An Analysis of English Grammatical Error in Essays Written by Mattayomsuksa Five Students

การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ในการเขียนเรียงความของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 5

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study aimed to 1) analyze grammatical error that major problems for Thai students in writing essays 2) classify types of the English grammatical errors 3) to find out causes of the English errors in essays written by Mattayomsuksa five students at Kutchumwittayakom school in Kutchum district of Yasothon Provice. The sample who participated in this study was Mattayomsuksa Five students studying at Kutchumwittayakom school.

The results of the research were revealed that the common errors from types of errors were analyzed and found that 61.83% was grammatical errors, 18.93% was syntactic errors, and 19.21% was lexical errors respectively. The common causes of errors in writing essays were ignorance of rules restriction (38.81%), false concepts hypothesized (25.94%) and incomplete application of rule (13.07%).

Keywords: grammatical error, analysis, essays

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อ 1) วิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ซึ่งเป็นปัญหาหลักในการเขียนเรียงความของนักเรียนไทย 2) แยกประเภทของข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ 3) ค้นหาเหตุของความผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ในเรียงความที่เขียนโดยนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 5 โรงเรียนกุดชุมวิทยาคม อ.กุดชุม จ.ยاسnonce กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ใช้ในการศึกษาครั้งนี้ คือ นักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาปีที่ 5 ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ข้อผิดพลาดทั้งหมดในประเภทของข้อผิดพลาดที่ได้วิเคราะห์และค้นพบคือ 61.83% เป็นข้อผิดพลาดของหัวข้อของไวยากรณ์ 18.93% เป็นข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ และการสะกดคำผิดมี 19.21% ส่วนสาเหตุของข้อผิดพลาดคือขาดความใส่ใจในกฎไวยากรณ์(38.81%), การสะกดคำผิดเนื่องจากไม่สมบูรณ์ (13.07%)

คำสำคัญ: ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์, การวิเคราะห์เรียงความ
Introduction

In the present global society, English is very important and essential to daily life, as English serves as an important tool for communication, education, seeking knowledge, livelihood and understanding of cultures. English enables learners to be aware of diversity of cultures and viewpoints in the world community, conducive to friendship and cooperation with various countries. It contributes to learners’ development by giving learners better understanding of themselves and others. The learners are thus able to learn and understand English and cultures, customs and traditions, thinking, society, economy, politics and administration.

According to Ministry of Education (2008: 40), in Thailand, English plays an important role in both the Thai educational system and many occupational fields. Thai education, English is a compulsory subject in primary, secondary schools and university. Moreover, English is a required course for students to complete their curriculum. One English skill Thai students have to learn is writing. We use writing as a means of communication in our daily lives such as notes, letters, memorandums, agenda, newspapers, magazine, and etc. Moreover, writing skill is taught in every instruction because it is the essential way to communicate. There are various types of writing; however, if students of EFL would like to further their study in higher education, one kind of writing they have to study and use is essay writing. Writing may starts from the alphabet, words, sentences and paragraphs which are necessary in essays.

Although English has been included in Thai educational systems for many years, Thai students still face the problem in the English usage, especially in writing, which may be the common problem among non-native speakers. Likewise, according to Siengsawang (2006: 2) Thai students also face difficulty when writing in the English language, especially vocabulary and grammar, which are their major problems. Therefore, Hu (2006: 78-81) suggest that it is important for Thai students who take writing classes to have a good basic background in grammatical and lexical skills in order to write creatively and to be able to present complex ideas in their writing. At least, to write English efficiently, the writers should know grammatical rules, structure, vocabulary, and punctuation.

Nevertheless, to improve English writing skills is not an easy task for Thai learners of English since making errors are regarded as a natural systematical process of language learning.
strategies (Corder 1982:6-7 cited in Khaourai 2002:2). This means that Thai learners of English tend to use their background knowledge of Thai language to help them learn the English language, and this is where the writing problems begin.

Teaching writing, particularly essays, is a difficult task. Nevertheless, (Michaelides 1990: 28-30 cited in Sereebenjapol 2003: 3) suggests that error analysis is one of aids to teaching English language. The collection of all kinds of written works (essays, translations, summaries) has always been burdensome for foreign language teachers, especially, the experienced. Some errors are always encountered in a large number of written work associated with foreign language learning, even with mother-tongue learning. Furthermore, error analysis is an importance criterion for the preparation of teaching materials.

Because of the above mentioned problems, it is interesting to analyze the students’ errors on grammar in writing English essays. This could be of benefit for EFL teachers to be aware of some important errors that Thai students may make and endeavour to pre-teach them before they write an English paragraph. It can be concluded that grammatical error analysis of secondary students’ writing would help teacher prepare the lessons, and it can be used to derive a method for correcting those errors.

**Research Objectives**

This study was intended to undertake the investigation of hypothetical student errors. Using Errors analysis, the study aims:

1. To analyze, classify types of the English errors in essays written by Mattayomsuksa Five Students.
2. To find out causes of the English errors in essays written by Mattayomsuksa Five Students.

**Scope of the Study**

**Population and Subjects**

The population of this research consisted of 114 Mattayomsuksa Five students from four classrooms, studying Fundamental English (E32102) in the second semester, the 2015 academic year, from Kutchumwittayakom school, Kutchum District, Yasothon Province. The subjects of this research were selected from four classrooms of Mattayomsuksa Five: 5/1, 5/2, 5/3 and 5/4. The subjects were selected by a purposive random sampling technique.
Research Methodology

The sample in this research was four classrooms of Mattayomsuksa Five: 5/1, 5/2, 5/3 and 5/4 studying at Kutchum Wittayakhom school, Kutchum District, Yasothon Province in the academic year 2015. The researcher has purposively selected this sample group because they had the five-year experiences in English writing. In addition, this level focuses specifically on composition because they were assigned to write English essays every week.

The errors were classified into each type of error according to the Error Classification Scheme and the frequency of errors was counted using the record form of errors. Before written, students were told that they were going to write a essay based on one of these three topics of “My hobby” so that they can prepare themselves in writing. Forty-five Mattayomsuksa five students in the second semester of the academic year 2015 at Kutchum Wittayakhom school gathered at a normal English classroom prepared for the writing. Participants then wrote English essays on the topic they chose in one hour. The teacher collected all essays after they finished writing. After the collection of students’ writings, the researcher photo copied all essays for the correction. A native speaker who has taught English especially in writing for years and the researcher corrected positions one by one and then double checked all of them to find out whether the scheme of errors classification is based on and was completed and agreeable.

Research Result

1. Types of Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Errors</th>
<th>Number of Errors</th>
<th>Percentage of Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Grammatical error</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Agreement</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Prepositions</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Articles</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Tenses</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Verbs</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>12.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Nouns</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Errors</td>
<td>Number of Errors</td>
<td>Percentage of Errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Possessives</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Pronouns</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Adjectives</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Adverbs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11 Gerund</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Types and number of errors (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Errors</th>
<th>Number of Errors</th>
<th>Percentage of Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.12 Comparison</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.13 Capitalization</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>222</strong></td>
<td><strong>61.83</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Syntactic errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Errors</th>
<th>Number of Errors</th>
<th>Percentage of Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Incomplete sentence structure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Punctuations</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Conjunctions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Word order</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Relative clauses</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Run-on sentences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Spoken form</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Parallel structure</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Redundancy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
<td><strong>18.93</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Lexical errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Errors</th>
<th>Number of Errors</th>
<th>Percentage of Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Spelling</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Literal translation from Thai to English</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Word choice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows types and number of errors in English essays written by Mattayomsuksa Five students. As can be seen, errors were categorized into three main types: grammatical, syntactic and lexical errors. Among these types, grammatical errors were the most frequently found (61.83%), followed by lexical errors (19.21%) and syntactic errors (18.93%), respectively.

1. **Grammatical Errors**

As can be seen in Table 4.1, the number of grammatical errors is totally 222 (61.83%). Twelve types of grammatical errors were found. The most five prevalent errors were (1) verbs (12.26%), (2) articles (10.86%), (3) agreements (10.03%), (4) prepositions (7.52%), and (5) tenses (6.96%) respectively. The following are twelve types of error.

1.1 **Error in agreements**

As shown in Table 4.1 the number of errors in agreement is 36 (10.03%) which included subject – verb agreement and determiner- noun agreement. Errors in the use of subject- verb agreement were most frequently found.

1.2 **Error in prepositions**

The number of errors in prepositions is 27 (7.52%). The findings show three types of errors in prepositions: omission, misuse and overuse of preposition. The omission of prepositions was mostly found.

1.3 **Error in articles**

The number of errors in articles is the greatest of all, 39 (10.86%). Errors in articles were omission, misuse, and substitution of definite article for the indefinite articles. Among the three types, omission of articles was mostly found.

1.4 **Error in tenses**

The number of error in tenses is 25 (6.96%). The findings reveal four types of errors: misuse of past continuous tense, present simple tense, past simple tense and incorrect form of tense. The most frequently found was misuse of present simple tense for past events.
1.5 Error in verbs
The findings reveal that the number of errors in verbs is 44 (12.26%). There were five types of errors in verbs: omission of verb, misuse of verbs, “verb to be” and “verb to have”, and overuse of verbs. The most frequently found was omission of verbs.

1.6 Error in nouns
According to Table 4.1, the number of errors in nouns is 8 (2.23%). The findings show only one type of error that is the omission of plural endings.

1.7 Error in possessives
The number of errors in possessives is 13 (3.63%). There were three types of errors: omission of possessive adjectives, substitution of personal pronouns for possessive adjectives, and substitution of article for possessive adjectives. The most frequently found was substitution of personal pronouns for possessives.

1.8 Error in pronouns
The number of errors in pronouns is 10 (2.78%). Two types of errors were found: the use of subject pronouns instead of object pronouns, and the use of object pronouns instead of subject pronouns. In this study, the use of subject pronouns instead of object pronouns is mostly found.

1.9 Error in adverbs
It can be seen that errors in adverbs is totally 7 (1.95%). The only type of error was the misuse of adverbs.

1.10 Error in gerunds
Grammatically, the number of errors in gerunds is 5 (1.39%). The type of errors was the misuse of gerunds.

1.11 Error in comparison
As can be seen the number of errors in comparison is 1 (0.28%). The error was misuse of superlative degree.

1.12 Error in capitalization
Regarding to capitalization, the findings show that there were six errors (1.67%). Two features of errors were found: overuse and omission of capitalization at the beginning of the sentences.

2. Syntactic Errors
Regarding syntactic errors, it was found that the total number of syntactic errors is 68 (18.93%). The errors were
categorized into seven types. The three most prevalently found errors were (1) punctuations (11.70%), (2) conjunctions (2.78%), and (3) relative clauses (1.95%), respectively.

2.1 Error in incomplete sentences structure
The number of error in incomplete sentences is 2 (0.55%). There were two features of errors: omission of subject-verb phrases and omission of complement. The most frequently found error was the omission of subject-verb phrases. The examples of errors in incomplete sentence structure are illustrated below.

2.2 Error in punctuations
The findings show that the number of errors in punctuation is 42 (11.70%). The findings reveal two types of error: omission of punctuations and misuse of punctuations. The omission of punctuations was mostly found.

2.3 Error in conjunctions
As can be seen, the number of errors in conjunctions is 10 (2.78%). The features of errors were omission and misuse of conjunctions. The findings show that the misuse of conjunction was the most frequently found.

2.4 Error in word order
The number of errors in word order is 1 (0.28%). The feature of error was misplacement of adjectives.

2.5 Error in relative clauses
Of relative clauses, it can be seen that there were seven errors (1.95%). Two types of error were found: omission of personal relative pronouns and misuse of personal relative clauses. The findings show the omission of personal relative pronouns for most.

2.6 Error in run-on sentences
Regarding run-on sentences, it was found that there was on one error (0.28%). The only feature of error was that of many main sentences in one sentence.

2.7 Error in redundancy
Five errors (1.39%) of syntax were in redundancy. There was only one feature of error that is the subject-verb redundancy.

3. Lexical Errors
According to Table 1, the great number of lexical errors is 69 (19.21%). The errors were classified into five types. The three most frequently found was the error in (1) literal translation from Thai to English (8.36%), (2) spelling (6.96%) and (3) word choices (3.34%). Each type of lexical errors is detailed as follows:
3.1 Error in spelling
The number of errors in spelling is 25 (6.96%). The feature of this type of error was misspelling.

3.2 Error in literal translation from Thai to English
It can be seen that students mostly made errors from the literal translation from Thai to English. The number of this type of error is 30 (8.36%). The feature of error was the use of one translation equivalent.

3.3 Error in word choices
The number of errors in word choices is 12 (3.34%). There were four categories of errors: misuse of adjectives, “verb to be” and “verb to have”, nouns and adverbs. The findings mostly reveal the misuse of nouns.

3.4 Error in mixing codes
The number of error in mixing codes is 2 (0.55%). The feature of error was that of using Thai for proper names.

2. Causes of Error
Table 2 Causes and number of errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of Errors</th>
<th>Numbers of Errors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mother tongue interference</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>11.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Overgeneralization</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ignorance of rule restriction</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>38.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Incomplete application of rules</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>13.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. False concepts hypothesized</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>25.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Carelessness</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 reveals causes and number as well as percentage of errors in essays. As can be seen, there were six causes of error: mother tongue interference, overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, false concepts hypothesized and carelessness. The total number of errors resulting
from the six causes is 505. It was found that the greatest number of errors was caused by ignorance of rules restriction (38.81%), false concepts hypothesized (25.94%) and incomplete application of rule (13.07%), respectively. Six causes of error are discussed as follows:

1. Errors caused by mother tongue interference

Errors caused by mother tongue interference are those resulting from the mother tongue structure and lexis having influence over second language learning. From the study, it was found that the number of error from this cause is 60 (11.88%).

2. Errors caused by overgeneralization

The findings show that errors caused by overgeneralization in essays written by students were the least prevalent (0.99%).

3. Errors caused by ignorance of rule restriction

Of all causes, it can be seen that the errors caused by ignorance of rule restriction were the most extensive (38.81%).

4. Errors caused by incomplete application of rules

The number of error caused by incomplete application of rules is 66 (13.07%). The findings illustrate that error resulting from this cause was the third most frequently found.

5. Errors caused by false concepts hypothesized

As can be seen from Table 4.2, the number of errors caused by false concepts hypothesized is 131 (25.94%).

6. Errors caused by carelessness

It was found that the number of errors caused by carelessness was 47 (9.31%).

As for the second most prevalent cause of errors, it was found that false concepts hypothesized were the main cause whereas errors caused by carelessness were found in the essays written by students.

Conclusion

This study presents a descriptive analysis of types of errors in essays written by Thai EFL students. The results of the study revealed that students of all levels produced three types of errors: grammatical, syntactic and lexical errors. The findings also showed that grammatical errors were found in the highest percentage (61.83%).

The grammatical analysis revealed 13 types of errors including agreements, prepositions, articles, tenses, verbs, nouns, possessives, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, gerunds, comparison and capitalization. Of all grammatical errors, essays were verbs
In terms of syntax, the findings revealed 9 types of error categories including incomplete sentence structure, punctuations, conjunctions, word order, relative clauses, run-on sentences, spoken form, parallel structure and redundancy. It can be seen that errors in syntax made by students. Normally, students produced more errors as found in the study, this was not consistent with this finding since students made more errors in syntax than students did, especially in punctuations marks and conjunctions. It can be seen in the examples below:

As for the lexis, the study presented 4 error categories which were spelling, literal translation from Thai to English, word choice and code mixing. It can be seen that students made all four errors categories. The most commonly found in essays written by students were in spelling, however, most errors were those in literal translation from Thai to English.

The study revealed that learners made errors due to six causes. These causes are ignorance of rule restriction, false concept hypothesized, incomplete application of rules, carelessness, mother tongue interference and overgeneralization, respectively. It can be concluded that the most common cause of errors for students at all levels was ignorance of restriction while the minor cause of errors was the overgeneralization.

Also, it was found that other main causes found in essays written by students at each level were different. As can be seen another main cause for students were the false concepts hypothesized while for student was carelessness. Moreover, the findings revealed that incomplete application of rules was the main cause.

In addition, the study disclosed that mother tongue interfered students for the most part as can be seen in syntactic and lexical errors. Apparently, the study revealed that the learner’s native language and intralingual factors of rules of learning have emitted great influence on second language learning.

Consequently, EFL learners and teachers should be aware of these factors and take them into account in the process of teaching and learning so that they can examine the most effective approach for the second language to be achieved.
Recommendations for the future studies

Regarding to the findings of the study and its limitation, the following are recommendations for further research.

1. Due to the small number of the subjects in this study, a strong conclusion cannot be made concerning whether grammatical, syntactic and lexical errors have been the majority problems for Thai EFL students. More studies are needed to validate the findings.

2. In attempt to investigate the errors on student’s writing in order to get more information and real causes of error, it is recommended that further research should concern more about data collection approaches.

3. In further studies, there should be analysis of students’ essays and interviews to see their perceptions towards the errors they make. This would probably help the teacher to get real causes of error that each student makes and be beneficial for the teacher in order to solve students’ writing problems.

4. It would be good for further studies to conduct error analysis in other fields such as in spoken source and different modes of writing, for example, in students’ personal letters, notes and diaries. Errors in different sources probably signify different features, causes and errors ranks.

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