use of articles was the cause of most grammatical errors found in a government university. This reinforces the fact that Thai students have problems with grammar. They do not understand how to use English grammar precisely. In line with Gogoi (2015), the results also reflected the fact that the students used passive vocabulary. This means that the students did not know how to use the words, or what they meant. The students made grammatical errors because they applied second language learning strategies; they applied second language rules without considering that there were some exceptions to those rules.

In addition, it was found that overgeneralization could be a cause of writing errors. After the students were assigned to write a paragraph, they created sentences in their minds. The created sentences were translated directly from Thai to English. Thai verbs always take the same form whether they are used in the present or the past such as I ever hear (instead of heard) this sentence from the internet... This shows that the students were unconcerned about verb tenses when they wrote. This was the third most frequently made error found in the writing samples. This is in agreement with Sangwirach (1995: 21-22) who noticed that overgeneralization occurred when the form of the verb was in the wrong tense. This happened when students used structure carelessly. They created strategies to apply to unfamiliar situations. From the interview, the students wanted teachers to explain tenses, conjunctions, and vocabulary because they did not have enough knowledge of these elements. They got confused when using grammar because of the dissimilarities between Thai and English. Besides, the students were unconcerned that English verb forms were more various than Thai verb forms. Although there are tense markers in Thai sentences, the form of verb remains the unchanged. Conversely, English verb forms vary, depending on the tense.

Focusing on the structure, from 380 errors, 50 errors were related to sentence fragments. This was the second most common error found in the written samples. For example, students often started their simple sentences with "Because". They did not know that the conjunction could not be used in a simple sentence. From the interview, the students explained that, sometimes, Thai sentences did not require a subject. Besides, there is no full stop at the end of Thai sentences. When the students wrote sentences, they

translated immediately from Thai to English. These results are consistent with Selinker (1972) who ascertained that Language Transfer was a cause of errors. The students did not have enough knowledge of English sentence structure. As a result, they tried to produce English language sentences by applying Thai structural rules. The students did not show knowledge of English structure in their writing; they thought in Thai and wrote English in a Thai way. Apart from sentence fragments, the students also produced a few run-on sentences (Pengpanich, 1986). They did not know how to separate ideas because Thai sentences do not require a full stop to separate complete thoughts. The results show that Thai students were influenced by their mother tongue. They wrote sentence after sentence without full stops, as they did when writing in Thai. The Mother tongue significantly influenced their writing output. These errors occurred due to the differences between L1 and L2, as shown in the table below.

Table 3: Differences between Thai and English

Thai	English
1. No articles before nouns	1. Requires articles before nouns
2. No need to change the verb tense	2. Needs to change verb tense
3. Omits the subject in some sentences	3. Requires a subject in a sentence
4. No subject-verb agreement	(English subjects can be omitted in a clause)
5. Singular nouns and plural nouns have the same forms.	4. Subjects must agree with verbs
6. The use of punctuation is not as varied as English	5. Singular nouns and plural nouns have different forms
7. No capitalization	6. Punctuation is used often
8. Word arrangement in Noun Phrases (head nouns are initially followed by modifiers)	7. Needs capitalization
	8. Word arrangement in Noun Phrases (modifiers come before head nouns)

The Mother Tongue Interference can affect either negative or positive way on writing. It would be good, if the positive effects were applied. A wrong word order can occur in case the students applied the Interference negatively such as placing adjective after a modified noun. Selinkker (1972) referred to interlingual/transfer errors as the negative interference from the learner's first language habits. For example many EFL learners think in their first language and they used direct translation when they speak and write in L2.

The least frequently found error was with spelling, consisting of capitalization and spelling (10.53%). Suthisawaskul (2003) acknowledged that vocabulary was the foundation of language learning. To learn a language efficiently, it is essential to have knowledge of vocabulary. The results show that Thai students had the least problems with vocabulary. Misspelling accounted for only 16 out of 380 errors, however, more capitalization errors were found in the writing samples. The students indicated that Thai words did not require capital letters at the beginning of sentences, or for proper nouns. This confirms that first language interference influenced their writing. The Thai learners wrote English sentences in the same way that they wrote Thai sentences, and they did not use active vocabulary. They knew the meaning of the word but they did not know how to use it. The students also had spelling problems, which resulted from similar sounding letters. For example, inspyration instead of inspiration. Spelling was influenced by mispronunciation. The students tended to spell the words according to the way they pronounced them, and they tended to misspell the words according to the mispronunciation.

Finally, 31 errors were made with punctuation; for example: *...the answer is, () I want to be a rich people. and When I was young. (,) I always hear the question "What you want to be"*. These examples show that the students used incorrect punctuation rules or forgot to insert punctuation marks when they were needed. These results correspond with Norrish (1983) who pointed out that punctuation errors occur when non-native speakers learn English. The students said that they did not apply any punctuation rules while they were writing English sentences because writing in Thai did not require the use of commas and full stops. The results suggest that Thai students do not have enough exposure of English punctuation rules to enable accurate use. The students did not acknowledge that Thai and English punctuation rules are used differently. For example, full stops and commas are not necessary for writing in Thai. The cause was that the students had not mastered the correct use of punctuation. Therefore, they could not apply the rules correctly. The major causes of errors in this current study were 1) the interference of the mother language especially when they translated their mother tongue to the target language. 2) Applying of the second language learning Strategies which was counted when they applied the second language rules without thinking of the exception of the rules. 3) Overgeneralization which occurred when they put the wrong verb tenses and verb forms. As for the rest, difficulty in word choice in many types of phrase and clauses also come into play. Semantically, the wrong word choices in their writing mislead the readers. In addition, some participants wrote

very little, and this might be explained by their limited vocabulary. They could not think of appropriate words and phrases to express their ideas. Some students' writing samples were very short because they did not have too much exposure in English writing. The lack of fluency in writing also increased the difficulty to comprehend students' writing samples

6. Conclusion

1. The learners' errors are very important as they provide "insight into how far a learner has progressed in acquiring a language and showing how much more the learner needs to learn" (Ringbom, 1987: 69). Making errors are a normal language developmental process, so students' errors are great sources for improving teaching and learning. Consequently, teachers should not labels students based on their errors in writing. Namely, students' effort of trying should be praised, and teachers should encourage students to engage writing for different purposes in order to language in the different contexts.

2. Teachers of English should explain the differences between Thai and English while students are studying to make them more aware of their errors. Teachers should also give the students a basic knowledge of English to build a solid foundation for further learning. In order to minimize or eliminate the errors in writing of Thai students, the students have to learn and analyze their own errors. Then the students have to correct their own mistakes. The instructors can play the important role in this stage to advise and explain some grammar points and structure to them. The instructors have to focus on the students individually by giving them the correct information of the English structure and grammar rules. As a language learner, the qualities of a good writer are following the grammar rules of Standard English precisely, focusing on correct spelling, and incorporating the most suitable and accurate word

3. This current study would like to highlight that these errors have positive indications for language teachers and researchers. For teaching purposes, teachers need to design activities for areas needed for improvement. Teachers should keep in mind that overemphasis on errors can frustrate learners' motivation. Teachers could use these errors in class and revise the teaching activities. For students, we should allow students to learn when they are ready. In the classroom, teachers should be able to provide corrective feedbacks in a non-threatening way (e.g., recast, paraphrase, positive feedbacks) in order to raise learners' awareness to correct themselves. Teachers also should be able to model the complete sentence and lexical use in order to provide students more exposure in using English.

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