

**A STUDY OF PERSISTED SYNTACTIC ERRORS IN WRITING OF THE 3RD
YEAR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH FOR INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNICATION PROGRAM**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to analyze the persisted syntactic errors found in writing and to study the causes of those errors, which will lead to the solution to help students lessen those errors. The findings will enable students to be aware of the problematic areas in writing and thus, help in preventing such errors. The 46 samples were the 3rd year students of English for International Communication Program, Foreign Languages Department, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya, selected by simple random sampling method. Each of the samples produced 6 pieces of writing, in which the errors were analyzed and marked. Data was collected and analyzed by the percentage of the errors, and then ranked according to the frequency of both individual and group persisted errors, from the highest to the lowest. At the same time, the causes of those errors were analyzed. From the study, 3,212 errors were found in the 276 pieces of writing from 46 students. The four highest-frequency areas of errors found were: determiners, subjects and verbs agreement, tenses, and prepositions. The results from both individual and group analysis showed no difference. Moreover, it was found that the persisted errors in writing were resulted from the mother tongue interference, the false hypothesis and the ignorance of the correct sentence patterns of English structures, together with the lack of knowledge in grammatical rules. The result of this study could be used as a guideline for instructional management to prevent those areas of errors and to minimize students' persisted errors for the ultimate goal of English learning and teaching.

Keywords: persisted errors, syntactic errors, English for International Communication Program

INTRODUCTION

As a language of globalization world, English is needed in every aspect of modern society. Accuracy in the use of the language guarantees the better understanding between the sender and the receiver of the message. On the other hand, errors made may cause misunderstanding or even communication breaks-down. In teaching writing skill, many students were found to perform persisted errors, the same errors that they made again and again. There have been many studies done on the errors to lessen the problems in teaching. Charas Ubol (1981), Bamrung Torat (1997), and Lush (2002) found that the most frequent errors were the syntactic errors about the use of articles, subject-verb agreement, tenses, the paralleled forms of verbs, and the use of infinitive form. For the causes of the errors, the previous studies by Richards (1974) and Lush (2002) found that the main causes were the interference of the mother tongue, the difficulty of the grammar rules, overgeneralization, and the difference between L1 and L2. To identify the persisted errors, and also to analyze the causes of those errors, The Study of Persisted Syntactic Errors in Writing of the 3rd Year Students of English for International Communication Program was undertaken. The main aim was to try to find the appropriate ways to design the instructional tools to lessen the persisted errors in writing of the third-year students of English for International Communication Program at Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1 Participants

The target group of the study was 91 third-year students of English for International Communication Program. All of them had experienced basic writing skills from the writing courses: Writing 1 and Writing 2 as well as other English subjects. The researcher applied the systematic simple random sampling by drawing the names to get 46 samples.

2 Instruments

The sample was assigned to write 6 pieces of writhing which included two pieces of picture-guided writing, two pieces of story-guided writing, and two pieces of free writing. The reason why the researcher applied different types of writing tasks is to avoid the variance based on the study and to get rid of the samples' problems of limited vocabulary and sentence structures or lack of ideas on certain topics. Moreover, in assigning different types of writing tasks, the researcher expected to be able to find different types of possible errors.

A detection of persisted errors was identified after the collection of the writing pieces. The table of error categories was developed by the researcher to identify both the individual errors and the group errors. The 4 highest percentages of errors both from the individual and the group were investigated and determined to design the instructional tools to be used as pretest and posttest instruments for a further research study.

3 Data Collection

Each sample produced 6 pieces of the assigned writing. The duration was 6 weeks. The allocation time was 1 hour for each piece of writing consisted of about 100 words. The samples were not allowed to use neither the dictionary nor any references during the writing tasks. The pieces of writing were then marked on persisted syntactic errors. Every single error of each type was numbered and counted for the analysis.

4 Data Analysis

The data used for analysis in this study were drawn separately from two types of sources; from individual and as the whole group. The frequency of errors occurred in each writing was marked on the set predetermined categories. The amounts were counted and ranked according to the frequency found.

5 Classification of Errors

The errors found at the sentence level were categorized according to the predetermined criteria as follows:

Subject-Verb Agreement This included the non-agreement in the use of subject and verb in various types of sentences: statements, questions and negatives.

Preposition This included the omission of prepositions, and the misuse of words in the places of positions for directions, movements and time.

- **Pronoun** This included the incorrect use of subjective pronouns, objective pronouns, pronouns to represent the relationship, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, the omission of the pronouns and the word order of the pronouns in the sentence.

- **Conjunction** Errors of this type were the wrong choices of conjunction; an omission and the use of unnecessary conjunction in a sentence.

Determiner This was counted for a misuse, an omission, and the use of unnecessary determiners in a sentence, both definite and indefinite determiners.

Tense This was counted when the sample applied the wrong or inconsistent use of tenses.

- **Infinitives and Gerunds** These types of errors were applied when the sample made mistakes in using infinitives and gerunds.

Auxiliary Verbs This type of errors included the incorrectly or negligently use of auxiliary verbs.

- **Incomplete Structure** This was counted when there was no subject, modifier or object in a sentence which obstructed the comprehension of the meaning.

- **Run-on Sentence** This type of error included the omission of the punctuations when needed, and the repeated of the subject or the verb in a sentence.

- **Word Order** This was applied for the misplacement of the words in a sentence which distorted the meaning of the sentence.

- **Punctuation** This included the misuse and the omission of punctuations when needed.

There-be application This was counted when the sample used *verb to have* instead of *there be structure* or other structures.

- Possessive Structure This type of errors was when the sample used *of* instead of *apostrophe ('s)* or the omission of possessive structures where it is necessary.

Singular and Plural Nouns This included the non-agreement of the use of the singular and plural nouns in a sentence.

Relative Clause This included the incorrect use of adjective clauses or adverbial clauses.

- Participial Phrase This included the grammatically incorrect use of participial phrases both in the present and the past tenses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The errors from 276 pieces of writing obtained from 46 samples were marked and classified according to the set predetermined categories. The total identified persisted errors from the whole group were 3,212. Of these errors, the most frequent errors made were found in the wrong use of determiners, which counted for 610 or 18.99%; the second most frequent errors made were found in the wrong use of subject-verb agreement, which counted for 538 or 16.75%; the third most frequent errors made were found in the wrong use of tenses, which counted for 400 or 12.45%; and the fourth most frequent errors made were found in the wrong use of pronouns, which counted for 359 or 11.18%. In identifying the total frequencies of the persisted errors made by individual, the greatest numbers of errors found in the wrong use of determiners, subject-verb agreement, tenses, and pronouns were 56%, 22.83%, 20.64%, and 7.61%, respectively. It is noted that the first two most frequent errors made by the individual were the same as those analyzed from the group.

Table 1. The percentage of the frequency of persisted errors from individual analysis

	Types of Errors	Freq.	%
1	Determiner	24	26.09
2	Subject/Verb Agreement	21	22.83
3	Preposition	19	20.64
4	Tense	7	7.61
5	Others	21	22.82
	Total	92	100.00

Table 2. The percentage of the frequency of persisted errors from group analysis

	Types of Errors	Freq.	%
1	Determiner	610	18.99
2	Subject/Verb Agreement	538	16.75
3	Tense	400	12.45
4	Preposition	359	11.18
5	Others	1,305	40.63
	Total	3,212	100.00

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that the most frequent errors in writing were due to the interference of the Thai language. This is because the learners applied the structures of their mother tongue when they write in English. The differences in both the vocabulary and the structures of the two languages cause the problems in writing the second language. Moreover, the learners have false hypothesis in learning the second language. They over-generalize and construct their own assumption in the new language which can not be applied in neither Thai nor English. The researcher, therefore, will design the instructional tools in the aspects of the detected categories of errors to lessen the grammatical problematic areas for the writing class in the next research.

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