A Comparison of Grammatical Errors Made by Thai EFL Undergraduate Students in Different Types of Essays

การเปรียบเทียบข้อผิดพลาดด้านการใช้ไวยากรณ์ของนักศึกษาไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศจากเรียงความประเภทต่างกัน

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Abstract

This study aimed to enhance the writing proficiency of Thai EFL students by investigating the types and causes of grammatical errors made by Thai EFL undergraduate students across various essay types. This research examined four types of essays: a balanced opinion essay, an explanatory essay, a point-counterpoint essay, and an analysis essay. Fifteen students participated in this study, and a total of 60 essays were collected for analysis. The findings revealed that sentence fragment errors were most prevalent in explanatory essays. The misuse of nouns was most frequent in balanced opinion essays while subject-verb agreement mistakes had the highest occurrences in point-counterpoint essays. Spelling errors were the most common mistake in analysis essays. In terms of the causes, these grammatical errors may have stemmed from a combination of interlingual and intralingual interference. This study emphasizes the importance of Thai EFL instructors thoroughly understanding the distinctive features of each essay genre, and equipping students with a solid grasp of grammatical rules. Specific attention should be given to recurring grammatical errors including sentence fragments, the use of nouns, subject-verb agreement, and spelling when teaching essay writing to Thai EFL undergraduate students.

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อเพิ่มความสามารถในการเขียนของนักศึกษาไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ โดยการศึกษาประเภทและสาเหตุของข้อผิดพลาดด้านการใช้ไวยากรณ์ในเรียงความประเภทต่าง ๆ งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการเขียนเรียงความ 4 ประเภท ได้แก่ การเขียนเชิงแสดงความคิดเห็นที่สมดุล การเขียนเชิงอธิบาย การเขียนเชิงโน้มน้าวแสดงประเด็นข้อแตกต่าง และการเขียนเชิงวิเคราะห์ นักศึกษาจำนวน 15 คนเข้าร่วมในการศึกษานี้ และผู้วิจัยได้วิเคราะห์งานเขียนเรียงความรวมทั้งสิ้น 60 เรื่อง ผลการวิจัยพบว่าข้อผิดพลาดในส่วนของประโยคพบมากที่สุดในเรียงความเชิงอธิบาย การใช้คำนามผิดพบมากที่สุดในเรียงความเชิงแสดงความคิดเห็นที่สมดุล ข้อผิดพลาดเรื่องการใช้ประธาน-กริยาให้สอดคล้องกันพบมากที่สุดในเรียงความเชิงโน้มน้าวที่แสดงประเด็นข้อแตกต่าง และข้อผิดพลาดเรื่องการสะกดคำพบมากที่สุดในเรียงความเชิงวิเคราะห์ นอกจากนี้ เมื่อวิเคราะห์สาเหตุของการใช้ไวยากรณ์ผิดพลาดในการเขียนเรียงความดังกล่าว อาจเกิดจากการแทรกแซงของภาษาแม่และอันตรภาษา งานวิจัยนี้เน้นให้เห็นความสำคัญต่อผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศชาวไทยในการทำความเข้าใจลักษณะเฉพาะของเรียงความแต่ละประเภทอย่างถ่องแท้และการสอนหลักไวยากรณ์แก่ผู้เรียนให้เข้าใจอย่างชัดเจน และควรให้ความสำคัญต่อข้อผิดพลาดของการใช้ไวยากรณ์ที่เกิดซ้ำ ๆ เช่น ส่วนของประโยค การใช้คำนาม การใช้ประธาน-กริยาให้สัมพันธ์กัน และการสะกดคำ เมื่อสอนเขียนเรียงความให้กับนักศึกษาไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

คำสำคัญ: การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด, ประเภทของการเขียน, ข้อผิดพลาดด้านการใช้ไวยากรณ์, นักศึกษาไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

Introduction

In Thailand, acquiring writing skills is necessary at the university level. All Thai EFL undergraduates are required to enroll in numerous writing courses which focus on writing sentences, paragraphs, and essays. Moreover, it is essential for them to study different types of writing in order to be able to communicate in different contexts. This requirement aims to equip them with writing skills to prepare them for their future career. For example, Thai EFL engineering students need to learn technical writing in order to write work instructions (Ueasiriphan & Tangkiengsirisin, 2019).

Writing is different from other skills as it demands accuracy and clear exposition (Hyland, 2003). Thai EFL undergraduates are required to write essays, and when they write, they need to

make a decision on their writing styles (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017) and have a complex thought to write a well-organized essay (Asari & Maruf, 2022). In addition, they need to focus on the language use when they write different types of essays (Asari & Maruf, 2022). For example, they need to use articles, prepositions, tenses, commas, etc. correctly to make their essays accurate and comprehensible. Without a high degree of accuracy, it might be difficult for readers to comprehend and grasp the writers' intended message.

Being able to use grammatical rules correctly plays a significant role in writing accuracy. However, grammatical errors are considered to be the biggest obstacle that students encounter (Saengboon, 2017). It has been found that Thai EFL undergraduate students have writing difficulties due to English grammatical rules which are different from Thai language (Kampookaew, 2020; Khumphee & Yodkamlue, 2017; Patarapongsanti et al., 2022; Sermsook et al., 2017; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). Therefore, this study aimed to examine the types of grammatical errors and the causes of those errors in Thai EFL undergraduate students' different types of essays as it is important for them to study different types of writing and use grammatical rules correctly. The findings can be used as the guideline for EFL teachers to solve problems regarding grammatical errors in essay writing.

This study aimed at finding answers to the following questions:

1. What are the types of grammatical errors that Thai EFL undergraduate students make in different types of essays?

2. What are the causes of grammatical errors in Thai EFL undergraduate students' different types of essays?

Review of Literature

Different Types of Essays

An essay refers to the most common type of academic writing that students need to write based on the writing prompt given by the teacher (Bailey, 2011). It is necessary for EFL undergraduate students to acquire essay writing skills as it constitutes a basic foundation essential for them to reach their full academic potential. They should practice writing different types of

essays in order to be able to write other types of academic writing (e.g., a dissertation, a thesis) in the future.

According to Westbrook et al. (2019), there are many types of essays, such as a balanced opinion essay, an explanatory essay, a point-counterpoint essay, and an analysis essay. Each type of essay has its own purposes and different language focus, which is presented in Table 1 below.

Types of essays	Purposes	Language focus
Balanced opinion essay	To give two sides of an argument	Verb and noun forms
Explanatory essay	To explain a topic	Prepositional phrases with advantages and disadvantages
Point-counterpoint essay	To give arguments and evidence to support the writer's opinion	Counter-arguments
Analysis essay	To interpret information	Describing graphs using noun and verb phrases

Table 1. Characteristics of four types of essays

When students are asked to write a *balanced opinion essay*, they must give their opinions about two opposite propositions and provide two arguments to support their opinions (Walls, n.d.). To develop each argument, they have to give explanation and examples. On the other hand, when students are required to write an *explanatory essay*, they have to provide information of something based on the topic in a clear and concise way (University of Texas System, 2012). This type of essay is totally different from a balanced opinion essay since students do not need to provide arguments for and against a particular viewpoint. Students are commonly asked to write an explanatory essay about the benefits and drawbacks of something, such as renewable energy sources, the gig economy, etc. (John, 2023). Additionally, when students are asked to write a *point-counterpoint essay*, they need to give a strong position on an issue in order to persuade readers to agree with their point of view (Ristow, 2023; Westbrook et al., 2019). It is important to provide reliable and accurate evidence (e.g., facts, reasons, statistics) to support their argument. In addition, when students are required to write an *analysis essay*, they are expected to analyze the information within the context of the provided data. For instance, when students are asked to write an analysis essay on a graph, they have to understand and interpret facts, reasons, or

statistics depicted within the graph (Westbrook et al., 2019). This type of essay is similar to a point-counterpoint essay because facts, reasons, or statistics play a crucial role in the text.

In conclusion, each type of essay has different writing goals. Some types of essays focus on explaining something, whereas others focus on using facts, reasons, or statistics to support the writer's point of view. It is important for students to practice writing different types of essays and learn to use appropriate, correct grammar points to make the text clear and convincing (Aquino-Cutcher et al., 2016).

Error Analysis

Error analysis (EA) is a linguistic analysis of errors produced by L2 learners (Gass et al., 2013). Since L2 learners develop their own systems of making errors as they progress toward proficiency in a new language, EA can serve as a method to examine and understand those errors (Yilmaz & Demir, 2020). It can be used to investigate the sources and the causes of those errors, especially frequent ones, which leads to remediating and further pedagogical intervention (Sompong, 2013).

Some prominent models (e.g., Corder's (1974) model and Gass et al.'s (2013) model) have been employed by many scholars in order to conduct an error analysis in the classroom. According to Corder (1974, as cited in Chaudary & Moya, 2019) there are five steps for researchers to conduct an error analysis. This model consists of the stages of collecting, identifying, describing, explaining, and evaluating errors. Two taxonomies are used in the third step (description) including a linguistic taxonomy and a surface structure taxonomy. In addition to Corder's model of error analysis, Gass et al. (2013) suggested a six-step model for error analysis. The first step is collecting data. Researchers can collect written or spoken data from learners' L2 production. The second step is identifying errors which can be in various kinds, such as wrong verb form, incorrect tenses, etc. The third step is classifying errors. Each error can be classified into different categories, such as grammar, mechanics, sentence structure, etc. The fourth step is quantifying errors. In this step, researchers count all errors made by learners. The fifth step is analyzing source, and the last step is remediating. After researchers find sources of errors, pedagogical intervention should be suggested.

Research on EA has been conducted by EFL researchers around the world in order to enhance language learning. It has been found that learners always make errors in L2 production, so research on EA has been popular to the present time (Sompong, 2013). Research studies on this area are both interesting and beneficial because they present how language is learned in different dimensions. Teachers can also learn from learners' systems of L2 production (Chaudary & Moya, 2019) which cause errors and may lead to miscommunication.

Common Types of Grammatical Errors in Writing among Thai EFL Undergraduate Students

Many research studies have found that Thai EFL undergraduate students make common types of grammatical errors. Four research studies (Kampookaew, 2020; Khumphee & Yodkamlue, 2017; Patarapongsanti et al., 2022; Sermsook et al., 2017) shown in Table 2 below sought to identify these common types of errors. Participants in all four studies share identical participant characteristics; that is, they were Thai EFL undergraduate students who enrolled in a writing course. The participants in the studies of Khumphee and Yodkamlue (2017), Sermsook et al. (2017), and Kampookaew (2020) were second-year undergraduate students who enrolled in an academic writing course, whereas the participants in the study of Patarapongsanti et al. (2022) were third-year undergraduate students who enrolled in a paragraph writing course.

Each of the four research studies presents a different list of error types, with important similarities and differences between them. All four studies identified punctuation, nouns, prepositions, articles, and sentence fragments as error types appearing in Thai EFL undergraduate students' writing tasks. However, three types of errors (i.e., infinitives/gerunds, subject-verb agreement, and capitalization) were found in only three of the studies. Another four error types (i.e., verb forms, pronouns, run-on sentences, and spelling) were found in two of the research studies. Three types of errors including voice, spacing, and conjunctions were found in only one research study.

The differences between the studies might be because of the different frameworks used in the analysis. Khumphee and Yodkamlue (2017) used an analysis framework adapted from Na-ngam's (2005) error taxonomy and Richards' (1971) error categories, whereas Sermsook et al. (2017) classified error types into two groups: the sentential level errors and the word level errors.

Meanwhile, Kampookaew (2020) adapted Norrish's (1983) approach, and Patarapongsanti et al. (2022) followed an analysis framework suggested by Corder (1974, 1975), Palmberg (1980), and Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). Overall, 15 error types have been identified in total as the most common within Thai EFL undergraduate students' writing tasks.

Types of grammatical errors	Khumphee & Yodkamlue (2017)	Sermsook et al. (2017)	Kampookaew (2020)	Patarapongsanti et al. (2022)
1. Punctuation	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Nouns	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Prepositions	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Articles	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Sentence fragments	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Infinitives/gerunds	✓	-	✓	✓
7. Subject-verb agreement	✓	✓	✓	-
8. Capitalization	-	✓	✓	✓
9. Verb forms	✓	✓	-	-
10. Pronouns	✓	✓	-	-
11. Run-on sentences	✓	-	✓	-
12. Spelling	-	✓	-	✓
13. Voice	-	-	✓	-
14. Spacing	-	-	-	✓
15. Conjunctions	-	-	-	✓

Table 2. Common types of grammatical errors in writing among Thai EFL undergraduate students

As presented in Table 2, there are 15 types of grammatical errors. According to Mackey and Gass (2005), in case there are many aspects of a large dataset in the table, researchers should discuss only important information. Therefore, in this study, the researchers selected only error types present in at least two out of four research studies, resulting in the exclusion of three error types – voice, spacing, and conjunctions, leaving the first 12 types of errors to be examined.

Causes of Grammatical Errors in EFL Undergraduate Students' Essays

According to previous research (Aisyah & Rahmawati, 2019; Depega & Jufrizal, 2019; Jiang, 2023), grammatical errors found in EFL undergraduate students' essays are based on two sources: interlingual and intralingual interference. Interlingual interference happens when students construct English sentences based on direct translation (Kaweera, 2013). As the native language plays a significant role in learning the target language, students try to use the knowledge of their native language to help them write sentences, and thus they make errors. Moreover, some English words which students directly translate from their native language cannot be used in every context, so students make errors because they do not consider this limitation. Secondly, intralingual interference occurs when students are acquainted with only some rules of the target language (Richards, 1985). There are four types of intralingual interferences: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesis. Overgeneralization refers to the creation of deviant structures based on knowledge students have learned. Ignorance of rule restrictions means that students make use of rules without considering their limitations. Incomplete application of rules means that students misuse some rules when they have to communicate. False concepts hypothesis means that students misunderstand the use of some forms. For example, students produce *she was died yesterday* because they think that *was* is used as the marker of the past tense.

The majority of previous research studies investigated causes of errors made by EFL undergraduate students in a particular essay genre, especially the argumentative essay – a frequently assigned type of writing for undergraduate students (Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020). The study by Aisyah and Rahmawati (2019) investigated the most common types of grammatical errors in argumentative essays made by Indonesian EFL undergraduate students and found that the most common type of grammatical error was the use of articles. This type of error was caused by interlingual interference because Indonesian lacks articles, whereas English contains two types of articles – definite and indefinite articles. They must be used to identify nouns based on different situations. Students might be influenced by their first language, so they were not able to use articles in identifying nouns in particular situations.

Another study in identifying types of grammatical errors made by Indonesian EFL undergraduate students in argumentative essays was conducted by Depega and Jufrizal (2019).

Their findings reveal that the most frequent type of error was subject-verb agreement. This type of error was caused by intralingual interference due to false concepts hypothesis. For example, students might have a misconception when they use two verbs to be (e.g., is, are) with two different kinds of subjects (e.g., singular and plural nouns). Additionally, Jiang (2023) investigated the main types of grammatical errors made by Chinese EFL undergraduate students in argumentative essays. After collecting the essays, it was found that the main type of grammatical error students made was the use of nouns; that is, students used the wrong noun forms. For instance, they used a singular form instead of a plural form. This type of error was caused by interlingual interference since nouns in Chinese are not changed into singular and plural forms. In contrast, in English, two forms of nouns must be used based on types of nouns including countable and uncountable nouns. Consequently, students might be influenced by their first language, causing them to overlook the changes of noun forms.

Furthermore, there have been a number of research studies investigating Thai EFL undergraduate students' argumentative writing problems. The study by Ka-kan-dee and Kaur (2014) examined the writing difficulties experienced by Thai EFL English-major students when they wrote argumentative essays. The researchers found that students did not have enough knowledge of the grammatical structure and they had difficulties of L1 transfer. It was difficult for them to write English sentences because they had the cognitive process in Thai. They translated sentences word-by-word to construct each sentence in an essay. In other words, they translated Thai into English directly. The findings of another study conducted by Arihasta (2023) examining Thai EFL undergraduate students' difficulties in argumentative writing reveal that it was difficult for students to use tenses correctly because there is no tense in Thai, while English has various tenses, such as present simple, present continuous, present perfect, and so on. Although there have been numerous research studies investigating causes of errors in an argumentative essay, it is important for EFL researchers to explore other types of essays as well. Therefore, it would be interesting to compare the types of grammatical errors that students make in different types of essays and find the causes of errors found in each type of essays.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers analyzed grammatical errors made by Thai EFL undergraduate students in different types of essays. A quantitative method was used to identify types of grammatical errors on different types of essays, and a qualitative method was used to examine causes of those errors.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 15 second-year undergraduate students who enrolled in *English for Academic Purposes I* offered by the Faculty of Humanities at a government university in Bangkok, Thailand. This course focused on four types of essays including a balanced opinion essay, an explanatory essay, a point-counterpoint essay, and an analysis essay. The participants were required to take this course as part of their bachelor's degree, so they were an intact group of this study. Before this course, they studied *English for Children's Literature* in the same class and received B+ and A grades. Consequently, they were homogenous in terms of their language proficiency.

Data Selection

The researchers used all four types of essays including a balanced opinion essay, an explanatory essay, a point-counterpoint essay, and an analysis essay as part of the instruction for participants. From the four writing tasks, a total of 60 writings by 15 students were collected. In each type of essay, participants were required to write an essay with 250-300 words. They were asked to write essays with the writing prompts adapted from Westbrook et al. (2019) as shown in Table 3.

Types of essays	Writing prompts
Balanced opinion essay	Should universities require students to take physical education classes? Discuss both sides and give your opinion.
Explanatory essay	Choose a new area of technology or invention and discuss its advantages and disadvantages.
Point-counterpoint essay	The fashion industry is harmful to society and the environment. Do you agree or disagree?
Analysis essay	Describe the multiple-line graph comparing revenue from DVD sales and video streaming and explain the data.

Table 3. Writing Prompts

Data Collection

In this writing course, students learned to write four types of essays (balanced opinion essay, explanatory essay, point-counterpoint essay, and analysis essay). They studied a balanced opinion essay as the first lesson. They were given a 3-hour lecture on the essay structure, its special characteristics, and language focus. In a second class session, students were asked to write the first essay, a balanced opinion essay, based on the writing prompt given by the teacher. They had to write and submit the essay in class within two hours. After students completed the essay, they received indirect feedback from the instructor. Similar procedures were followed for the other three essays (explanatory essay, point-counterpoint essay, and analysis essay). As a result, from the four writing prompts, the researchers collected 60 writing tasks from 15 students in total.

Data Analysis

In this study, the researchers analyzed grammatical errors that the participants made based on the categories used in four research studies of Kampookaew (2020), Khumphee and Yodkamlue (2017), Patarapongsanti et al. (2022), and Sermsook et al. (2017) because participants in those studies shared strong similarities in characteristics as the researchers' participants. Since three error types (i.e., voice, spacing, and conjunctions) were omitted, the researchers counted grammatical errors based on only 12 types including nouns, pronouns, verb forms, subject-verb agreement, infinitive/gerunds, prepositions, articles, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences.

Gass et al. (2013)'s error analysis procedure was employed in this study because it has been widely used in conducting error analyses. The researchers analyzed each of the essay types for 12 types of grammatical errors (Kampookaew, 2020; Khumphee & Yodkamlue, 2017; Patarapongsanti et al., 2022; Sermsook et al., 2017). The percentage of each type of grammatical errors out of the total number of errors was calculated. The grammatical errors in each type of essays were compared in order to test the claims that each type of essays has different types of grammatical errors. The analytical framework is illustrated in Figure 1.
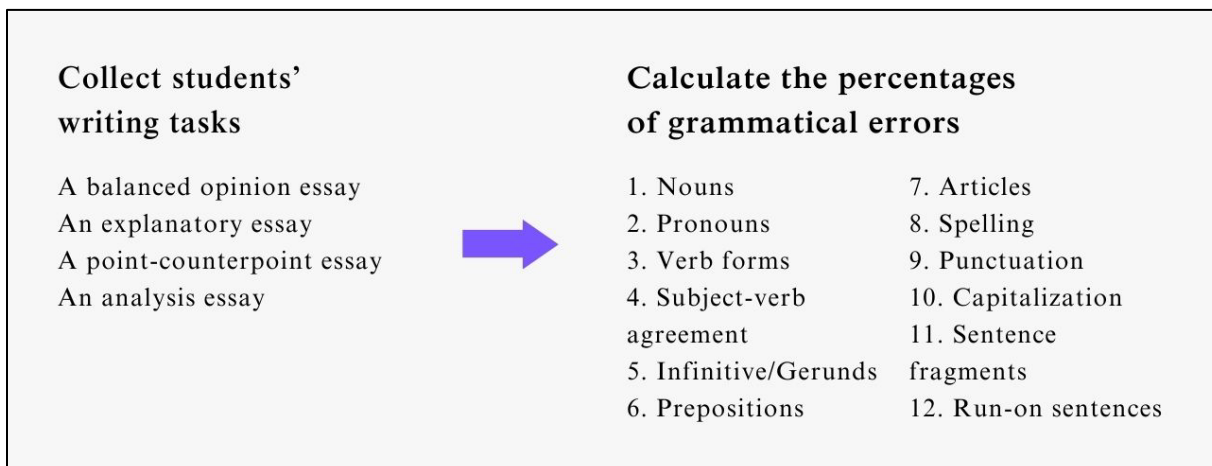

Figure 1. An analytical framework

Results

Research Question 1: Types of Grammatical Errors on Different Types of Essays

1) *A Balanced Opinion Essay*

Students were asked to write a balanced opinion essay about physical education classes. The grammatical errors that students made on this type of essay are shown in Table 4.

Types of grammatical errors	Occurrence	Percentage
Nouns	27	29.35
Subject-verb agreement	11	11.96
Sentence fragments	11	11.96
Capitalization	9	9.78
Verb forms	8	8.70
Spelling	8	8.70
Pronouns	7	7.61
Articles	6	6.52
Prepositions	2	2.17
Punctuation	2	2.17
Infinitive/Gerunds	1	1.09
Run-on sentences	0	0.00
Total	92	100

Table 4. Types of Grammatical Errors on a Balanced Opinion Essay

As shown in Table 4, there were 92 grammatical errors in a balanced opinion essay. Among 12 types of errors, the four most frequent errors were found in the use of nouns (29.35%), subject-verb agreement (11.96%), sentence fragments (11.96%), and capitalization (9.78%), respectively.

2) An Explanatory Essay

Students were asked to write an explanatory essay about a new area of technology or invention. The number of grammatical errors that students made on this type of essay are shown in Table 5.

Types of grammatical errors	Occurrence	Percentage
Sentence fragments	47	51.09
Nouns	18	19.57
Articles	17	18.48
Subject-verb agreement	12	13.04
Verb forms	11	11.96
Capitalization	11	11.96
Punctuation	10	10.87
Pronouns	7	7.61
Infinitive/Gerunds	7	7.61
Prepositions	7	7.61
Spelling	7	7.61
Run-on sentences	1	1.09
Total	155	100

Table 5. Types of Grammatical Errors on an Explanatory Essay

Table 5 shows that there were 155 grammatical errors made by students in an explanatory essay. Errors in sentence fragments and the use of nouns were again found in the top three of the most frequent errors. Students made errors in sentence fragments the most (51.09%), followed by the use of nouns (19.57%) and the use of articles (18.48%), respectively.

3) A Point-Counterpoint Essay

Students were asked to write a point-counterpoint essay on the fashion industry. The grammatical errors that students made on this type of essay are shown in Table 6.

Types of grammatical errors	Occurrence	Percentage
Subject-verb agreement	18	19.57
Nouns	12	13.04
Verb forms	7	7.61
Capitalization	7	7.61
Sentence fragments	7	7.61
Pronouns	6	6.52
Prepositions	6	6.52
Spelling	6	6.52
Articles	4	4.35
Punctuation	4	4.35
Infinitive/Gerunds	3	3.26
Run-on sentences	1	1.09
Total	81	100

Table 6. Types of Grammatical Errors on a Point-Counterpoint Essay

As shown in Table 6, there were 81 grammatical errors in the participants' point-counterpoint essays. Errors in the use of nouns and sentence fragments were still found in the top three of the most common errors. However, students made errors in subject-verb agreement the most (19.57%), followed by the use of nouns (13.04%), verb forms (7.61%), capitalization (7.61%), and sentence fragments (7.61%), respectively.

4) An Analysis Essay

Students were asked to write an analysis essay about revenue from DVD sales and video streaming. Grammatical errors that students made on this type of essay are shown in Table 7.

Types of grammatical errors	Occurrence	Percentage
Spelling	32	34.78
Nouns	16	17.39
Subject-verb agreement	15	16.30
Prepositions	13	14.13
Sentence fragments	13	14.13
Verb forms	9	9.78
Articles	6	6.52
Infinitive/Gerunds	5	5.43
Capitalization	4	4.35
Punctuation	3	3.26
Run-on sentences	2	2.17
Pronouns	1	1.09
Total	**119**	**100**

Table 7. Types of Grammatical Errors on an Analysis Essay

As shown in Table 7, there were 119 grammatical errors in the analysis essays. Errors in the use of nouns were still found in the top three of the most frequent errors. However, students made errors in spelling the most (34.78%), followed by nouns (17.39%), and subject-verb agreement (16.30%), respectively.
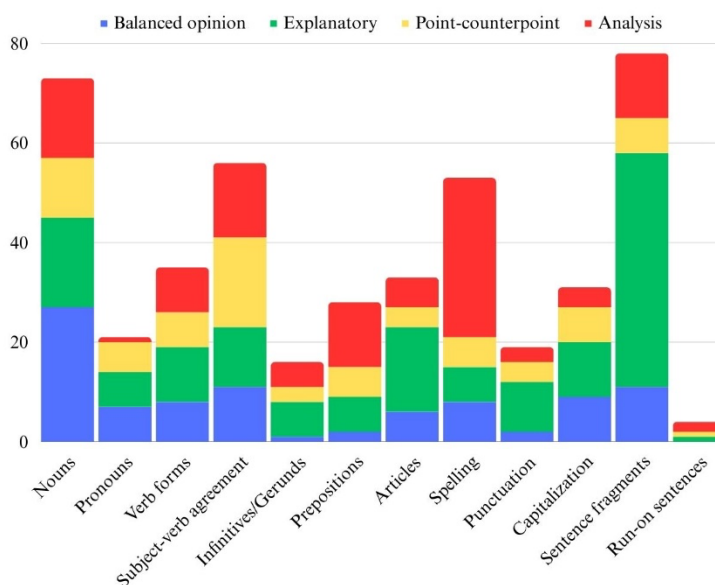

Figure 2. A Comparison of Types of Grammatical Errors Found in Four Types of Essays

According to the findings of this investigation, it can be seen that each type of essay had different numbers of error frequency. The comparison of the types of grammatical errors found in four types of essays is shown in Figure 2. The results show that there were 447 grammatical errors in four types of essays. The top three most frequent errors included 78 errors in sentence fragments (17.45%), 73 errors in the use of nouns (16.33%), and 56 errors in subject-verb agreement (12.53%), respectively.

Research Question 2: Causes of Grammatical Errors on Different Types of Essays

1) *A Balanced Opinion Essay*

For the balanced opinion essay, the examples of the most frequent error type, which is the misuse of nouns, are shown as follows:

Incorrect sentence: These <u>day</u>, <u>universities</u> students have health problems.

Correct sentence: These <u>days</u>, <u>university</u> students have health problems.

In this sentence, there were two errors in nouns. The student used the wrong noun form. In fact, she needed to add -s to show plurality in a countable noun (day). On the contrary, she did not need to add -ies to a word ending with a 'y' preceded by a consonant (university) because this word acts as an adjective to modify *students*.

Incorrect sentence: Not every <u>students</u> are good at sports.

Correct sentence: Not every <u>student</u> is good at sports.

As presented in this example, the student used a plural noun, which is a wrong noun form. In fact, she needed to use a singular noun (student) after *every*, and thus, a singular verb (is) must be used in this sentence.

English has a complicated grammatical system; that is, nouns are divided into singular and plural forms. According to two examples above, the errors in nouns could be classified as an intralingual interference because the students overgeneralized the rules. They might have had limited knowledge about some exceptions to the rules of a plural form. In fact, the rules of a plural form cannot be applied to all situations. The students cannot use a plural form with a noun which acts as an adjective. Moreover, they cannot use a plural form after *every*.

2) *An Explanatory Essay*

For the explanatory essay, the examples of the most frequent error type, which is sentence fragments, are shown as follows:

Incorrect sentence: The main advantage of an e-bike is that <u>safer</u> than a motorcycle.

Correct sentence: The main advantage of an e-bike is that <u>it is safer</u> than a motorcycle.

According to this example, an error was found in the that-clause which is the object of the sentence. The student did not put a noun and a verb before an adjective (safer). In fact, he needed to put a pronoun (it) and a verb to be (is) in order for the sentence to be complete.

Incorrect sentence: A real benefit of an e-bike is that <u>save</u> energy.

Correct sentence: A real benefit of an e-bike is that <u>it saves</u> energy.

In this sentence, there was a sentence fragment. The student did not put a noun before a verb (save) in the that-clause which is the object of the sentence. In fact, he needed to use a pronoun (it), and thus, a singular verb (saves) must be used for the sentence to be correct.

According to the two examples above, errors in sentence fragments that the students made can be divided into two groups: 1) missing a noun (a subject) and 2) missing a verb. All of these errors could be classified as interlingual. Students might have translated those sentences based on L1 context without considering the rules of that-clauses. In Thai, a subject (a noun) can be omitted and a sentence can start with a verb and still be grammatical. However, English does not allow omitting a subject in that-clause. Therefore, the omission of a noun and a verb in a that-clause results in an ungrammatical sentence.

As mentioned earlier, the students made two types of sentence fragment errors. In the case of the student omitting a noun, they might have used a word-for-word translation. In other words, they ignored the rules of that-clauses when they talked about an advantage or a benefit of something. In addition, the student omitted a verb to be before *safer* because he might have thought that *safer* was a verb, and there is no verb to be in Thai. In fact, *safer* is an adjective, so the student cannot omit a verb to be when an adjective is used in a sentence.

3) *A Point-Counterpoint Essay*

For the point-counterpoint essay, the examples of the most frequent error type, which is subject-verb agreement, are shown as follows:

Incorrect sentence: The fashion industry <u>cause</u> too much waste.

Correct sentence: The fashion industry <u>causes</u> too much waste.

As presented in this example, there was an error in subject-verb agreement; that is, the verb 'cause' did not agree with a subject 'the fashion industry'. The student used a plural verb, which is a wrong verb form. In fact, a singular verb is needed in order for the verb to agree with a singular subject. In other words, an –s needs to be added after *cause* in order for the verb to take a singular form.

Incorrect sentence: The old trends <u>was</u> overlooked.

Correct sentence: The old trends <u>were</u> overlooked.

In this sentence, the student used a singular verb 'was' which is the wrong verb form. In fact, she needed to use a plural form 'were' in order for it to agree with the subject which is a plural noun 'trends'.

According to the two examples above, the errors in subject-verb agreement could be caused by interlingual interference. In English, the forms of verbs must be changed in accordance with the subjects, whereas in Thai, there is no change in verb forms. Since the students might be influenced by their first language, they may lack fluency in applying the English subject-verb agreement rules. As a result, they did not change the forms of the verbs. In fact, every verb must agree with its subject. Moreover, the student may have confused '*was'* with '*were'* and vice versa, leading to their accidental substitution of one for the other.

4) *An Analysis Essay*

For the analysis essay, the examples of the most frequent error type, which is spelling, are shown as follows:

Incorrect sentence: Video <u>steaming</u> sales have moved in opposite directions.

Correct sentence: Video <u>streaming</u> sales have moved in opposite directions.

As presented in this example, there was an error in spelling. The word 'streaming' was misspelled as *steaming*. The student omitted the letter 'r', and thus, it might have caused some misunderstanding. A reader might have thought that a writer put the wrong word, which is *video*, to modify *steaming*. In fact, the writer's real intention is that she wanted to mention sending or receiving video over the internet in order to describe the graph comparing revenue from DVD sales and video streaming.

Incorrect sentence: <u>Nowaday</u>, technology makes people's lives more comfortable.

Correct sentence: <u>Nowadays</u>, technology makes people's lives more comfortable.

In this sentence, an error in spelling occurred by omitting a letter. The word 'nowadays' was misspelled as *nowaday*; that is, the student omitted the letter 's'. She might have thought that -s cannot be added after an adverb. In fact, some adverbs are ended with the consonant 's', such as nowadays, always, sometimes, etc.

According to the two examples above, errors in spelling could be the result of intralingual interference. The student might have had limited knowledge of vocabulary. She possibly confused *steaming* with *streaming* or vice versa, so she used one in place of the other. Interestingly, it was found that among 32 errors in spelling, 13 errors (40.63%) were found in misspelling of the word 'streaming'. This might be because students were asked to describe the graph comparing revenue from DVD sales and video streaming and explain the data, and they could not avoid using the word 'streaming'. However, due to confusion, they misspelled *streaming* as *steaming*.

Furthermore, the student might lack knowledge of spelling rules. She possibly became confused with spelling rules for adding 's'. She might have thought that –s can be added after a plural noun or a singular verb only, so she misspelled the adverb 'nowadays' as *nowaday*. In fact, –s can be added after some adverbs as well.

According to the results above, the most frequent errors on each type of essay were different, and the causes of errors on each type of essay were different as well. The causes of the most frequent errors that students made on four types of essays are shown in Table 8.

Types of essays	Balanced opinion essay	Explanatory essay	Point-counterpoint essay	Analysis essay
The most frequent errors	Nouns	Sentence fragments	Subject-verb agreement	Spelling
Causes of errors	Intralingual interference	Interlingual interference	Interlingual interference	Intralingual interference

Table 8. Causes of Grammatical Errors on Different Types of Essays

As shown in Table 8, interlingual and intralingual interference was found in this study. Interlingual interference was a cause of errors in sentence fragments and subject-verb agreement, occurring in the explanatory essay and point-counterpoint essay. Meanwhile, intralingual interference was a cause of errors in the use of nouns and spelling in the balanced opinion essay and analysis essay.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that among all grammatical errors made by Thai EFL undergraduate students in four types of essays, the most frequent error type was sentence fragments. Among all errors in sentence fragments, most errors were found in an explanatory essay. When students wrote an explanatory essay, they were required to choose a new area of technology or invention and discuss its advantages and disadvantages. Since they had to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of a subject, they could not avoid using prepositional phrases with advantages and disadvantages (e.g., the main advantage of ... is that ...). Students also had problems when they used that-clauses to introduce the advantages and disadvantages after prepositional phrases. It was found that students wrote incomplete that-clauses. Some of them wrote a that-clause which did not contain a subject and a verb. This explanation can be supported by Kampookaew (2020), Khumphee and Yodkamlue (2017), Pataraphongsanti et al. (2022), and Sermsook et al. (2017). They explained that Thai EFL undergraduate students made

errors in sentence fragments as they did not put main verbs in sentences. Previous studies (i.e., Al-Jamal, 2017; Chuenchaichon, 2022) have suggested similar results. These errors could potentially stem from interlingual interference. Students literally translated Thai into English sentences, so they used an adjective instead of a verb, for instance.

The second most frequent error type was the use of nouns. Among all errors in nouns, when considering the frequency, most of them were found in a balanced opinion essay, and some of them were observed in an explanatory essay. When students wrote a balanced opinion essay, they had to clearly state their opinions about taking physical education classes required by universities. Meanwhile, when they wrote an explanatory essay, they had to explain a topic to discuss its advantages and disadvantages. Whether students wrote a balanced opinion essay or an explanatory essay, it was necessary to use nouns to help state opinions or explain a topic. The errors in nouns were found in the top three of the most frequent errors in every type of essays. This point is supported congruently with the study of Chuenchaichon (2022). Thai EFL undergraduate students made errors in the use of nouns as they did not add -s to show plurality in a countable noun. According to Aknouch and Bouthiche (2022), errors in nouns were caused by intralingual interference. Students made errors in nouns as they might not be familiar with the complicated rules of English language structure. Some of them used the wrong form of nouns; that is, they used a singular form instead of a plural form, or they used a plural form instead of a singular form.

The third most frequent error type was subject-verb agreement. Most errors in subject-verb agreement were found in a point-counterpoint essay and an analysis essay. When students wrote a point-counterpoint essay, they had to use evidence to support their arguments about the fashion industry. Meanwhile, when they wrote an analysis essay, they had to describe the graph comparing revenue from DVD sales and video streaming and explain the data. Whether students had to write sentences to support their arguments or to explain the data, all sentences needed to be correct. That is, a verb must agree with a subject. However, it was found that students had problems in subject-verb agreement since errors in subject-verb agreement were found in the top three of the most frequent errors in almost every type of essays. The results in this study are also in line with the study of Kampookaew (2020). Thai EFL undergraduate students made errors in subject-verb agreement. That is, they used a plural verb instead of a singular verb,

so it did not agree with a singular subject. Errors in subject-verb agreement were caused by interlingual interference because subject-verb agreement does not exist in Thai (Patarapongsanti et al., 2022). Students made errors in subject-verb agreement when they used a present tense or a past tense. For example, when students wrote a point-counterpoint essay, they had to use evidence to support their arguments about the fashion industry. Some students used personal experience as evidence to support their arguments, so they used a past tense to talk about their experience. They made errors in subject-verb agreement as a verb did not agree with a subject.

Interestingly, the study found that among all errors found in an analysis essay, the most frequent error type was spelling. As mentioned earlier, students described the graph comparing revenue from DVD sales and video streaming and explained the data. It was found that students had problems in spelling; the word 'streaming' was misspelled as *steaming* and the word 'nowadays' was misspelled as *nowaday*. The explanation of this study can be supported by Patarapongsanti et al. (2022) and Sermsook et al. (2017). They explained that Thai EFL undergraduate students made spelling errors by omitting a letter, and those errors were caused by intralingual interference due to confusion and inadequate knowledge of vocabulary.

Conclusions

An analysis of grammatical errors made by Thai EFL undergraduate students in different types of essays is beneficial in the development of teaching different types of writing. Students might make errors in sentence fragments when they write an explanatory essay because they have to use complex sentences to provide explanation based on a topic given, such as advantages and disadvantages of something (John, 2023; University of Texas System, 2012). Meanwhile, students use nouns to help state opinions when they write a balanced opinion essay (Walls, n.d.), so errors in nouns could be found in a balanced opinion essay. However, when students write a point-counterpoint essay or an analysis essay, they use the present or past tenses to support arguments or explain the data (Ristow, 2023; Westbrook et al., 2019). Consequently, they might make errors in subject-verb agreement. Moreover, students might have spelling errors when they write an analysis essay due to complex vocabulary in the writing prompt.

As presented in numerous research studies (Aisyah & Rahmawati, 2019; Depega & Jufrizal, 2019; Jiang, 2023), two causes of grammatical errors consist of interlingual and intralingual

interference. Firstly, interlingual interference happens when Thai EFL students use Thai language structures in their English writing. When students discuss an advantage or a benefit of something, instead of an English language structure, they use a Thai language structure. They make errors in sentence fragments as they omit a noun before a verb, or they omit a noun and a verb-to-be before an adjective. Furthermore, Thai EFL students use a Thai language structure instead of an English structure when they talk about the present or past situations. They make errors in subject-verb agreement as they do not change the form of the verb. Secondly, intralingual interference can be the cause of grammatical errors, and it happens when students know only some rules of the target language. Students make errors in nouns as they use noun forms incorrectly when they state opinions.

Recommendations

In order to help improve Thai EFL undergraduate students' writing in different types of essays, errors in sentence fragments, nouns, and subject-verb agreement should be pointed out for Thai EFL teachers when they teach a balanced essay, an explanatory essay, a point-counterpoint essay, and an analysis essay. It is important for students to recognize the rules of that-clauses, nouns, and the present and past tenses. In addition to these rules, spelling should be focused on as well since Thai EFL students have problems confusing similarly spelled words, such as *steaming* and *streaming*. All in all, grammar and genres should not be separated when teaching writing. Although the present study focused on types of essays, it raises an issue regarding the order in which EFL teachers should teach the different types of essays. Future studies should explore whether the order of essays could affect different numbers of error frequency or not.

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