



# Grammatical Errors in Spoken English of Undergraduate Thai Learners in a Communicative Business English Course

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## Abstract

The study aims to explore the grammatical errors in spoken English of Thai University learners in a communicative business English course. The main objectives of the research study are to identify the types and frequency of grammatical errors. Collected data were analyzed according to the surface structure taxonomy to present a general overview. The linguistic description approach on error was also used to present the findings in greater depth. The findings revealed that omission errors accounted for more than half of the total errors made by the sampled student population, followed by misinformation, addition and misordering. According to linguistic categorization of errors, the 3 most occurring errors were plural form, article, and verb form. Results yielded through error analysis will be valuable in the area of second language lesson and curriculum planning.

**Key Words:** Error analysis, Grammatical error, Communicative Business English, Spoken English, Role play.

## 1. Introduction

Communicative competence is the ultimate goal that every L2 language learner strives to achieve. Mastering communicative competence requires a balance between fluency and accuracy. To foster students' communicative abilities in recent years, many educational institutions, especially those located in Asia, are leaning towards a more fluency focused teaching. As a result of this, many education providers are neglecting grammar-based instruction. Brown (2014) proposed that the most challenging areas in which students struggle are grammar and Lexis. Several studies have been conducted over the years and results revealed that grammatical accuracy had been traded for fluency (Ano, 2005; Doughty and Williams, 1998; Takashima, 2000). To balance the scales and improve students' grammatical performance, researchers suggested that grammar can be acquired while focus remains upon meaning. This means that teachers should focus on form while carrying out communicative activities (Ano 2005). In order to plan lessons, however, it is necessary to examine where students' problems lie and determine what remedies are needed. This is where error analysis comes into play. A vast number of studies have been conducted that examine the errors which English language learners produced (Ano, 2005; Arakkitsakul, 2008; Bennui, 2008; Bootchuy, 2008; Haji Saad and Sawalmeh, 2014; Muhamad, Ahmad Shah, Engku Ibrahim, Sirajuddin, Abdul Malik, and Abdul Ghani, 2013; Sattayahtam and Honsa, 2007; Ting, Mahadhir and Chang,



2010; Wee, Sim and Jusoff, 2010) However, most studies were conducted with a focus upon writing errors; leaving room for more research to be conducted on spoken errors. This current study was therefore undertaken to examine spoken errors of English of undergraduate Thai university students, employing role play tasks as the data collection tool.

The significance and stages of error analysis with reference to literature will be portrayed in the following section. Related previous research studies on error analysis in both the written and spoken form will also be examined in this paper.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Significance of analyzing language learners' error**

Error analysis is a valuable tool that is used to assess the accuracy of learners' language production in second language learning. Richards et al. (1992), as cited in Khansir (2012), declared that investigation of errors revealed that errors are useful in many ways. Firstly, they help to identify strategies which learners use in language learning. Second, error analysis allows the causes of learners' errors to be identified. Finally, information can be obtained on common difficulties in language learning for guidance in teaching or development of teaching materials.

In the classroom setting, error analysis has several implications for the treatment of learners' errors. They are: 1. Planning remedial measures, 2. Preparing a sequence of target language items and textbooks with easier items coming before more difficult ones, and 3. Making suggestions about the nature or strategies of second language learning employed by both first and second language learners (Khansir, 2012). Beneficial information gained from error analysis will be worthwhile in exploring as it can shed light upon future lesson planning as well as give aid in the selection of appropriate materials and methods of teaching. As a result, error analysis should be a part of the language learning process (Muhamad et al. 2013).

### **2.2 Stages in conducting error analysis**

Ellis (1997) stated that error analysis involves the following stages: 1. Collection of student's samples, 2. Error identification of samples, 3. Error classification according to the source of error, and 4. Improvement of teaching materials and methods to minimize error and difficulty in language learning. A comprehensive discussion of the mentioned stages will be explored.

#### *Collection of student's samples*

To obtain data for error analysis in SLA, two kinds of elicitations utilized were: clinical elicitation and experimental elicitation (Ellis, 1997). For this research, clinical elicitation was adopted. It refers to the process of having participants perform activities such as conducting interviews or role plays. According to Norrish (1983), assessment tasks for university-level EAP students should:

1. Be of general interest to a broad range of university-level L2 English users



2. Involve several content areas
3. Not be highly discipline-specific
4. Engage the examinees in a variety of complex, skills-integrated L2 activities
5. Retain real-world fidelity to the greatest extent possible

Furthermore, Norris, Brown, Hudson and Yoshioka (1998) also pointed out that performance assessment will typically be based on tasks which are:

- a. Based on needs analysis (including student input) in terms of rating criteria, content, and contexts
- b. Be as authentic as possible with the goal of measuring real-world activities
- c. Sometimes have collaborative elements that stimulate communicative interactions
- d. Be contextualized and complex
- e. Integrate skills with content
- f. Be appropriate in terms of number, timing, and frequency of assessment
- g. Be generally non-intrusive, i.e., be aligned with the daily actions in the language classroom.

Morrow (1977) as cited in Sook (2003), mentioned that communication is unpredictable in both form and message. As a result, for a speaking assessment task to be valid it should be in the form of impromptu simulations. A Korean Junior secondary English teacher in Sook (2003)'s study stressed the importance of the role play task. The teacher in the study stated that the role play task needs interaction between the students. Thus, from the perspective of validity; the task meets the criteria of an authentic speaking assessment task.

#### *Error identification of samples*

Over the years, linguists have proposed different definitions for the word, "error." George (1972) defined error as "an unwanted form - especially a form that a particular course designer or teacher does not want." According to Johansson (1975) as cited in Cohen, A.D. (1975), an error occurs when, "a native speaker hesitates about the acceptability of word or construction." Klashen (1995) as cited in Arakkitsakul (2008), refers to error as "a form or structure that a native speaker deemed unacceptable because of its inappropriate use". On the contrary, Richard and Platt (1997), as cited in Arakkitsakul (2008), characterized error as the incorrect usage of a word or a grammatical form found in a second language learner's spoken or written language production. Moreover, error can be seen as the formation of students' bad habits when viewed from a contrastive analysis perspective. Klassen (1995) further proposed that errors occur naturally and are the result of L1 interference which often occurs at the early stages of the transitional period of learning the target language.

### *Error classification according to the source of error*

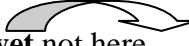
According to James (1998), errors could be classified in 2 ways: 1. The surface structure taxonomy, and 2. The linguistic description of errors.

#### **The surface structure taxonomy**

The surface structure taxonomy of Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) gives a top down overview of grammatical errors and is based on the belief that errors can occur because of change in surface structure in specific and systematic ways. In accordance to the surface structure taxonomy, grammatical errors can be identified by one of the four principal ways in which learners modify the target form. The four principle ways are: omission, addition, misinformation and misordering.

**Table: 1**

**Errors based on surface structure taxonomy**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Category definition</b>	<b>Error example</b>
Omission	Leaving out words where required	Andy <b>*(is the)</b> manager.
Addition	Unnecessary element included	Cindy doesn't <b>*knows</b> the truth.
Misinformation	Incorrect form of word used	Jack <b>*readed</b> the letter.
Misordering	Words use in incorrect sequence	Patty is <b>*yet</b> not here. 

(Adapted from Haji Saad& Sawalmeh, 2014, 349.)

#### *1) Omission*

As learners have not fully mastered the L2 system at the primary stages of their learning, they tend to leave out certain words. Kasper and Kellerman (1997) suggested that early learners omit function words rather than content words. Many cases have been reported in which advanced learners tend to be more aware of using content words and less frequently omit them. An explanation for this might be due to the fact that they resort to compensatory strategies for idea expression.

#### *2) Addition*

Instances of an addition occur when the language learner incorrectly includes words that are not necessary into their language production. This exhibition of error is the 'result of all-too-faithful use of certain rules' and was further categorized into subtypes (Dulay et al., 1982, p.156). These are:

2.1) Regularization, which involves overseeing exceptions and generalizing rules to areas where they do not apply, for example producing the incorrect "singed" for "sang".



2.2) Double marking, which can be referred to as ‘the failure to exclude certain items which are required in some linguistic context but not in others’. An example would be: “Jack doesn’t likes reading.”

2.3) Simple additions, which means additions not recognized as regularization or double marking, e.g. “I do hear him,” which could either be a non-native error or a native speaker’s method of highlighting information. The context is the determiner for such cases.

### 3) *Misinformation*

Dulay et. al. (1982) also defined misinformation as the use of the incorrect form of a structure. It includes the sub-categories of:

3.1) Regularization (e.g. “Does she be excited?”)

3.2) Archi-forms (i.e. use of “me” as both subject and object pronouns)

3.3) Alternating forms (e.g. No + verb and Don’t + verb)

### 4) *Misordering*

Misordering involves situations in which learners have selected the correct grammatical forms to be used in the right context, but have arranged them in the wrong order. Instances of misordering often include adverbials, interrogatives and adjectives. Errors could be produced in the following manner:

\*The Children every day go late to school.

\*You did do what?

From the observations of Dulay et al. (1982), misordering often resulted from learners L1 direct translation into the target language.

## **The linguistic description of errors**

Contrary, in a bottom up inspection, the linguistic description of grammatical errors categorization can be adopted. The linguistic description taxonomy identifies errors according to their location in the target language system. Errors are initially categorized in accordance with the level of language in which they are located: phonological, grammatical, or lexical (James, 1998). Once the level of errors have been determined, they can generally then be broken down into classes of verb form, preposition, article, plurality, tense, pronoun, question and word form to reflect the common types of errors made by the students. Correcting linguistic errors requires extensive knowledge of L2. Without this knowledge, learners may fail to provide correction to errors made (Haji Saad and Sawalmeh, 2014).

### **2.3 Sources of errors**

Norrish (1983) proposed that the sources for the production of errors can often be found in the interference of the learners’ first language, translation from their first language, contrastive analysis, general order of difficulty, overgeneralization, the incomplete application of rules, and also carelessness. Generally, sources of errors can be classified into two categories: (1) interlingual errors caused by mother tongue interference, and (2) intralingual or transfer errors which occur at the developmental phase where learners have not fully acquired the knowledge of their L2 (Richards



1974). Researchers such as Dulay and Burt (1974) highlighted that intralingual errors account for nearly 90% of errors produced by language learners.

*Improvement of teaching materials and methods to minimize error and difficulty in language learning*

Given the context of a communicative Business English course, a brief discussion of how error analysis benefits English teaching and learning will be made. From the learners' point of view, when becoming aware of the grammatical errors produced, students will attempt to engage in more self-reflection and thus self-correct as they carry out communicative tasks. Teachers, on the other hand, will be able to see the grammatical errors that students make, evaluate the causes, and develop means of corrective instruction on the basis of this understanding. Data on the type and frequency will be valuable for educators to design effective speaking tasks, activities, and materials as well as give aid in curriculum planning. Richards and Sampson (1974) maintained that, "At the classroom level, error analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determine priorities for future effort (p. 15)."

Since error analysis provides teachers with insights as to where and how the errors occur and most importantly help to understand students' learning problems, it has been studied widely in both writing and speaking classes. In the following segment, past studies of error analysis in both the written and spoken genre will be touched upon.

*Previous studies on L2 English Language Learner*

Research studies on error analysis in the genre of English writing have been widely conducted throughout the years for educational purposes. The studies have taken place in different L1 backgrounds to represent different student populations, ranging from secondary school, undergraduate to the postgraduate level. A thought-provoking selection of aforementioned research studies in Thailand as well as overseas will be presented.

Jimenez (1996) observed the frequency and variability of errors in the use of English prepositions of essays written by 290 third year students of English as a foreign language from three Spanish state secondary schools. The results of this study suggested that English prepositions are difficult for Spanish secondary students. Substitution errors tend to occur more frequently than omission and addition errors. The differences in percentages are supported by previous studies that report that omission and addition errors tend mostly to occur in beginners. The researcher concluded that though preposition errors do not seriously hinder communication, accuracy is still an important component in language learning.

In a study by Sattayatham and Honsa (2007), errors in sentence translation and opinion paragraph writing of 237 first year medical students from four medical schools in Thailand were investigated. Data collected were analyzed to find the most



frequent errors produced by using the distribution of frequency. The top-ten errors of each medical school were identified and the chi-square was used to find the dependency among the three types of writing. Findings illustrated that the most frequent errors were on the syntactic and lexical levels. Inadequate lexical and syntactic knowledge were determined to be the source of errors, resulting in the overgeneralization of errors, incomplete rule application, omission, and building of false concepts. Mother-tongue interference was also detected as a cause of the above inaccuracies. It can be generally concluded that errors result from inadequate learning (intralanguage) as well as the complexity of the English structure.

Bennui (2008) conducted a similar study on paragraph writing of 28 third-year English-minor Thai students at Thaksin University. Findings yielded results similar to those of Sattayahtam and Honsa (2007). Even though results revealed that there was L1 interference at the level of words, sentences and discourse, the causes of each type were of a different nature. Bennui explained that the lexical interference took the form of literal translation of Thai words into English, whereas interference at the sentence level involved structural borrowing from Thai language such as word order, subject-verb agreement and noun determiners. At the discourse level, “the wordiness or redundancy style of Thai writing appeared in the students’ written English” (Bennui, 2008, p.88).

In a study to find out the types of grammatical errors and the extent to which students transfer Thai language into ill-formed academic written text, Bootchuy (2008) researched 41 master students’ English written tasks and final term papers at a university in Bangkok. It was concluded that the three most frequent type of ungrammatical sentences involved 1) omission of subjects, verbs, objects and complements 2) incorrect form of compound and complex sentences, and 3) word - order errors. Nearly half of the errors identified were interference errors, whereas intralingual and developmental errors being also common, especially errors concerning the incomplete application of rules.

Wee et al. (2010) attempted to identify and determine the type and frequency of verb-form errors in EAP writing of 39 second year learners in a public Malaysian University Diploma Program. For data analysis the researchers examined participants’ 350-words discursive essays. Among the four category types: omission, addition, misformation, and ordering, findings revealed that the subjects made the most number of errors in the omission of verb-forms in the area of the third person singular verb (-s/-es/-ies). This particularly occurred when students tried to make the verb agree with the singular subject or plural subject by dropping the -s inflection from the third person singular verb or making the verb plural by adding the -s inflection, respectively. Moreover, the rates of recurrence of errors for addition and misformation categories were identical while verb-form errors of ordering were reported to be the least occurring. The copula “be” verb was a major problematic area for participants. This is reflected in their over-generalization of the verb, and thus, either omitting the “be” verb or using it incorrectly. Errors in writing affected the comprehensibility of the work. The result of these findings will help teachers to



become aware of the problems concerning students' verb-form errors and find ways to equip them with the basics for producing error-free writing.

In 2016, a study of grammatical and lexical errors in low-proficiency Thai graduate student's writing was conducted by Phoocharoensil, Moore, Gampper, Geerson, Chaturongakul, Sutharoj & Carlon (2016). Data was collected from two in-class written paragraphs produced by 15 students enrolled in the Diploma Program in English for Careers (DEC). The findings revealed that verb errors (36.90%) outnumbered other major types of errors. The subject-verb agreement form of verb errors were the most common, and the main cause for this frequency is believed to result from learner's L1 structural transfers. According to the researchers, grammatical errors such as verbs, articles, and word classes were shown to be more problematic when compared to lexical errors. It is hoped that EFL instructors will use this knowledge to examine the errors which students commit and to create teaching material and lesson plans that minimize future written error production.

O'Donnell (2016) recently conducted a research study attempting to incorporate elements of the spoken context of error analysis into students' written work. The purpose of the study was to investigate the linguistic errors of freshmen enrolled in a foundation English course at Burapha University, Thailand. 212 subjects participated in the study in which they were assigned to write a controlled writing dialogue in pairs. The data comprised 106 first draft dialogues of approximately 150 words per dialogue. The errors were recorded and classified. Capitalization, full stop, subject-verb agreement, adjective, verb tense and prepositional verb phrase were reported as the most frequently occurring errors, respectively. The researcher stated that the results could be used for pedagogical purposes to improve student EFL writing.

Despite the vast numbers of research studies being done on written error analysis, only a limited number of research studies focuses on the spoken form. Available literature on spoken English studies tend to only focus on areas such as speaking skills, students' reluctance to speak in English classes, and features of certain English deviations, such as Malaysian English. It is a common view that error analysis in the spoken form is extremely complicated. The nature of speech may account for the difficulty of examining linguistic accuracy of spoken data. McCarthy and O'Keeffe (2004) wrote about real dialogues which do not look neat with well-formed sentences. Beattie (1983) affirmed that "spontaneous speech is unlike written text, in which it contains many mistakes, sentences are usually brief" as cited in Halliday, (1985, pg.76). Brown (2003) as cited in Ting et al. (2010) stressed the incongruity of requiring students to use complete sentences when they speak and point out why the notion of utterances rather than sentences are used for describing spoken discourse. Researchers have gone on to highlight how the grammar of spoken colloquial English does not impose the use of complete sentences, making utterances like "Ya wanna come along?" appropriate. Regardless of the fact that some fine-tuning needs to be made in studies of grammatical errors of the spoken language, existing research does serve the pedagogic purpose of showing educators what learners have learned and what they have not yet mastered in spoken English.





Furthermore, such studies also contribute to a literature on linguistic properties of spoken language for materials development. A collection of research on spoken errors will be presented in the following section.

Error analysis of the spoken English comparing bilingual and monolingual Mexican-American students is the central theme in Politzer and Ramirez's research conducted 1973. Data was collected through subject interviews in which interviewees were asked to tell the story of a silent movie they had watched. After transcriptions, data that deviated from Standard English were considered as error; counted, and categorized. The main findings of the study showed that the causes of deviations from Standard English included the expected interference of Spanish as well as the improper application of Standard English rules and the influence of nonstandard English dialects. The comparison between children enrolling in bilingual and monolingual school revealed that there is no significant difference between the two groups with respect to frequency of deviations from Standard English.

Ano (2003) conducted a research study to investigate the relationship between fluency and accuracy in spoken English of 58 Japanese high school students. Collected data were classified into one of the five factors concerning fluency and furthermore into the twenty – two grammatical error categories. Results revealed that the three highest occurring grammatical errors were tense, article and preposition. As for tense, students often used the present in the place of future or past despite the use of correct adverbial phrase showing time. Learners also showed that they could not scrutinize the use of article and preposition. Many instances during the study illustrated that learners used unnecessary prepositions as a result of learning the English language as chunks or set phrases. Errors in function words were found to be more common than content words; this may have resulted from learners focusing heavily or solely upon content when they spoke English. Fossilization can be seen as the primary cause of this error. To avoid this phenomenon, form focus instruction is suggested for classroom activities and teachers should encourage students to pay attention to the correct grammatical form when performing communicative activities.

Another interesting study on spoken grammatical accuracy was done with Malaysian university students by Ting et al. (2010). The aim of the study was to determine the types of errors and the changes in grammatical accuracy in an English for Specific Purpose communicative course. Spoken data were obtained and transcribed from 42 less proficient students' simulated oral interactions in five role play situations over a period of 14 weeks. A close examination utilizing error analysis showed that the five most common errors produced by the participants were preposition, question, article, plural form of nouns, subject-verb agreement and tense respectively. Based on a broader categorization of the surface structure taxonomy, data from the study demonstrated that students mainly modify the target form through misinformation and omission. In contrast, a less frequent rate of the addition of elements or misordering was reported. When observed over time, an improvement in grammatical accuracy during the course was observed.



Several other research studies have also been conducted on the Malaysian student population. Muhammad et al. (2013) researched errors in students' oral presentation in an English for Academic Purpose course. Results showed that misinformation accounted for most of the students' errors, following by omission and addition. Linguistically, students made the most errors in verb form, word form and article. Following the work of Muhammad et al., Haji Saad and Sawalmeh (2014) initiated a project to investigate errors in role-plays of less proficient L2 learners. Surprisingly, the top two findings in the area of linguistics descriptions of error among less proficient students in role plays yield similar results to the study of EAP students performing presentations in the study of Muhammad et al. (2013). On the other hand, the results were different when examined from the surface structure taxonomy perspective. Omission was the most prominent type of error occurring in role plays, while misinformation occurred more frequently in presentations.

Despite the fact that there were several studies conducted on error analysis on the spoken language, no research in this area has been published in the Thai context. The researcher was interested in exploring spoken error data among Thai samples and curious to find out whether they are similar to the findings of previous studies conducted abroad.

This research study aims to provide answers to two research questions:

1. What are the types of spoken grammatical errors that Thai students make?
2. What are the most frequent types of spoken grammatical errors that Thai students make?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Data collection**

The participants for this study were at the bachelor degree level, and were studying a Communicative Business English 2 course, focusing on speaking and listening skills at Thammasat University, Rangsit Campus. All students enrolled in this compulsory oral communication course were in their second or third year of study and the majority was from the faculty of Commerce and Accountancy. The students' level of English ranges from intermediate to high intermediate. They had completed at least one foundation English course which emphasized the four-language skills, and passed a pre-requisite Communicative Business English 1 course which focused on the skills of reading and writing in a business context in a previous semester.

According to Ellis (1997), sample size in error analysis studies can be divided into three types: massive, specific, and incidental. For this study, the specific sample size was used for selecting the sample group. It involved collecting data from only a specific language use of a limited number of research participants. Approximately 40 participants were selected to be included in the sample. The sample use was derived from the purposive sampling technique. That is, participants were chosen based on the required criteria which met the objectives of the study. To ensure uniformity, the



participants included 2 randomly selected groups of students (about 20 students from each class) taught by the researcher, enrolled in the Business Communicative English 2 course. Both groups of participants were assumed to have similar proficiency levels in English as each of the participation group was selected based on comparable grades received from their previous Business Communication course 1. Participants from both groups were of mixed abilities, with proficiency grades from their preceding course ranging from A to C. This method of sampling yields a good representative of the total Business Communication 2 course population of Thammasat University students.

As demonstrated by Sook (2003), a valid speaking assessment task should be in the form of an impromptu simulation. Taking this into consideration, the primary tool for data collection was performed through communicative task observations. Incorporating the concept of representing several content areas, having a variety of authentic complex skills-integrated activities, and containing collaborative elements that stimulate communication, the impromptu simulation role plays were selected as the core research tool. The role-play type of oral assessment was based on the business theme tasks specifically designed by the researcher with some adaptations from the Business Result Intermediate course book written by John Hughes and Jon Naunton (2012). Students were randomly put into pairs and given time to prepare their role play before performing it.

Prior to the data collection period, students were taught the content of the units from the Business Result Intermediate textbook with exposure to either reading or listening comprehension texts which provided context for grammatical features relevant to the communicative purpose. One week before students performed their role plays, they had the opportunity to practice the language features learned in partially controlled simulated real-life situations. The instruction of grammar in context was intended to raise students' awareness of relevant language features whereas the oral practice at the end of the unit was to give students a sense of how language could be used in everyday life. Three role play tasks were performed by students at three intervals during the 15 week semester. The researcher chose the themes of the tasks based on the topics thought to be useful for the participants and which the level of grammar or language was generally comparable. The proposed theme for Role Play 1 in week 4 was updating and delegating tasks with the language focus on present simple and continuous, while Role Play 2's theme was on getting information and changing arrangements, performed in week 9 which also focused on the present simple and continuous for future use. Lastly, Role Play 3's content was based on the theme of participating in a discussion with grammar and language focus on the present simple and the first and second conditionals (week 13). During each role play, students were required to exchange roles for accurate data collection. The role plays were audio-taped for assessment purposes and also as a mean for data collection for this study with the consent of the students, instructor and institution.

### 3.2 Data analysis

Transcriptions of spoken data were analyzed according to three stages. Firstly, data were checked for errors by the researcher and two other native English speakers. For an accurate judgment of errors regarding the variety of English uses, the native English speakers were of two different nationalities, namely a British and an American. Errors found by at least one native checker were examined and cross checked. Data

found to be erroneous in grammatical form and thus deviated from the normal spoken British and American English identified by at least two checkers were considered to be inaccurate and identified as an error. In the following stages, the transcribed spoken error collection were analyzed in accordance with the way surface structures are transformed in erroneous utterances and further put into categories according to the surface structure taxonomy of Dulay et al. (1982). The errors were classified as omission, addition, misinformation and misordering. Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005) as cited in Ting et al. (2010), proposed that a linguistic description of grammatical errors should be supplemented to produce a more practical use in grammar teaching. To reflect the common types of errors made by the students in this study, grammatical errors should be categorized as verb form, preposition, article, plurality, tense, pronoun, question and word form as opposed to describing errors as noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective, comparative form and subject-verb agreement. During the last stage, errors were calculated for frequency and expressed as percentages for both the categorization of the surface structure taxonomy and the linguistic description of grammatical errors.

### Findings and Discussions

The following section presents the results of the error analysis of the Thai university students' oral interaction. The role plays were recorded and transcribed, and the symbol \* was used to point out errors whereas the symbol ^ was used to represent missing elements in the spoken language. In the first section, results were presented according to the surface structure taxonomy. Following that, the errors will be discussed in accordance with the linguistic description framework.

### The surface structure description of grammatical errors

	Role Play 1	Role play 2	Role play 3	Total	Percentage
<b>Omission</b>	405	433	365	1,203	52.24
<b>Misinformation</b>	327	219	181	727	31.57
<b>Addition</b>	110	142	93	345	14.98
<b>Misordering</b>	14	13	1	28	1.21
<b>Total errors</b>	856	807	604	2,303	100
<b>Word count</b>	8,228	10,186	7,137	25,551	



Analysis of the errors shows that the total number of errors found among the 3 role plays was 2,303. Table 2 presents the frequency of each type of error according to the surface structure taxonomy. As shown in Table 2, the total number of errors found in Role Plays 1 and 2 were quite similar; 856 and 807 respectively. While on the other hand, the total number of errors found in Role Play 3 was only 604. The variation in input functions of each role play may account for these differences as students were given more language input which they could adapt for communicative usage and thus were under less pressure to produce their own utterance.

**Table 2: Frequency of types of errors based on the surface structure description**

When examining the types of errors based on surface structure descriptions, it can be seen that the most frequent type of error occurrence was omission (1,203 errors or 52.24%), followed by misinformation (727 errors, or 31.57%). The errors in the category of addition and misordering of elements occurred with less frequency; together accounting for around 16%. The high prevalence of omission errors probably indicates that students were unaware of the importance of many obligatory grammatical components of the English language. As a result, they tended to omit elements, which made their sentence ungrammatical. 727 misinformation errors out of 2,303 total recorded errors suggests that although students were aware that certain grammatical features in certain parts of their utterances were crucial, they made incorrect choices in selecting the type of usage, for example “I’m very busy \*in this moment” (Role play 1, pair 2). The findings contrast previous studies conducted on spoken errors by Muhamad et al. (2013) and Ting et al. (2010), who both reported misinformation to be the highest occurring type of error found in spoken language. A more recent study by Haji Saad and Sawalmeh (2014) shared similar results in terms of the rankings and percent of error categories.

It can generally be concluded that Thai university students have problems in the category of omission. Errors were made when students dropped obligatory elements such as verb, article and preposition. Examples of omission errors produced in the study are in (1) and (2).

(1) Verb omission

I ^ let you choose your team members.

The auxiliary verb “will” is missing in this example as it is a compulsory element to be combined with the main verb “let” to indicate future time in English.

(2) Article omission

What is happening with ^ event organizer?

The above question lacks the article “the”. Article omission is very common among Thai learners of English as the Thai language does not require the use of articles.



Misinformation was the second most frequent error type found in the study. Errors of misinformation often occur when there is an incomplete bridge in knowledge of the target language rather than solely from mother tongue interference (Fungai & Itayi, 2012). Examples of misinformation errors are presented in (3) and (4).

(3) Tense and word choice misinformation

The meeting will be \*arrange on the 8th of June in \*am.

An incorrect verb form of “arrange” is used. Instead of the future tense, the present is used. In the example, the student also used the word “am” in the incorrect context. “In the morning” would be a more appropriate word choice.

(4) Subject-verb agreement misinformation

The manager \*want to join the meeting next week.

This example shows the speaker dropped the singular “s” for the verb want though the subject is a singular noun requiring the verb to be in agreement.

Addition as the third most frequent type of error, arose when students added unnecessary elements or words into their speech. (5) and (6) are examples of this error type.

(5) Plural noun “s” addition

We have 1 large convention \*rooms.

The speaker of this utterance added the unnecessary “s” to the singular noun. This may be due to a simple mistake on the part of the speaker.

(6) Excessive preposition addition

Let’s meet \*in at the lobby.

In this example, the student was probably not sure which correct preposition to use. As a result, both prepositions were included in this utterance.

Although the general word order of the Thai and English languages is different, it is surprising to note that students did not make a substantial amount of the misordering type of error. According to this study, it was found that the misordering category in which students produced utterances using elements in the wrong word order only accounted for 1.22% of total errors. This might be due to the fact that students were given sufficient input and language preparation, e.g. explicit language teaching, before engaging in the communicative role play tasks. According to Archer and Hughes (2011), effective - explicit instruction stimulate great levels of success. Students are more likely to be more successful or accurate when they engage in an academic task on the condition that clear and meaningful instruction is given. An example of misordering is given in (7).



### (7) Subject and verb misordering

How I <sup>↔</sup>may help you?

From the above example, the order of the subject noun “I” and the modal “may” are inverted. Although such an ill-formed question is understandable, it is considered grammatically incorrect in English. The student transferring of grammatical rules from their mother tongue is believed to be the main cause of such errors.

In summary, in relation to the surface structure taxonomy, Thai university students’ cases of omission accounted for more than half of the total errors produced. This was followed by misinformation, addition and misordering respectively. Error analysis based on a different perspective will be examined in the next section. The linguistic description of errors or the word family helps to provide a more detailed investigation as to manner and location in which errors were produced.

### The linguistic description of errors

Adapted from previous studies such as Ting et al., (2009), Muhammad et al. (2013), and Haji Saad & Sawalmeh (2014), ten types of error were examined in accordance to the linguistic descriptions of errors. Table 3 below shows the frequency of errors made by students in their oral interactions based on the linguistic description of the error.

**Table 3: Frequency of errors based on the linguistic description**

	Omission	Misinformation	Addition	Misordering	Total	Percentage
<b>Plural form</b>	407	18	42	0	467	20.28
<b>Article</b>	267	69	77	0	413	17.93
<b>Verb form</b>	203	76	74	8	361	15.68
<b>Preposition</b>	109	115	81	2	307	13.33
<b>Tense</b>	13	217	11	0	241	10.46
<b>Word form</b>	46	130	24	5	205	8.90
<b>Pronoun</b>	109	51	26	4	190	8.25
<b>Subject verb agreement</b>	46	47	7	4	104	4.52
<b>Question</b>	2	3	2	5	12	0.52

	Omission	Misinformation	Addition	Misordering	Total	Percentage
<b>Negation</b>	1	1	1	0	3	0.13
<b>Total</b>	1,203	727	345	28	2,303	100.00

According to Table 3, the 3 most frequently occurring types of errors deal with plural form (467 errors), article (413 errors) and verb form (361 errors) respectively. The linguistic description of error analysis suggests that error of plural forms occurred at the highest frequency within the categories of grammatical errors (20.28%). In relation to this, plural forms occurred mainly due to omission (407 errors), addition of unnecessary plural “s” (42 errors), and misuse of plural forms (36 errors). The results correspond with Abdul Rashid, Goh and Wan (2004), in that verb form and preposition are some of the elements that have high rankings among grammatical errors of mixed level Chinese students. This finding also supports the previous research of Suriyatham and Honsa (2007) on Thai Medical students’ most frequently occurring errors, in that some linguistic items such as articles, tense and verb forms appear to be sources of frequent errors. In addition, in more recent studies on students’ oral production by Muhamad et al. (2013) and Haji Saad and Sawalmeh (2014), errors tend to also occur in similar categories and with similar frequency. On the contrary, verb form errors only account for 9.8% in Ting et al.’s study of low proficiency Malaysian students. As previously mentioned, the errors students produce could result from the students’ inadequately learning the language as well as the complexity of the English structure which is not found in the students’ native language. For a clearer picture, samples from students’ role play productions based on the linguistic description of data will be illustrated.

The excerpt of spoken data below produced by a student in Role Play 1 provides insight as to how several errors can be made in a single utterance. They include 1) misordering of elements of the question form, 2) misinformation in terms of incorrect verb form, 3) omission of article as well as 4) inappropriate word form as in (8).

- (8) You can meeting\* with ^ profession\* organizer next week? (Role play 1, pair1)  
Correction: “**Can you meet** with **the professional** organizer next week?”

Several cases of errors could be depicted from the above question. They include misordering of elements, incorrect verb form usage, article omission and word form error, respectively. The student’s utterance in (8) shows that there is no inversion of the modal “can” and the subject in question formation. In addition, there is an incorrect usage of the verb form “ing” following the modal “can”. Commonly in English, the base form of the verb conjugates with modals. Furthermore, the absence of an article preceding a noun can also be witnessed in (8). Article omission is said to be one of the prominent errors in which Thai students have problems with. Thai EFL learners tend to have more difficulties in including articles in their utterances as articles do not exist in their L1 (Bootchuy, 2008; O’Donnell, 2015; Phoocharoensil et.al., 2016;





Sattayatham and Honsa, 2007). Another frequently occurring type of error is the misuse of word form or word class. In the role play excerpt above, a noun is used instead of an adjective. An adjective “professional” is required to clarify the noun “organizer”.

In the succeeding section, a detailed analysis of Role Plays 1, 2, and 3 is presented along with examples of errors produced by the participants.

**Table 4: Frequency of errors based on linguistic description of Role Play 1**

	Omission	Misinformation	Addition	Misordering	Total	Percentage
<b>Verb form</b>	83	38	21	3	145	16.94
<b>Plural form</b>	123	16	4	0	143	16.71
<b>Article</b>	94	24	21	0	139	16.24
<b>Tense</b>	13	114	11	0	138	16.12
<b>Preposition</b>	34	40	36	2	112	13.08
<b>Pronoun</b>	42	20	11	2	75	8.76
<b>Word form</b>	5	60	2	3	70	8.18
<b>Subject verb agreement</b>	9	15	3	0	27	3.15
<b>Question</b>	1	0	1	4	6	0.70
<b>Negation</b>	1	0	0	0	1	0.12
<b>Total</b>	405	327	110	14	856	100.00

From Table 4, we can see that the four highest occurring errors produced by students from Role Play 1 are verb form (16.94%), plural form (16.71%), article (16.24%) and tense (16.12%). It is interesting to note that the percentages of each type of error mentioned above are all within the 16% range. There were similar degrees of distribution among the different types of errors as classified in the surface structure with the exception of misordering, which occurred less frequently. In contrast, a closer examination reveals that for errors concerning tense, the occurrence of misinformation outscores the other types of errors at a prominent rate (misinformation = 114, omission = 13, addition = 11). Samples of common types of errors in Role Play 1 on the theme of asking for updates are presented below with the omission type of errors accounting for the majority of the errors made (405 errors out of the total 856 errors).

(9) Verb omissions

“Well, I^ let you ^ back to work.” (pair 9)

Corrections: “I **will** let you **get** back to work.”

As in (9) the helping verb “will” complementing the verb “get” was dropped.

Despite being aware of the role play context function of future plans, the student still failed to include the future tense marker. The second error found in the same sentence production was the omission of the main verb “get”. The student was not responsive to the rule that a main verb is required before an infinitive, and might not be aware that an infinitive verb alone does not constitute a grammatical sentence.

(10) Subject verb agreement and tense misinformation

“Invitation\* are already print\* and deliver\*.” (pair 16)

Corrections: “Invitations are already printeded and delivereded.”

Another major problem for Thai learners of English is the inability to produce sentences in which the verb agrees in number and person with the subject. Unsurprisingly, a great number of these errors stem from their L1 interference. In the Thai language, the subject-verb agreement rule does not exist, therefore students are not accustomed to adding the “s” to the verb to make it agree to the singular subject and vice versa using plural verbs with plural subjects (Iwasaki & Ingkapirom, 2009). Also in (10) tense misinformation can be observed as the student produced an inaccurate form of the passive sentence. When closely examined, it can be easily noticed that the correct structure of the passive voice was not utilized. The participant used the wrong form of the past participial to complement the verb “be”.

(11) Tense misinformation and article omission

“What^ happen\* with ^ event organizer? (pair 20)

Corrections: “What is happening with the event organizer?”

(11) illustrates the student’s difficulty in constructing a question using the present continuous to ask about an event in progress. The question lacks an auxiliary verb “is” and the “ing” ending of the main verb to create the continuous form. Once again we can see another case of article omission where it is needed. The article “the” was not included before the noun phrase.

**Table 5: Frequency of errors based on linguistic description of Role Play 2**

	Omission	Misinformation	Addition	Misordering	Total	Percentage
<b>Article</b>	129	41	27	0	197	24.41
<b>Plural form</b>	121	2	25	0	148	18.34
<b>Verb form</b>	58	22	41	5	126	15.61
<b>Preposition</b>	44	54	26	0	124	15.37



	Omission	Misinformation	Addition	Misordering	Total	Percentage
<b>Word form</b>	38	36	13	2	89	11.03
<b>Pronoun</b>	26	14	7	1	48	5.95
<b>Subject verb agreement</b>	16	16	2	4	38	4.71
<b>Tense</b>	0	32	0	0	32	3.97
<b>Question</b>	1	1	1	1	4	0.50
<b>Negation</b>	0	1	0	0	1	0.12
<b>Total</b>	433	219	142	13	807	100.00

According to Table 5, the most frequently occurring errors are still the omission of article (24.41%), plural form (18.34%) and verb form (15.61%) similar to Role Play 1. However, there were slightly more preposition errors in Role Play 2 (15.37%) when compared to Role Play 1 (13.08%). Examples of students' errors collected during the communicative task on the theme of asking for business information are as follows:

(12) Object pronoun and article omission

"I can't make ^ on ^ 28<sup>th</sup> of August." (pair 12)

Corrections: "I can't make it on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August."

Object pronoun omission occurs when an obligatory object pronoun complimenting a certain verb is not included in the utterance, thus resulting in an incomplete ungrammatical utterance as in (12). This type of error could possibly be associated with either the learner's carelessness or not knowing that "make" is a transitive verb, and must be followed by a direct object. Moreover, the excerpt reveals that errors were also made by omitting the article "the" in front of a date. An explanation for such cases of errors might be due to the fact that many learner's falsely associate a date with a number representation and not as a noun. Hence, they tend to drop the article in front of such nouns.

(13) Article and plural form omission

"We have ^ large grand ballroom for 800 guest^." (pair 7)

Corrections: "We have a large grand ballroom for 800 guests."

Article omission in (13) possibly demonstrates that learners follow the rule that article needs to be added in front of a noun only. They might not have mastered the knowledge to notice that an article is also required in front of adjectives and noun phrases. Another frequent error type among Thai students

is the oversight of “s” for plural nouns. In the example, the learner did not add “s” to the plural noun “800 guests”. Referring back to Table 5, it can be seen that this type of error ranks second in terms of frequency. Mother tongue interference could be the cause of such errors as there are no plural suffixes in the Thai language (O’Donnell, 2015; Phoocharoensil et al., 2016; Sattayatham and Honsa, 2007).

(14) Verb form misinformation, preposition omission and misinformation

“The meeting will ^ arranged ^ the 19<sup>th</sup> of May \*in pm.” (pair 23)

Corrections: “The meeting will **be** arranged **on** the 19<sup>th</sup> of May **at 6 pm.**”

(14) is another example of a student’s failure in the construction of an accurate future passive voice sentence. The verb “be”, an important component of the passive voice structure was dropped. Additionally, a preposition omission error can also be found in the above speech. The utterance lacks the preposition “on” which is an essential element to be included preceding the date. The third error displayed in (14) is the misinformation of preposition to be used for the purpose of specifying the time of a specific activity. The subject seemed to have trouble using the correct preposition of time. She incorrectly used “in” with pm instead of substituting it with “at”. Moreover, a specific hour such as 6 needs to be added before “pm” to make the meaning of the utterance clear to the listener.

**Table 6: Frequency of errors based on linguistic description of Role Play 3**

	Omission	Misinformation	Addition	Misordering	Total	Percentage
<b>Plural form</b>	163	0	13	0	176	27.50
<b>Verb form</b>	62	16	12	0	90	14.06
<b>Article</b>	44	4	29	0	77	12.03
<b>Tense</b>	0	71	0	0	71	11.09
<b>Preposition</b>	31	21	19	0	71	11.09
<b>Pronoun</b>	41	17	8	1	67	10.47
<b>Word form</b>	3	34	9	0	46	7.19
<b>Subject verb agreement</b>	21	16	2	0	39	6.09
<b>Question</b>	0	2	0	0	2	0.31
<b>Negation</b>	0	0	1	0	1	0.16
<b>Total</b>	365	181	93	1	640	100.00

Data from Table 6 shows that the order of errors occurring still does not vary considerably from the two previous role plays. Omission of plural form (27.50%), verb form (14.06%), article (12.03%) and tense (11.09%) still top the list of error frequency. Nevertheless, there are some minor differences such as a considerable



decrease in errors concerning misinformation of the articles category (Role Play 1 = 24 instances, Role Play 2= 41 instances, Role Play 3= 4 instances). This might result from the different types and numbers of input provided. Below are error examples taken from Role Play 3 focusing on the topic of giving updates.

(15) Plural form omission

“Do you have any problem<sup>^</sup> about communication?” (pair 3)

Correction: “Do you have any problems<sub>g</sub> about communication?”

Normally in English “any” is used with plural and uncountable nouns. In (13) it is erroneously used with a singular noun “problem”.

(16) Verb omission and verb form misinformation

“If you <sup>^</sup> free in the afternoon, I will \*give you up to date.” (pair 15)

Correction: “If you **are** free in the afternoon, I will **keep** you up to date”

In (16) the subject-verb-object rule was violated as there is an absence of the verb “are” in the conditional sentence. Furthermore, the student made a wrong choice in verb selection for accompanying the phrase “you up to date”. The suggested grammatical expression would be “keep you up to date” rather than “\*give you up to date”. This verb form misinformation may have arose due to the speaker previously seeing the phrase “give an update” being used as an explicit language input presented earlier in the lesson. As a result, generalizations may have been made that the verb “give” could also be correctly used as “\*give you up to date”.

(17) Article addition and omission

“I think \*the Green Holidays will be <sup>^</sup> good prospect.” (pair 4)

Correction: “I think Green Holidays will be **a** good prospect.”

In contrast to example (13) where an article was omitted in a noun phrase, an article addition was found in example (17). In the above case, “Green Holidays”, the name of a tour company, was mistakenly referred to as a noun phrase. Hence, the article “the” was erroneously added before the noun phrase. It is also interesting to see that in the same utterance, the student made both article addition and omission errors. Consistency in rule applications concerning articles is not present throughout the utterance. It can be clearly seen that in the beginning of the utterance, the article “the” was unnecessary added to a name. On the other hand, at the end of the speech, the crucial article “a” is missing from a noun phrase.



## Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Findings for the English learners' spoken errors in the Thai context are shown in this study. Data were obtained from class role play dialogues produced by 40 Thai undergraduate students. The plural form, article, verb form and preposition are among the major problems for the students, classified as the linguistic description of errors. The alteration in the surface structure of the utterances revealed prevalent omission errors. Almost half of the total errors produced were omission (1,223 instances out of 2,325 errors). The second most frequently occurring category of errors was misinformation (31.57%), followed by addition (14.98%) and misordering (1.22%). An explanation of the students' problem with omission of the plural form and article may arise from the student's L1 mother tongue interference due to the fact that there are no equivalents to plural forms and articles in Thai. It could generally be concluded that Thai students need to focus more on these problematic areas and be specially drilled in using the plural and article. As for verb forms in which the tense markers are different from those in their L1, continuous practice over time could lead to improvements. Additionally, making students aware of their errors through teacher and peer corrective feedback would also be fruitful and thus, discourage future error production.

For the purpose of keeping up with the ASEAN community, it is increasingly important for Thailand to incorporate the communicative components or speaking skills into its curriculum. This study is held to be noteworthy as it provided valuable insight and suggestions for the identification of spoken grammatical errors. This could help students as well as stakeholders and teachers to see the problematic areas and find corrective measures to minimize errors from recurring or optimistically reducing fossilization. Furthermore, this data could contribute to the area of materials and course development, and the planning of the English teaching process as whole.

## Recommendations for Further Studies

A suggestion for future studies would be to carry out the data collection for a longer period of time in order to produce more generalized findings. Two semesters or a one year period would be an ideal time period to generate increased data reliability. To produce a more precise picture of the Thai students' flaws, future studies are recommended to be carried out separately among proficient groups of students as well as less proficient groups. It would also be worthwhile to determine whether there are any differences in error production among different groups of students as each teaching institution across the Kingdom is of a different nature and background.

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