Grammatical and Lexical Errors in Low-Proficiency Thai Graduate Students' Writing

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Introduction

English grammar and lexis seem to be among the most problematic areas in second language (L2) acquisition (Brown, 2014). A good number of past studies have investigated English learners' different kinds of errors, using a variety of elicitation techniques, such as a translation task, a grammaticality judgment task, a role play, an essay, etc. (Abbasi and Karimnia, 2011; Hemchua and Schmitt, 2006; Sattayatham and Honsa, 2007; Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang, 2012; Yamashita and Jiang, 2010). The data drawn from such instruments, however, are sometimes criticized for not reflecting learners' genuine L2 competence since these tasks can differ from those they perform in everyday life (Larsen-Feeman and Long, 1991). In other words, it is believed that learners' true competence may be observed through a task that elicits more natural L2 use, e.g. free writing with some controlled topics (Phoocharoensil, 2009). The current study was therefore undertaken to bridge this gap by exploring low-proficiency Thai EFL students' writing, with an emphasis on their grammatical and lexical errors, using a paragraph as the main data collection technique.

The next section pertains to the literature regarding the significance and stages of error analysis, followed by relevant previous studies on errors of Thai as well as other EFL learners' in L2 English acquisition.

Literature Review

Significance of Language Learners' Errors

Language learners' errors are worth investigating for three principal reasons (Corder, 1987). First of all, errors reveal learners' existing second language knowledge. What is missing in the learners' L2 system is indicative of what they have to further acquire in the L2 learning process. Second, L2 acquisition can also be examined through learners' errors. The third reason is that error production allows students to access teachers' feedback in response to their problems; learners are believed to be able to discover new rules or revise their imperfect present rules in their L2 repertoire, based on teachers' comments on or corrections of the errors found.

Whereas inevitable deviations resulting from a child's L1 acquisition process will gradually disappear over time, L2 learners' errors are regarded as more serious since these deviant forms will consistently repeat unless the particular rule governing such L2 use is internalized (Ellis, 2008). Error correction therefore seems to be an essential component in L2 pedagogy as this helps learners to use L2 more effectively, which is one of the major goals in L2 teaching (Brown, 2014).

Error Analysis: Five Classic Stages

James (1998), following Corder (1977), postulates that error analysis (EA) deals with five stages: collection of a sample of learner language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and evaluation of errors.

Each of the five aforementioned stages is discussed comprehensively below.

Collection of a Sample of Learner Language

Ellis (2008) remarked that data collection methods in EA play a vital role in determining the research results. It is highly likely, in other words, that the errors elicited by one task could be different from those gathered using another technique. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) insisted that SLA researchers would best observe learners' interlanguage provided that L2 uses are elicited through a task in which they can naturally produce L2 forms, e.g. essay writing, rather than an artificial task, e.g. a cloze test, a picture description task, a translation task, in which learners seem to be forced to complete. The latter may not perfectly reflect leaners' L2 knowledge.

According to Corder (1973), two types of data elicitation techniques exist in SLA research. On one hand, clinical elicitation methods, e.g. a general interview, a composition, etc., appear to obtain more natural tokens. On the other hand, the experimental elicitation involves certain data collection methods, e.g. a grammaticality judgement task, drawing specific linguistic features which are the researchers' central focus.

While collecting learners' errors, researchers should be aware of the fact that the majority of EA studies use a cross-sectional design, which means data are to be collected from only a single stage of learners' L2 development although L2 learners at different times are representative of different L2-competency level (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Such data collected at simply one period of time fails to be a true reflection of learners' entire interlanguage system.

Identification of Errors

Error identification, as the second step in EA, concerns recognizing language use in L2 that deviates from what is viewed as grammatically correct or target-like according to native speakers' standards in the target language. For example, the past tense form *runned* is considered incorrect as it differs from the target-like form *ran*. Researchers need to prepare a

reconstruction of the error by imagining what could have been used instead by native speakers of the target language (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Ellis (2008), nonetheless, expresses some concern over this stage of EA, pointing out some prominent problems facing EA researchers. The first one pertains to which code should be selected as the standard with which learners' production will be compared. It is evident that even native speakers of English from different parts of the world often use dissimilar language features. For instance, speakers of L1 British English usually prefer the construction *help + object + to-infinitive*, whilst those natively speaking American English are more accustomed to the structure *help + object + base form*. Moreover, it can be unfair if a code from Kachru (1986)'s Outer Circle, to which the colonial Englishes belong, e.g. Indian English, is ignored or devalued. A further code selection problem is associated with which linguistic mode of English, e.g. written or spoken, should be used.

In addition to the code, a clear distinction between the concepts of *error* and *mistake* should be made at this stage of EA. As noted by James (1998), L2 teachers need to concentrate on students' errors, as opposed to mistakes, due to the fact that errors are committed systematically as a consequence of learners' incomplete L2 rule application or in-progress acquisition of the related L2 rule. In contrast to errors, mistakes are influenced by certain performance factors, e.g. memory lapses, exhaustion, sleepiness, illness, nervousness, etc; in this case, learners actually have internalized the L2 rules but sporadically fail to heed them because of some uncontrollable factors as previously stated. For instance, an undergraduate student majoring in English may accidentally make a minor mistake by using the uninflected written form *want*, as in (1), rather than the target-like one *wants*, which agrees in number with the singular subject *He*. If the student is capable of correcting the erroneous form by himself or herself, it should be thought of as a mistake, not an error.

(1) *He *want* to withdraw all the money from the bank.

Description of Errors

The next stage of EA is concerned with error description, which is a process aimed at comparing learners' imperfect use in L2 with a native speaker's corresponding reconstruction. That is, learners' L2 use will be regarded as an error if the appearance differs from what native speakers of the target language would use in the same situation (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). In describing errors, as suggested by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), "Errors should be classified in terms of the target language categories that have been violated rather than the linguistic categories used by the learner" (p. 60). For example, in (2), the error is apparently caused by the incorrect past tense form of the verb marry. Such an error has to be categorized under the English past simple tense, which is the target grammar point they are learning, as opposed to under the present simple tense, as seen in the learner's deviation.

(2) *Yesterday Martin *marry* his life-long sweetheart.

(Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 60)

James (1998), based on Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), proposes some common ways in which learners' L2 forms can be different from the corresponding target-like ones.

a. *Omission*:

This occurs when an essential component is missing. In (3), the lack of the past tense form of *be, i.e., was*, results in an error.

(3) *Bill *singing* karaoke when I arrived at the restaurant,

b. *Addition:*

This occurs when learners add something to the target form, making it unacceptable based on the L2 standard. In (4), double-marking or redundancy of the auxiliary *did* and the past-tense verb form *understood* leads to ungrammaticality in L2 English.

(4) *They *didn't understood* the main point.

c. *Misinformation:*

This refers to the incorrect use of the morpheme or structure. For instance, some learners inappropriately use the pronoun *me* as a subject as well as an object.

d. *Misordering:*

This kind of error stems from the wrong order of phrase or clause components. In (5), the position of the adverb *slowly* between the verb *opened* and the direct object *the jar* appears unsuitable due to misordering, while the initial or final sentence positions or that right after the subject are all acceptable.

(5) *We opened *slowly* the jar.

Explanation of Errors

With respect to error explanation, it is necessary for researchers to locate the sources of actual errors. In general, two major types of errors exist: interlingual and intralingual errors.

Interlingual errors, or transfer errors, result from learners' mother tongue influence. L2 learners, particularly those with limited L2 exposure and proficiency, are more likely to resort to L1 knowledge and then transfer some L1 forms into their L2 use. While L1 transfer sometime yields a positive or facilitative result, this is often found to be a primary cause of L2 learners' errors (Odlin, 2003). For example, Thai EFL students often omit an obligatory preposition within a relative clause (RC), probably because L1 Thai does not have this type of RC, object-of-preposition relative (Gass, 1979; Phoocharoensil, 2009). In (6), the preposition *in* needs to be inserted either before the relative pronoun *which* or after the adjective *interested* in order for the sentence to be considered well formed.

(1) *They saw the apartment which all of them were interested.

Intralingual errors, unlike interlingual errors, are defined as errors that occur as a result of learners' application of universal learning strategies. In this case, learners' native language does not come into play. It is widely accepted that this sort of error is produced no matter what learners' L1 background is (Ellis, 2008). Intralingual errors could be due to a variety of strategies applied by learners in the process of L2 acquisition, as exemplified below:

a. False Analogy

This type of deviation is derived from learners' overgeneralization of L2 rules. For example, some learners may incorrectly produce the past-tense verb form *eated*, as opposed to *ate*, having been influenced by many other regular verbs, e.g. *walked, typed, employed*, etc., whose verb forms are constructed by adding the suffix *-ed*.

b. Exploiting Redundancy

An intralingual error can also arise from learners' omission of a grammatical feature that does not contribute to the meaning of an utterance on the whole. A clear example is

omission of the present tense morpheme {-es}, as in (7) to be affixed to the verb to show its agreement in number with the singular subject *Tina*. This may result from the fact that whether or not the morpheme appears, the core meaning of the sentence stays the same.

(6) *Tina normally *go* to university by bus.

c. Overlooking Co-occurrence Restrictions

L2 learners of English are frequently incapable of collocation production in the target language (Fan, 2009; Nesselhauf, 2005). This seems to be a subtle problem because there are many instances when two words can be put together to form a syntactically well-formed construction, but the resulting combination might violate collocability in L2 (Barnbrook, Mason & Krishnamirthy, 2013). For example, whereas *naked* and *bare* are close in meaning, substituting one for another is not always possible since doing so occasionally leads to collocational errors, as in **naked feet* and **bare eyes*, as opposed to the target-like counterparts *bare feet* and *naked eyes*, respectively (Sinclair, 1991).

The next stage, i.e., the last stage in EA, deals with evaluation of errors.

Evaluation of Errors

The final step of EA, i.e., error evaluation, is pedagogically significant as it reveals the seriousness of each error that learners produce. According to Burt (1975) and Ellis (2008), errors are divided into *global* and *local errors*. Global errors are more serious since they affect overall comprehensibility or sentence organization. For instance, English is a language that strictly relies on S-V-O (Subject-Verb-Object) word order, as in *I like him*; changing the positions of the sentence components, e.g. **I him like*., has a considerable impact on the structural organization, resulting in a global error. Local errors, conversely, are far less serious since only minor elements in a sentence are affected, e.g. **two website*, in which the cause of the error lies in the absence of the overt plural morpheme {-es}. However, the meaning of the entire chunk seems to be slightly affected by the lack of the plural suffix.

Evaluating errors primarily concerns the addressees who assume responsibility as the judges of learners' errors. The judges, in this sense, could be either native speakers or non-native speakers of the target language, who are asked to assess a wide range of problematic L2 linguistic aspects, e.g. morphology, phonology, orthography, semantics, syntax, etc. By and large, native speakers pay more attention to the impact that an error has on the comprehension of the L2 production, while non-native judges seem to place a greater emphasis on fundamental L2 rules. Non-native addressees view minor errors, e.g. morphological errors, as more serious than their native speaker counterparts (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

All five stages of EA illustrate the systematicity of the research procedure. Researchers, having analyzed learners' errors, should come to an understanding of the genuine problems confronting L2 learners. Finding the actual causes of each error enables teachers to focus on what students really have problems with in their L2 acquisition process, instead of emphasizing something else that the particular group of students being taught, e.g. Thai EFL learners, do not struggle with.

In 2.3, a review of previous relevant studies on EFL learners' errors is provided.

Past Studies on L2 English Learners' Errors

A number of studies on error analysis of learner language have been conducted (e.g. Abbasi and Karimnia, 2011; Hemchua and Schmitt, 2006; Sattayatham and Honsa, 2007; Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang, 2012; Yamashita and Jiang, 2010). This section is aimed at

exploring related studies focusing on the problems learners face with respect to L2 English grammar.

One of the most interesting error analysis studies was undertaken by Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang (2010), which reported on spoken grammatical errors committed by 42 low-proficiency Malaysian ESL learners. The researchers collected data using five role play situations during the 14-week semester. The oral interaction data indicated a variety of grammatical errors, with prepositions being the most common (20.67%), followed by errors on questions (14.89%). The third and fourth most frequent kinds of errors were those on verb forms (10.78%) and articles (10.53 %), respectively. Based on Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982)'s framework known as Surface Structure Descriptions, the researchers discovered that misinformation seemed to be the most common cause of the students' problems, followed by omission and addition, respectively, while misordering had the least influence on their error production. It was also claimed that since the data was gathered from an oral task, the errors on questions emerged with a very high frequency, which made the study's results different from many other past studies. To be more specific, the major characteristics of these errors concerned auxiliary verb omission and a lack of subject-verb inversion.

Influence of learners' native language on L2 collocation acquisition was highlighted in Yamashita and Jiang (2010)'s study. A phrase-acceptability judgment task was employed to examine the accuracy and performance speed of English native speakers in comparison with L1 Japanese speakers processing collocations in English. More precisely, concentrating on the role of L1 congruency in L2 collocation learning, the study found that EFL learners produced more errors on and reacted in a slower manner to incongruent collocations than congruent collocations. By contrast, a lower number of collocational errors and higher collocation processing speed was observed in ESL users' overall performance despite the fact that there were more errors on incongruent collocations than congruent ones. It was suggested that L1 congruency and L2 exposure contributed to the acquisition of L2 collocations.

Abbasi and Karimnia (2011) analyzed the grammatical errors of Iranian EFL university students from a translation task. That is, two groups of juniors and seniors, differing in L2 English competency levels, were asked to translate letters and messages written in Persian into English. As anticipated, this interlanguage study revealed that errors found in the juniors' translations tremendously outnumbered those produced by the seniors. Aside from the lexico-semantic errors, a large number of syntactic and morphological errors were found. It was pointed out that interlingual errors were predominant as L1 Persian apparently played a significant role in the participants' L2 English use in translation. Among the most prevailing syntactic problems were errors on tenses, prepositions, and articles, which is in line with Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang (2010). With regard to preposition misuse, the learners omitted prepositions where there must be one, as in **I didn't agree (with) him* and used incorrect prepositions, as in **I teach English for (to) my students*. Furthermore, they seemed to be extremely confused over various tenses in L2 English, often mistaking one tense for another. Articles, in addition, were incorrectly employed as well in two main ways--when they omitted the definite article *the* and the indefinite articles *a* and *an* in the context where an article is required, and when the article *the* was unnecessarily used, as in **Tabriz is coldest city in Tehran*.

Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) investigated Thai EFL learners' lexical errors in English compositions. Based on James (1998)'s error taxonomy, in conjunction with Leech's semantics (1981), this research study aimed to analyze lexical errors in 300-to-350-word argumentative compositions written by 20 third-year Thai English majors. The errors were then classified into formal and semantic errors. As regards the formal errors, the three

subcategories were formal misselection of words (15.33%), (e.g. incorrect word classes, false friends, etc.), distortions or misspellings (14.56%), and misformations (6.90%), (e.g. direct translation from L1 Thai), the latter of which was associated with L1 influence. As for semantic errors, collocational errors were ranked first in frequency (26.05%), whereas the second most common error was confusion of sense relations (24.9%). Stylistic errors (8.04%) and problems of connotative meaning (4.21%) were found to be the third and fourth most frequent subtypes of semantic errors. Hemchua and Schmitt proposed that L1 transfer was not the major cause of the learners' problems. Instead, the difficulty primarily lies in the intrinsic properties of English vocabulary, e.g. abstractness, specificity and register restriction, multiplicity of meaning, inflectional and derivational complexity.

Written grammatical and lexical errors were the focus of the research of Sattayatham and Honsa (2007), who collected data from first-year Thai medical students through three elicitation tasks, i.e., a sentence-level paragraph, a paragraph-level translation, and an opinion paragraph. As shown in the results, the participants, in translating 32 sentences from Thai into English, encountered the gravest difficulty with English conditionals, followed by articles, question tags, past tense, and connectors, respectively. The paragraph-level translation revealed their grammatical problems, such as incorrect word choice, contrastive connectors, reported speech, main-verb omission, articles, etc. Finally, the participants similarly faced severe difficulty in word choice, articles, conditionals, connectors, etc. The researchers attributed the errors to insufficient lexical and syntactic L2 knowledge as well as L1 interference.

While there have been numerous studies on English learners' grammatical and lexical errors in productive tasks, e.g. compositions, little research has focused on the written errors of Thai EFL students with a low L2 proficiency level. To address this research gap, the present study examined students' actual errors found in paragraphs from in-class assignments.

The present study was conducted to address two research questions:

1. What are the grammatical errors made by Thai EFL students with low proficiency in their L2 English writing?
2. What are the principal causes of these grammatical errors?

Methodology

Data collection

The participants of the study were recruited from the total of 15 students enrolled in an academic writing skill development course in the Diploma Program in English for Careers (DEC). The participants had been studying for two consecutive semesters at the time when the data was gathered. They were lower-intermediate EFL learners speaking L1 Thai, and they learned English only in a classroom setting. The principal medium of English instruction before they entered the DEC program was Thai. The participants were asked to write two paragraphs of 120-150 words, each of which was written within 100 minutes as an in-class assignment. The two paragraphs were expository types under the topics *My Role Model* and *Thai festivals*. In the writing process, they were permitted to use any online dictionary application on their smartphones; nevertheless, copying of sentences from online sources was strictly prohibited to prevent them from plagiarizing.

Data analysis

As the present study focused on exploring learners' grammatical errors found in a written task, Error Analysis was employed. With the EA procedure, all the grammatical uses that deviated from the syntactic norm of standard written British and American English were first identified. To illustrate, three corpus-based grammar references based on both

aforementioned varieties of English, i.e., *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, Finegan, 1999), *Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide. Spoken and Written English. Grammar and Usage* (Carter & McCarthy, 2006), and *English Grammar Today*: *An A-Z of Spoken and Written Grammar* (Carter, McCarthy, Mark, & O'Keeffe, 2011), were consulted for error identification. Any deviation from target-like forms included in the references was considered an error. After the error identification, the students' errors were classified and their major causes were accounted for.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1. Types of Errors in Thai EFL Students' Writing

Error Type	Token	Percentage
1.Errors on Verbs	108	36.90
2.Errors on Articles	36	12.30
3.Errors on Word Classes	34	11.60
4.Errors on Prepositions	30	10.24
5.Errors on Spellings	27	9.22
6.Errors on Nouns	26	8.90
7.Errors on Punctuations	12	4.10
8.Errors on Word Choice	10	3.14
9.Errors on Word Order	6	2.10
10.Errors on Relative Clauses	4	1.40
TOTAL	293	100

As shown in Table 1, Thai EFL learners were found to commit ten major types of errors, to be discussed in detail below.

Errors on verbs (36.90%) appeared to be the most common in the students' writing. Different kinds of errors on verbs emerged, the most frequent one concerning subject-verb agreement, as in (8)-(10).

(8) *Even our family started from have nothing but my mom and dad *doesn't surrender*.
(9) *She can give detail that true when she *describe* about something.
(10) *Last, she *pay* attention to every details of children.

The problem of subject-verb agreement violation in the data probably stems from learners' L1, i.e., Thai, where there exists no necessity for a verb to agree in number and person with its subject (Iwasaki and Ingkapirom, 2009). Thai EFL learners may transfer such an absence of subject-verb agreement from Thai to English, causing an interlingual error.

Moreover, the participants also had difficulty constructing appropriate verb forms in English, using a number of deviant forms of verbs, as in (11)-(12). The errors in (11) and (12) result from the use of *was*, probably as a past-tense marker, rather than the addition of the past-tense suffix *-ed* to the end of each verb. In (13), the irregular verb form *chose* is required. The error in (14) concerns an incorrect use of the modal *could*, which is usually followed by a verb in the base form, instead of a verb in the past-tense or past-participle form like *bought*. All of these errors on verb forms can probably be attributed to the complexity of verb form construction in L2 English, which normally involves verb conjugation to indicate tenses (Carter and McCarthy, 2006).

(11) *Every New Year, I *was visit and talk* with her for update in life, education, job, social, culture and love life.
(12) *I *was learn* Thai culture from my mom.
(13) *I *choosed* to study in college because the course is management but I would like to learn about language.
(14) *They *can bought* own house.

Another verb-related error deals with the omission of *be*, as in (15) and (16). In (15), the auxiliary *be*, i.e., *is*, is missing, while *be* as a main verb, i.e., *is*, in (16) has been left out. Such errors seem to be due to the fact that English requires a linking verb, e.g. *be*, before the preposition *like*, as in (16), whereas in (15), *is* is needed to constitute the present progressive structure. The students' omission of *be*, regarded as an intralingual error, could have occurred as a consequence of the complicated verb form construction in the target language, as opposed to interference from the learners' L1 Thai.

(15) *She always *wearing* pants when directing in theatre.
(16) *So I call her mom because she *like* my mother give me several recommendation and knowledge.

The second most important type of error made by the Thai learners of English concerned article use (12.30%). The errors on articles arise from omission of definite and indefinite articles where there must be one. In (17), the absence of the indefinite article *an* right before the noun phrase *ingenious man* is the cause of the error. In a similar vein, in (18), lack of the indefinite article *the* leads to ungrammaticality. As the English article is considered as one of the most daunting challenges for learners whose L1 does not have articles (Cowan, 2008), there is little doubt that Thai EFL students often struggle with L2 English article system acquisition. In a nutshell, the complex usage of English articles seems to cause considerable problems for Thai EFL learners.

(17) *Jay Chou was (an) ingenious man.
(18) *they are (the) first teacher of mine.

The third most frequent error category is associated with parts of speech (11.60%). In English, different word classes, often formed through affixation, e.g. suffix addition, are required, while virtually the same word form in Thai can be used for different parts of speech. Such a sophisticated system of word classes in L2 English might cause Thai learners some confusion, which can contribute to their incorrect use of word class forms. For instance, in (19), the verb form *graduate* should replace the noun form *graduation*. Likewise, the adjective form *retired* is required in place of the nominal one *retirement* in (20).

(19) *after you *graduation* and go to work, for the tourism staff must to ready before your customer.
(20) *She was *retirement* in position of special professional level teacher.

The next kind of problem that Thai EFL students faced concerns prepositions (10.24%). Overall, there were three subcategories of preposition misuse, as demonstrated in the learner corpus: incorrect choice of preposition, addition of prepositions, and omission of prepositions. Thai EFL students often incorrectly choose inappropriate prepositions, as in (21) and (22), where the target ones should be *to* and *like*, respectively. In particular, the

problem in (21) probably occurs because the student is unaware of the subcategorization of the verb *give*, i.e., *give something to someone*. In (22), the student could have been confused over the use of *like* and *as* in English, both of which are viewed as a pair of confusing words in English (Carter, McCarthy, Mark, & O'Keeffe, 2011). In both cases, the resulting errors were classified as intralingual ones.

(21) *She gave viewpoint *for* me. (to)
(22) *I hope to be *as* him. (like)

Furthermore, the participants were also found to produce errors by unnecessarily adding a preposition, as in (23), where a double preposition, i.e., *until at*, results in an error. This student might be familiar with the prepositional phrase *at midnight* and think this is a fixed phrase that needs to be used together at all times despite the preceding preposition *until*. In (9), repeated here as (24) for convenience, the transitive verb *describe* needs no preposition to follow. This error could be intralingual because the learners seemed to ignore the transitivity of the verb being used.

(23) *My father works *until at* midnight.
(24) *She can give detail that true when she *describe* about something.

Preposition omission also occurs when an obligatory preposition is deleted, as in (25), where the verb *go* requires the following preposition *to* rather than a noun, e.g. *school*. This particular error might have emanated from L1 influence. That is, the verb *go* in Thai can be followed by a noun/noun phrase denoting a place.

(25) *We take a bus to *go school*.

Thai EFL students also experienced some difficulty in using English spelling, which ranked fifth in frequency (9.22%). These errors, as in (26)-(29), could be ascribed to the learners' carelessness or confusion over the proper spellings of the words.

(26) *she had to look after my grandmother and *grand father* who always sick. (grandfather)
(27) *My parents can stand to face with a lot of *troble* situations. (trouble)
(28) *Mr. Phillip, my previous boss from Mass Company Limited, was an *exellent* role model… (excellent)
(29) *..he did not blame the subordinates with *agressive* words but he gave an opportunity to them to investigate the root cause…

The sixth most frequent error type pertained to nouns (8.90%). To be more precise, the learners misused nouns by omitting plural suffixes, as in (30)-(31). Such errors may have stemmed from the fact that English distinguishes between singular and plural noun forms; this complicated system probably causes Thai learners to commit some intralingual errors by failing to add the plural suffix *-es* at the end of a plural noun.

(30) *She always wear suitable dress in *several party* such as… (parties)
(31) *All 20 years that my parent worked hard, they do a lot of job and finally… (jobs)

Another kind of error concerned the incorrect use of punctuation (4.10%). It can be clearly seen that some of the students employed semi-colons inappropriately, as in (32), where a colon should be used instead when giving examples. Moreover, the problem of

comma splice, i.e., a comma used to join two complete sentences, was discovered in the corpus, as in (33), where a semi-colon is needed instead in such a context.

(32) *She do housework; cleaning room, washing curtain…
(33) *our mom is so kind, we love her.

The eighth category pertained to lexical errors, namely, problems of word choice (3.14%). In (34), the word *superly* does not exist in standard English. The learner might have overgeneralized the prefix *super-*, which has a positive meaning, using it as an adverb ending in *-ly*. In (35), the problem lies in the non-existent adjective form *gratituded*, which should be replaced by the target-like one *grateful*. Both deviations appear to be related to the students' confusion about proper word choice in the target language.

(34) *she *superly* works hard.
(35) *she is *gratituded*, active, and supportive.

A minor type of error found in the data concerned word order (2.10%). More specifically, in an indirect question, as in (36), there is no need for subject-verb inversion. In fact, only a canonical or affirmative subject-verb structure is required. This problem can probably be attributed to the complex structure of reported questions, about which EFL students can become confused, especially when compared with similar constructions, e.g. an interrogative structure, since both constructions apparently involve wh-words.

However, in (37), the adjective *monthly* should precede the noun it modifies, i.e., *income*. The problem may have occurred as a result of L1 transfer because a noun modifier in Thai follows a head noun.

(36) *I use to ask my mother how *can she and Dad pass* it all.
(37) *…she do more job is English teacher for *more income monthly*.

The least frequent kind of error was incorrect use of relative clauses (1.40%). In (38), the resumptive pronoun *her* is syntactically redundant with the relative pronoun *who*. Similarly, in (39), the resumptive pronoun *her* is also considered to be ungrammatical since it and the relative marker *that* both refer to the same antecedent, i.e., one of (the) teachers. As confirmed by Phoocharoensil (2009), using a resumptive pronoun is a universal, unmarked relativization strategy regardless of the existence of such pronominal copies in learners' native language. Therefore, using resumptive pronouns should be regarded as an intralingual error.

(38) *Three characteristics of my super mother who I really admire *her*…
(39) *Mrs Petcharak is one of teachers in college that our class and me love *her* because she is kind, watchful and timely.

The data demonstrated that most of the Thai EFL learners committed more grammatical errors than lexical ones. More specifically, the most frequent type of error related to verbs, regarded as a very complicated grammar topic for EFL students, which is in line with previous studies (e.g. Abbasi and Karimnia, 2011; Hemchua and Schmitt, 2006; Sattayatham and Honsa, 2007; Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang, 2012).

Conclusion

The present study has revealed some interesting findings in regard to Thai English learners' errors in writing. Although the data was collected from only two paragraphs written in a classroom, some of the major problems with which Thai EFL students are usually confronted in L2 English writing were witnessed. Not only can these errors be attributed to the learners' L1 influence, but they also seem to have resulted from learners' confusion over the target language, the grammatical system of which is evidently complex. Overall, lexical errors were far smaller in number than grammatical ones. Put differently, the latter appear to be more problematic, especially when verbs, articles, and word classes are taken into consideration. EFL instructors in Thailand, based on the research findings presented in this article, can develop some teaching materials concentrating on the real errors frequently troubling students' L2 English learning in the hope that their lessons and materials will be able to address the students' actual problems, thus reducing the chance of error production in their writing.

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