

การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดในงานเขียนย่อหน้าภาษาอังกฤษของนิสิตไทย

ERROR ANALYSIS IN ENGLISH PARAGRAPH WRITINGS

OF THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาข้อผิดพลาดและสาเหตุของข้อผิดพลาดในงานเขียนย่อหน้าภาษาอังกฤษ จำนวน 116 ชิ้น ของนิสิตสาขาการจัดการโลจิสติกส์ คณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยเกษตรศาสตร์ วิทยาเขตศรีราชา ผลการศึกษาพบข้อผิดพลาดในงานเขียนจำนวน 664 ข้อ แบ่งออกเป็น 6 กลุ่ม โดยความผิดรูปแบบเป็นข้อผิดพลาดที่พบมากที่สุด รองลงมา ได้แก่ ข้อผิดพลาดอื่น การคัดคำออก การเสริมคำ การแทนที่คำ และการผิดพลาดทับ ผลการวิเคราะห์ยังพบว่าสาเหตุของข้อผิดพลาดในงานเขียนส่วนใหญ่เกิดจากการละเลยหรือไม่ใส่ใจในกฎเกณฑ์มากที่สุด รองลงมาคือการใช้กฎเกณฑ์ไม่ครบถ้วนสมบูรณ์ ความเข้าใจผิดในกฎเกณฑ์ การสร้างหลักเกณฑ์เกิน และการแทรกแซงทางภาษา ตามลำดับ

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Abstract

This research examined errors and causes of the errors in 116 English paragraph writings of the students majoring in the Logistics Management at the Faculty of Management Sciences, Kasetsart University, Sri-racha Campus. The results of the study indicated six groups of 664 writing errors. Errors of misformation were the most frequent, followed by errors of others, omission, addition, substitution, and misordering. The analysis also revealed that most writing errors were caused by ignorance of rule restrictions, followed by incomplete application of rules, false concepts hypothesized, overgeneralization, and interlanguage respectively.

Keywords: error analysis, English writing, writing at the paragraph level

Introduction

Of the four language skills, Davies and Widdowson (1974) noted that writing is the most difficult to acquire due to the fact that a written language is not just a written representation of a spoken language. Since writing involves both a process and a product, a written product is an outcome of the process in thinking, drafting, and revising. This writing process which can be taught also requires a set of an individual's competencies different from those of the speaking skill (Brown, 2001: 335).

Since a language is what an individual learns and uses, Bartram and Walton (2001: 5-10) indicated that teaching will enable students to learn a language. Apart from that learning is the long-term nature of language learning, learning a second or foreign language is a highly individual experience in which each student differently learns and uses a language as a practical skill. As writing is a learned behavior, each student differently learns to use English as he writes for a good writer is said to be a good language user.

In learning a language, students unavoidably commit errors which are natural and part of the learning process (Bartram & Walton, 2001). Corder (1974), Corder (1981), and Sobahle (1986) indicated that errors are significant for they tell a teacher how far a learner has progressed and what remains for him to learn. Errors are evidences of how a language is acquired and what strategies a learner is using in learning the language. Moreover, making errors is the way a learner uses to test his hypotheses about the nature of the language he is learning. A learner's errors are not random mistakes but evidences of rule-governed behavior.

To examine errors, Lado (1988) suggested that by comparing a native language and a target language, we can find out what makes things easy and difficult for a learner. This hypothesis is known as contrastive analysis (CA) which claims interference of the first language on the second or foreign language as the main obstacle to language learning and the reason for a learner's errors. Contrarily, Richards (1974) proposed the notion of error analysis (EA) by reasoning that not all errors are the result of interference. Since a learner has his own learning order, he will bring upon himself the errors, and the sources of errors are found within the structure of a language itself or the way it is taught. Whereas the contrastive analysis examines only interlingual errors, the error analysis studies both intralingual and interlingual errors.

Coaching students to write as well as providing them feedbacks is a crucial role of writing teachers. In this study, the researcher realized the significance in examining students' writing errors and causes of the errors. Using the error analysis, the researcher aimed to understand students' difficulties in English writing. As writing errors indicate how students learn and use English, the results of the study will enable the researcher to implement appropriate methods in teaching and guiding students to be more efficient writers.

Research Objectives

This study examined errors and analyzed causes of the errors in English paragraph writings of the students majoring in the Logistics Management at the Faculty of Management Sciences, Kasetsart University, Sri-racha Campus.

Methodology

1. Population and Sample

The population involved 138 students of the Logistics Management at the Faculty of Management Sciences, Kasetsart University, Sri-racha Campus. Enrolling in the English writing courses of the academic years 2014 to 2016, these students learnt to write paragraphs based on narration, description, and exposition. They also practiced identifying and correcting their writing errors.

In the last class of each course, all students were asked to participate in the study by writing paragraphs expressing opinions on various topics. Of all 138 students, there were 116 participants who willingly handed in their papers. Thus, these 116 paragraph writings were the sample of this study.

2. Data Collection

The sample of 116 paragraphs written by 116 students in the English writing courses of the academic years 2014 to 2016 was collected in this study. The collected data were the students' last class assignments in which they expressed their opinions on different topics such as working a part-time job, talking on a cell phone while driving, learning a foreign or second language, and drunk driving. The students were given enough time to write in a classroom before their paragraphs were collected and used in error analysis.

3. Data Analysis

Brown's (2000) and Dulay, Burt, & Krashen's (cited by Zheng & Park, 2013) propositions were adopted in spotting 6 types of writing errors. *Errors of addition* is the presence of an unnecessary word or item in a well-

formed sentence. *Errors of omission* is the absence of a necessary word or item in a well-formed sentence. *Errors of substitution* is the wrong usage of a word or item in a well-formed sentence. *Errors of misordering* is the wrong order of a word or item in a well-formed sentence. *Errors of misformation* is the wrong form of a word or structure in a well-formed sentence. *Errors of others* include awkward sentences, fragmentary sentences, run-on sentences, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

Richards' (1974) and Brown's (2000) concepts were used to analyze causes of the writing errors. *Overgeneralization* is the occurrence of an unusual structure in which a learner creates in place of two regular structures in a target language. For examples, "He can sings." and "We are hope." *Ignorance of rule restrictions* is the failure to notice the restrictions of existing structures. A learner applies a certain rule to a context where it does not. For instances, "I made him to do it." and "She has arrived at home yesterday." *Incomplete application of rules* is the failure to achieve complete knowledge or grammatical rules of a foreign or second language, thus resulting to production of unacceptable sentences or structures. For examples, "You read much?" and "When you will come to the meeting?" *False concept hypothesized* is the faulty rule-learning or faulty comprehension of distinctions in a target language. For instances, "One day, it was happened." and "She was finished homework." *Interlanguage* is the interference of a native language in a target language.

Regarding the examination, all the writing errors were categorized and ranked in terms of frequency and percentage according to their types and causes of errors. For the accuracy of data analysis, two English experts were asked to attest for the identification of writing errors and determination of sources of the writing errors.

Results of the Study

1. Identification of Errors

Of 664 writing errors, students most frequently committed 296 errors of misformation (44.58%), followed by 159 errors of others (23.95%), 88 errors of omission (13.25%), 72 errors of addition (10.84%), 45 errors of substitution (6.78%), and 4 errors of misordering (0.60%) respectively.

For the misformation, 296 errors of wrong word forms or structures were found. The most frequent were singular or plural nouns (39.86%), subject-verb agreement (15.20%), and participial phrases (6.42%). Others included infinitives or gerunds, verbs after modals, nouns, articles, adjectives, and wrong forms or tenses. The examples were as follows.

These are the reason. (“Reasons” is the correct noun.)

It increase the risk of death. (“Increases” is the correct verb.)

People talk on cell phones have high accidents. (“Talking on cell phones” is the correct participial phrase.)

The results detected 159 errors of others. The most frequent errors involved capitalization (34.59%), fragmentary sentences (31.45%), and spelling (16.35%). The rest of the errors were awkward sentences, punctuation, and run-on sentences. Below were the samples.

Third, They have money. (The lower case is correct.)

Because many children spend time watching TV. (It is a subordinate clause. The main clause is needed.)

Chidren do nothing. (“Children” is the correct spelling.)

Students committed 88 errors of omission in which a necessary word or item was absent in a sentence. Missing articles (42.05%), missing verbs to be (13.64%), and missing prepositions (12.50%) were the most frequent errors.

Others included missing modals, missing subjects, missing conjunctions, and missing objects. The following sentences illustrated the errors.

Third, \wedge part-time job gives them money. (“A” is missing.)

Our lives \wedge precious. (“Are” is missing.)

We talk \wedge a phone. (“On” is missing.)

For the addition of an unnecessary word in a sentence, there were 72 errors. The most frequent were added verbs to be (41.67%), added prepositions (20.83%), and added articles before plural nouns (13.89%). Others were added articles before uncountable nouns, added verbs, and added conjunctions. The samples were shown in these sentences.

They can be use money. (“Be” is not needed.)

A part-time job gives them of money. (“Of” is unnecessary.)

Children who play games can solve the problem better than a children who don't. (“A” is not needed.)

Students did 45 errors of substitution using wrong words (62.22%) most frequently, followed by wrong prepositions (35.56%) and wrong modal verb (2.22%). Following were the sample errors.

Adolescents are more likely to smoke and use alcohol. (“Drink” is the correct word.)

They feel tired in time to study. (“Of” is the correct preposition.)

Children could be able to compete if they play games well.

(“Will” is the correct modal verb.)

Only 4 errors regarding misordering of a word or item were found in the following sentences.

They don't have money enough to support their baby.

(They don't have enough money to support their baby.) ✓

It takes time to go to work less.

(It takes less time to go to work.) ✓

We can ask for them help.

(We can ask them for help.) ✓

Games make children feel relaxed from work hard.

(Games make children feel relaxed from hard work.) ✓

2. Determination of the Sources of Errors

Of 664 writing errors, the results indicated that most 309 errors (46.54%) were caused by ignorance of rule restrictions. The rest of the errors were resulted from incomplete application of rules (137 errors = 20.63%), false concepts hypothesized (97 errors = 14.61%), overgeneralization (70 errors = 10.54%), and interlanguage (51 errors = 7.68%) consecutively.

Due to ignorance of rule restrictions, 309 errors were found concerning mostly to singular or plural nouns (38.19%), capitalization (17.80%), and subject-verb agreement (14.56%). Students also neglected the rule restrictions relating to nouns, articles, tenses, and pronouns. The sample errors were as follows.

Students can buy many book. (“Many” must be followed by the plural noun “books”.)

Most people use english in communication. (“English” must be capitalized for it is a proper noun.)

Most games that children play is violent. (The plural verb “are” must be used with the plural noun “games”.)

There were 137 errors caused by incomplete application of rules. Since students incompletely applied certain rules, errors of missing articles (27%), participial phrases (13.87%), and infinitives or gerunds (11.68) were the most frequent. Others concerned missing verbs to be, missing prepositions, missing

subjects, and missing conjunctions. The samples were illustrated in the following sentences.

It is ^ medium for communication. (“A” is needed.)

It is a standard language use in trademarks. (“Used in trademarks” is the correct participial phrase.)

Parents who work may need contact their children. (The main verb “need” must be followed by the infinitive “to contact”.)

Students did 97 errors resulted from false concept hypothesized or faulty comprehension of distinctions in a target language. The most frequent errors were fragmentary sentences (51.55%) and wrong words (28.87%). Below were the samples.

If children play games well. (Without a main clause, this subordinate clause is incomplete.)

You can use the language to register for a work. (“Apply” and “job” are the appropriate words.)

There were 70 errors due to overgeneralization. Unusual structures occurred with added verbs to be (42.86%) and added prepositions (17.14%) as the most frequent errors. The samples were shown below.

They are lack concentration to learn.

Scientists shouldn't be use animals in researches.

(“Verbs to be” are being overgeneralized in these structures “Subject + main verb...” and “Subject + helping verb + main verb...”)

Most of people know a native language only. (“Most of the + noun” and “most + noun” are being overgeneralized in this sentence.)

Thai ban people who use of cell phones while driving. (“The use of + noun” and “use + noun” are being overgeneralized in the sentence.)

Of 51 errors caused by interlanguage, students most frequently did awkward sentences (37.25%) and wrong prepositions (31.37%) interfered by their native language. Below were the examples.

English language increases a chance to get a good job.

(ภาษาอังกฤษเพิ่มโอกาสในการได้งานที่ดี)

Second, if we have English skills can help us to have a higher salary.

(หากเรามีทักษะภาษาอังกฤษจะช่วยให้เรามีเงินเดือนสูง)

We should ask a person who lives there by English.

(เราควรถามคนที่อยู่ที่นั่นด้วยภาษาอังกฤษ)

They feel tired in time to study.

(พวกเขารู้สึกเหนื่อยในเวลาที่ยี่เรียน)

Discussions

Corder (1974) and Brown (2000) noted that in language learning, learners will inevitably make errors which are clues of their learning process. In this study, over 600 writing errors of all types were detected, especially the errors of misformation. These indicate students’ main writing problems in using correct forms of English words or structures. Hence, in the next class, teachers may need to spend more time with the students in reviewing grammatical structures, showing more examples, and doing more exercises.

In this study, the most frequent errors were singular or plural nouns, capitalization, subject-verb disagreement, wrong words, fragmentary sentences, missing articles, added verbs to be, awkward sentences, and infinitives or gerunds. The results were consistent to the study of Promsupa, Varasarin, &

Brudhiprabha (2017) which revealed that most Thai university students made errors relating to singular/plural forms and articles. Meanwhile, Mahamongkol (2007) noted that nouns usage, wrong word choice, verb-tense consistency, articles, sentence fragments, and gerund were the most frequent errors committed by Thai students. These overall findings enable teachers to perceive students' exact problems to be solved or emphasized when teaching.

In this study, students mostly committed errors of singular/plural nouns, subject-verb agreement, participial phrases, infinitives or gerunds, verbs after modals, nouns, articles, and main verbs. Wu and Garza (2014) indicated that Taiwanese students had the greatest English writing problems in subject-verb agreement, sentence fragment, singular/plural, missing verbs, word choice, and use of articles. Zheng and Park (2013) detected the errors in English essays of Chinese and Korean university students such as the use of tenses, selection of accurate verbs and nouns, usage of prepositions and articles, subject-verb agreement, inflection of verbs, and plural forms. Moreover, Sun and Shang (2010) discovered similar English writing errors of Chinese and Thai students such as subject-verb agreement, wrong usage, and ambiguous sentence. Thus, it could be said that Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Thai students tend to commit similar errors of subject-verb agreement, nouns, verbs, and articles. The reason could be that in their languages, including Thai, there are no grammatical rules of singular or plural nouns and verbs, and the use of articles before nouns.

For the sources of errors, in this study, errors of singular or plural nouns and subject-verb agreement were caused by students' ignorance of rule restrictions. Although in each class, the students were given grammatical reviews and exercises on these errors before writing a paragraph, they were still found to ignore the main rules in changing a singular countable noun to a plural countable noun by adding "s" or "es". They also neglected the rules of subject-verb agreement in which they have to add "s" or "es" to a verb used with

a singular noun of the present simple tense. However, according to Bennui (2008) and Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013), these errors of singular or plural nouns and subject-verb agreement could also be caused by interference of the native language. In Thai language, nouns and verbs have no singular or plural forms. No “s” or “es” is added to any nouns or verbs. Nouns and verbs have no tense forms. The same forms of nouns and verbs are used in all tenses.

For the errors due to overgeneralization, students were found to create unusual structures such as “Students should be get a part-time job.” and “They are lack concentration to learn.” According to Richard (1974) and Brown (2000), overgeneralization occurs when a learner acts within a target language beyond legitimate rules. Overgeneralization is the negative counterpart of intralingual transfer in which a learner creates a deviant structure in place of two regular structures in a target language. Thus, “Students should be get a part-time job.” is the overgeneralization of “Students should be” and “Students should get”. Putting “be” before the main verb “get” is a negative intralingual transfer.

The results of the study revealed that besides students' own errors, they were also found to commit errors due to interference of Thai language such as awkward sentences and wrong prepositions. These findings were conformed to the studies of Promsupa et al. (2017) and Sermsook, Liamnimitr, & Pochakorn (2017) in which both interlanguage and intralanguage were regarded as the main causes of students' writing errors. The interlingual errors existed when the students use their L1 knowledge in learning the target language. The intralingual errors occurred due to the students' own learning difficulties with the target language.

Suggestions

The results of the study indicated influences of Thai language as well as students' own difficulties in English writing. Writing teachers should discuss these problems in class for the students to recognize and overcome their weaknesses or lessen writing errors they usually commit. Since the process in learning English writing is different from that of Thai language, the results of this study will thus enable writing teachers to design appropriate lessons, implement suitable teaching or learning methods, and focus on the parts that need to be reinforced for the students' improvement in writing skills.

For the future study, error analysis in English writings of students in other fields of study is suggested. A comparison of writing errors committed by students of different fields of study is also necessary. To gain more details of students' learning process and writing problems, an in-depth interview is also recommended.

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