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Common Syntactic Errors in Interlanguage Writing Output: A Case Study of EFL Undergraduates

ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ที่พบบ่อยจาก
ผลงานเขียนที่เป็นภาษาระหว่างกลาง:
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บทคัดย่อ

กรณีศึกษานี้วิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ในระดับประโยคที่พบบ่อยในงานเขียนเรื่องราวแบบอิสระของนักศึกษาวิชาเอกภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นปีที่ 2 คณะมนุษยศาสตร์และประยุกต์ศิลป์ มหาวิทยาลัยหอการค้าไทย บนพื้นฐานของรูปแบบการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดชนิด 6 ขั้นตอน โดยแบ่งเป็น 2 ระยะ คือ การตรวจสอบข้อผิดพลาด และการอภิปรายการจัดกระทำต่อข้อผิดพลาด จากผลการวิเคราะห์ในระยะแรก พบข้อผิดพลาดสูงสุด 9 อันดับซึ่งเป็นข้อผิดพลาดแบบ interlingual 50% และแบบ intralingual 50% ข้อผิดพลาดทั้ง 9 อันดับ ได้แก่ verb tense, article,

preposition, fragment, infinitive or gerundive construction, singular or plural form, part of speech, run-on sentence และ verb be ตามลำดับ การอภิปรายการจัดกระทำต่อข้อผิดพลาดใน ระยะที่ 2 ทำบนพื้นฐานทั้งทางทฤษฎีการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดและทฤษฎีภาษาระหว่างกลาง รวมทั้ง ความสามารถในการแก้ไขข้อผิดพลาดของนักศึกษาเมื่อจบการศึกษา ผลการวิเคราะห์ในระยะที่ 2 คือ การแบ่งประเภทการจัดกระทำต่อข้อผิดพลาดเป็น 3 กลุ่ม ได้แก่ สำคัญมากที่สุด สำคัญปานกลาง และ สำคัญน้อยที่สุด ซึ่งการจัดประเภทดังกล่าวจะเป็นตัวชี้ว่าลักษณะการตอบสนองเพื่อให้เกิดการแก้ไข กล่าวคือข้อผิดพลาดใดควรแก้ไขให้ถูกต้อง และข้อผิดพลาดใดสามารถยอมไว้ก่อน

คำสำคัญ: ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด การจัดกระทำต่อข้อผิดพลาด งานเขียน ภาษาระหว่างกลาง

Abstract

This case study analyzed common sentence-level syntactic errors in free compositions of English-major sophomores at School of Humanities and Applied Arts, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce. The analysis was based on the six-stage error analysis model. This six-stage analysis was conducted in two phases: investigation of the errors and discussion of error treatment. The findings from the first phase revealed the top nine syntactic errors whose psycholinguistic causes were 50% interlingual and 50% intralingual. The top nine errors were verb tense, article, preposition, fragment, infinitive or gerundive construction, singular or plural form, parts of speech, run-on sentence, and the verb be, respectively. The discussion on error treatment was based on both theoretical viewpoints (Error Analysis and Interlanguage Theory) and participants' self-correction ability after graduation. The results of the second phase were three categories of common errors for treatment: very important, moderately important, and least important. This provides some guidelines for correction feedback regarding what error to correct and what error to tolerate.

Keywords: Syntactic Error, Error Analysis, Error Treatment, Composition, Interlanguage

Introduction

English writing is a difficult skill for Thai students to acquire. Consequently, errors in the writing process are not infrequent. Even though errors are viewed positively as a natural and vital part of language acquisition (Corder, 1967), it is suggested that adult learners should be aware of their own errors and errors must be corrected (Krashen and Seliger, 1975; Hendrickson, 1983)

The problem is raised; however, concerning how to distinguish between types of errors. Out of an abundance of errors made by EFL writers in large classes, which errors should be dealt with first?

According to Corder (1974), when errors are analyzed systematically, it is possible for teachers to determine areas that need reinforcement, meaning it is necessary to make an analysis of errors in order to correct them effectively.

Since Error Analysis (EA) helps identify learner's linguistic difficulties and needs at a particular stage of language learning, this study adopted EA to analyze participants' common syntactic errors. However, for more effective findings, participants' self-correction ability after graduation and interlanguage theory were also taken into account. The two research questions of the study included:

1. What are common syntactic errors and their possible causes?

2. Should these common syntactic errors be corrected or tolerated based on theories (Error Analysis and Interlanguage Theory) and self-correction ability after graduation?

Literature Review

Errors VS Mistakes

Errors refer to the use of linguistic items in a way that is unacceptable to native speakers because of inappropriate use or incomplete learning (Klassen, 1991: 74). Unlike mistakes, which are caused by failures in performance (Corder, 1967: 25), errors are caused by the lack of language competence, reflecting gaps in the learner's knowledge (Brown, 1987; Ellis, 1997). The present study focused on errors in the students' written compositions, not their mistakes.

Error Theories

Error theories, which have been influential approaches dealing with ESL/EFL students' errors, include Contrastive Analysis (CA), Error Analysis (EA), and Interlanguage Theory (IL). This research analyzed errors based on the last two theories.

CA, whose basic assumption is that L2 would be affected by L1 (Jie, 2008: 36), caused it to become an unproductive pedagogical

tool. This is because much research, such as by Dulay and Burt (1973), supports the fact that interference from L1 is not the sole source of L2 learning problems. Since the late 1960s, when cognitive psychology influenced the theory of language acquisition, errors have been viewed positively as a vital part of learning (Lu, 2010: 74). EA then emerged in the field of second language acquisition. It first argued for the significance of learners' errors, causing a shift from CA to EA (Lu, 2010: 74). EA has two functions: a theoretical and a practical (Corder, 1981: 45). Based on its theoretical aspect, error analysis is part of the methodology of investigating the language learning process. From its practical aspect, error analysis guides the remedial action.

IL is the study of the language learners' language (Corder, 1981: 66), which is systematic and rule-governed (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: 69). It is a natural language system that can be described in terms of linguistic rules and principles (Doughty and Long, 2003). It suggests the half-way position between knowing and not knowing the target language, which might be better understood as a continuum between L1 and L2 in which the learners are moving toward the competence of a native speaker, but never quite reach it (James, 2001: 3, 7). Moreover, it may be viewed as an adaptive strategy that learners use through developmental stages toward target language proficiency (Selinker, 1972).

IL is a complete shift of the focus from teaching perspective to learning perspective in SLA and has characterized a major approach to second language research and theory. However, IL fails to define the concept clearly and develop effective approaches to facilitate empirical studies (Jie, 2008: 40).

The errors of the present study were analyzed based on Error Analysis to test if EA still had a value of its own. This was because the present study was merely a case study dealing with a small number of participants. It aimed to identify the frequencies of errors made at a particular stage of language learning and the students' ability to correct their errors after graduation. The evaluations of the errors were, however, on the basis of not only Error Analysis but also Interlanguage Theory.

Models for Error Analysis

Models of error analysis are primarily elaborations based on Corder's (1967, 1971) three stages of error analysis model. The three stages are recognition of idiosyncrasy, accounting for idiosyncratic dialect, and explanation.

This research adopted Li-qiu's (2008) model, which includes six stages: Selecting language samples, Identifying errors, Describing errors, Explaining errors, Evaluating errors, and Treating errors.

Classification of Errors

Errors can be classified into various types and in various ways according to psycholinguistic causes or sources of errors. However, all classifications of errors are categorized within two domains: interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are caused by L1 interference. And intralingual errors are caused by the students' strategies or efforts to learn the second or foreign language. These errors are then also called developmental errors.

The present study explained the syntactic errors based on one interlingual error (1) L1 interference and five intralingual errors, (2) overgeneralization, (3) ignorance of rule restrictions, (4) incomplete application of rules, (5) false concept hypothesized, and (6) learning strategy of simplification. Unlike transfer of learning/training, and material-induced errors, these five developmental errors could be theoretically supported with linguistic evidence.

Error Correction and Error Tolerance Based on Error Analysis and Interlanguage Theory

Common distinctions of errors in EA include (1) Overt errors vs Covert errors, (2) Major errors vs Minor errors, (3) Global errors vs Local errors, and (4) High frequency errors vs low frequency errors. Overt errors

are ungrammatical at the sentence level. Covert errors are grammatically correct at the sentence level, but are not interpretable within the context of communication (Corder, 1973: 272). Major errors are those caused by the violation of major grammar rules (all fundamental rules). Minor errors are those caused by the violation of minor grammar rules such as exceptions to grammar rules (Norris (1983). Global errors are those that cause a listener or reader to misunderstand a message or to consider a sentence incomprehensible. Local errors, by contrast, do not significantly hinder communication of a sentence's message (Burt and Kiparsky, 1972: 73). High frequency errors are errors that occur very frequently while low frequency errors are not common.

These distinctions basically help identify which errors are more important than others and when to correct them. However, to deal with errors the teacher should also use his/her own judgment about correcting them (Corder, 1975) based on 'common sense,' intuition, and knowledge of individual students (Birckbichler, 1977). This is because, for example, a lower frequency of errors need not necessarily mean that they are less difficult (Duskova, 1969). It may perhaps reflect the strategy of avoidance (Schachter, 1974).

IL views errors as natural signs that

indicate progress through the interlanguage system (Corder, 1975). This system contains three characteristics: systematicity, permeability, and fossilization (Adjemian, 1976). All interlanguage errors should be treated pertinently (Huang, 2009) with an appropriate corrective feedback. This is because excessive error correction may interfere with and alter students' thinking process and induce severe psychological frustration. On the other hand too much tolerance of students' errors may increase the risk of fossilization, causing non-progression of learning despite continuous exposure to input and opportunity to practice (Jie, 2008: 41). Furthermore, this fossilization can occur at any stage of the interlanguage system.

The evaluation of the importance of the present study's errors was based on EA and IL. EA would help in classifying the present study's errors into major and minor errors as well as global and local errors. IL helped confirm the degree of importance for each error by considering other factors such as frequency of the errors as well as effect on the reader/researcher. Apart from EA and IL, the self-correction ability of writers after graduation assisted in ordering errors in each group.

Method

Participants

The participants comprised 60 English-

major sophomores who enrolled in Communicative Writing 1 in the academic year 2009, School of Humanities and Applied Arts, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce. These Thai speaking students only used English during their English classes or when needed.

Procedures

To complete the process, the six stages (Li-qiu, 2008) were conducted in two phases:

Phase I: Investigation of the errors

Stage 1: Selecting language samples

Sixty free-writing short narrative compositions entitled 'My Most Memorable Experience' were collected in 2009. The average length of the compositions was 140 words.

Stage 2: Identifying errors

Overt syntactic errors were all underlined. These errors were based on the students' consistency in producing the same kinds of ungrammatical errors throughout their writing. If not, they were considered mistakes and were excluded from the study. To decrease mistakes, the students' compositions had already gone through a self and peer editing process before submission. The errors that might be students' mistakes (such as misspelled words and typing errors) were also excluded.

Stage 3: Describing errors

A grammatical description was assigned to each error based on an error classification scheme adapted from that of Darus et al (2007). The scheme consisted of 19 types of errors, including verb tense, article, subject-verb agreement, infinitive or gerundive construction, causative verb, modal verb, verb to be, active or passive voice, pronoun, singular or plural form, word order, negative construction, preposition, part of speech, conjunction and connector, possessive and attributive structure, fragment (incomplete structure), run-on sentence, and miscellaneous errors.

To facilitate the process of describing the errors and arriving at an accurate finding of the frequency of occurrence, Markin 3.1 software was utilized with annotation buttons previously customized based on the scheme.

While 60 original compositions were being corrected and analyzed, the copies of original compositions with no corrections were sent to individual participants via their emails in March 2012. The graduates were asked to correct their own composition written two years ago and send it back to the researcher. Unfortunately, only one third, or 20 compositions, were corrected by the graduates and returned to the researcher. To learn their self-correction ability after graduation, all of the returned compositions were corrected again by the researcher and

analyzed based on Markin 3.1 with the same error classification scheme applied earlier. The frequencies of the errors found were compared with those of the original compositions of the same authors without self-correction.

Stage 4: Explaining errors

The common errors were explained based on their two main psycholinguistic causes of errors including interlingual error (L1 transfer) and intralingual errors (developmental errors). Unlike linguistic causes of errors, psycholinguistic errors would tell more about the sequence of language development. Three experts gave comments on the explanation.

Phase II: Discussion on error treatment

Stage 5: Evaluating errors

Based on EA, the errors were categorized according to three levels of importance: very important (major + global: ***), moderately important (major + local: **), and least important (minor + local: *). Very important errors included major errors (errors caused by the violation of major grammar rules), which were also considered global errors (errors causing an incomprehensible messages). Moderately important errors included major errors, which were considered local errors (errors that did not cause an incomprehensible messages). Least important errors (errors caused by the

violation of minor grammar rules) did not cause any incomprehensible messages.

Next, the errors in each group were also arranged in order of importance within the group based on the graduates' self-correction ability. The lower the percentage of self-correction ability, the more difficult the error is to be corrected. As a result, an error having the lowest percentage was placed as number one in its group. (Deciding if each error was global or local depended on data used in this study only. That is to say the same type of error can be considered global or local in different contexts.)

Stage 6: Treating errors

The treatment of the errors was discussed in terms of whether to correct or to tolerate the errors based on levels of importance both from the previous stage and Interlanguage Theory. Simply put, IL had the last say on whether or not the importance of these errors should be changeable within groups. For example, minor + local errors (*) with high frequency of occurrence should be remarked as ** or *** depending on how serious they are likely to lead to fossilization.

Data Analysis

The participants' errors were identified and described by using an adapted error

classification scheme by Darus et al (2007) and Markin 3.1 software. Following that, the frequency of error occurrences was calculated into mean values by using Descriptive Statistics. The mean values were used to order types of errors from most frequently found to least frequently found. After that, possible psycholinguistic causes of the top nine common syntactic errors were explained by using content analysis based on Error Analysis. Finally, to evaluate the importance of the errors, content analysis was used based on Error Analysis and Interlanguage Theory together with descriptive statistics. This was to calculate the self-correction ability after graduation by comparing the mean values of the frequency of error occurrences of the compositions written when the writers were English-major sophomores and those of the same compositions corrected by their writers who had already graduated.

Results

Common Syntactic Errors

Table 1 presents the top nine common syntactic errors. They included (1) verb tense: 3.75, (2) article: 1.20, (3) preposition: 1.00, (4) fragment: 0.90, (5) infinitive or gerundive construction: 0.75, (6) singular or plural form: 0.65, (7) part of speech: 0.50, (8) run-on sentence: 0.20, and (9) verb 'be:': 0.10.

Table 1 Means of Top Nine Syntactic Errors Made by 60 UTCC English-major Sophomores

Order	Syntactic errors	Mean values
1	Verb tense	3.75
2	Article	1.20
3	Preposition	1.00
4	Fragment	0.90
5	Infinitive or gerundive construction	0.75
6	Singular or plural form	0.65
7	Part of speech	0.50
8	Run-on sentence	0.20
9	Verb 'be'	0.10

Possible Causes of the Common Syntactic Errors

Table 2 presents possible causes for the top nine errors: L1 interference (50%), false concept hypothesized (20.8%), ignorance of rule restrictions (12.5%), incomplete

application of rules (8.3%), overgeneralization (4.16%), and learning strategy of simplification (4.16%), respectively. These findings showed 50% of interlingual errors and 50% of intralingual errors.

Table 2 Summary of Top Nine Errors and Their Possible Causes

Order	Error Type	L1 interference	Overgeneralization	Ignorance of rule restrictions	Incomplete application of rules	False concept hypothesized	Learning strategy of simplification
1	Verb Tense						
	Wrong tense sequence (VTa)			P			
	Wrong verb form (VTb) (Verb stem + ed for simple past irregular verb)		P				
	Wrong selection (VTc)	P					
2	Article						
	Omission (Ara)	P					
	Insertion (Arb)			P			
	Wrong selection (Arc)			P			
3	Preposition						
	Omission (Pa)					P	
	Insertion (Pb)	P				P	
	Wrong selection (Pc)					P	
4	Fragment	P					
5	Infinitive or Gerundive Construction	P			P		
6	Singular or Plural Form	P				P	
7	Part of Speech						
	Wrong selection for a verb (PSa)	P					
	Wrong selection for a noun (PSb)	P			P		
	Wrong selection for an adjective (PSc)	P				P	
	Wrong selection for an adverb (Psd)						P
8	Run-on sentence	P					
9	Verb to Be						
	Omission (VBa)	P					
	Use of 'have', 'has', 'had' (VBb)	P					
		12	1	3	2	5	1
		50%	4.16%	12.5%	8.3%	20.8%	4.16%

Levels of Importance of the Errors

Table 3 presents the importance of the common errors based on Error Analysis and students' self-correction ability after graduation. Based on EA and self-correction ability after graduation, it was found that very important errors (***) including fragment, run-on sentence, singular or plural and verb tense (wrong selection), respectively, still remained. Part of speech for a verb was not put in the order since there were no errors before self-correction. The moderately important group (**) was comprised of infinitive and gerundive construction, part of speech (wrong selection for an adjective), preposition (omission), article (omission and wrong selection), part of speech (wrong selection for

a noun), and preposition (wrong selection), respectively. The errors in the least important group (*) were preposition (insertion), verb tense (wrong verb form), and article (insertion), respectively. Part of speech for an adverb and verb tense (wrong tense sequence) was not put in the order since there were no errors before self-correction.

The fact that the graduates could self-correct the following errors, (1) verb be: 100%, (2) article: 62.5%, (3) verb tense: 40%, (3) part of speech: 40%, (4) singular or plural form: 30.77%, (5) run-on sentence: 25%, (6) fragment: 16.67%, (7) infinitive and gerundive construction: 13.33%, and (8) preposition: 5%, provided information to order the errors within each EA group above.

Table 3 Importance of the Common Errors based on Error Analysis and Students' Self-correction Ability after Graduation

Very important		Moderately important		Least important	
***	Self-correction ability	**	Self-correction ability	*	Self-correction ability
1. fragment	16.67 %	1. Infinitive or gerundive construction	13.33 %	1. preposition (insertion)	less than 0 %
2. run-on sentence	25 %	2. part of speech (for an adjective)	33.33 %	2. verb tense (wrong tense sequence, wrong verb form)	20 %
3. singular or plural form	30.77 %	3. preposition (omission)	38.46 %	3. article (insertion)	100 %
4. verb tense (wrong selection)	41.43 %	4. article (omission, wrong selection)	40 %	4. part of speech (for an adverb)	<i>no</i>
5. Part of speech (for a verb)	<i>no</i>	5. part of speech (for a noun)	50 %		
		6. preposition (wrong selection)	60 %		
		7. Verb to Be	100 %		

no = no data to calculate

Discussion

Common Syntactic Errors

Based on these findings, verb tense was the most frequently made error as was also found by Ubol (1981) who investigated 150 first-year Thai students. The studies done by Darus et al (2007) and Darus and Ching (2009) with ESL students also found the same result when mechanics was excluded from the order. These findings were well supported with students' perception that using verb tenses was the most difficult part when writing English language essays (Boonpattanaporn, 2008: 85).

This was probably because the students had to use correct tenses to narrate their stories although tenses are not marked in their mother tongue. For example, in most cases the students in this case study used simple present tense instead of simple past tense.

Article and preposition were the second and the third in the order because they naturally have more chances to occur, even in simple sentences. Consequently, these orders are not related to their importance. Simply put, their mean values might be overestimated when compared to other errors, which had fewer chances to occur in sentences.

That fragment comes as number four in the order might be because word-for-word

translation from L1 was usually found in the students' writing, probably because the students still had not yet received the benefit of sufficient English teaching at the university. During interlanguage, the learner is carrying over the habits of the mother tongue into the second language (Corder, 1971). Consequently, language errors caused by L1 were common, especially in their early years at the tertiary level. However, this type of error can decrease gradually if the students continue learning and gaining more knowledge of L2. Other errors were found in the ranking because the students probably enjoyed freedom in lexical selection of a free writing with no time and score constraint. This caused a lot of developmental errors.

Since this order was based solely on the frequency of error occurrence from 60 compositions, the results cannot be generalized to all Thai students.

Possible Causes of the Common Syntactic Errors

The findings of the present study that show 50% of interlingual errors and 50% of intralingual errors in the students' interlanguage writing can be supported by the findings from previous research such as Chan (2004), Bataineh (2005), and Falhasiri et al (2011).

Chan (2004) and Bataineh (2005) compared interlingual errors and intralingual

errors between groups at different levels, such as lower proficiency level and higher proficiency level. It was found that ESL students of lower proficiency levels made more interlingual errors than those of higher levels. Similarly, Falhasiri, et al (2011) also found that interlingual errors far outnumbered intralingual errors of 23 low-intermediate level university students-- 71% of interlingual errors and 29% of intralingual errors were found based on Error Analysis. If all errors, not only the top nine out of eighteen, had been included in the calculation of the present study, the percentage of interlingual errors likely may have been more than intralingual ones.

Simply put, it was found by previous research that low-proficiency students made more interlingual errors while high-proficiency students made more intralingual errors. Chan (2004) and Bataineh (2005), therefore, concluded that intralingual errors play a more important role in foreign language acquisition because while L1 transfer played a less important role along the continuum, the majority of errors were caused by developmental factors.

Although intralingual or developmental errors increase along the continuum, the researcher; however, disagrees that intralingual errors are more significant than interlingual errors regarding second or foreign language acquisition. At least, being aware of the

differences between L1 and L2 would yield benefits to the students, especially during the freshman year of study and when negative transfer is likely to occur because L1 and L2 rules seem dissimilar in many aspects. For example, Thai language does not have any helping verb before adjectives. Consequently, omission of 'be' is frequently found even in a simple sentence like 'It was beautiful'. Thai student would simply write 'It beautiful', which is an exact transliteration from 'man suey' in a Thai sentence. Students being aware of interlingual errors; therefore, can probably move faster along the continuum while their accuracy development is also facilitated.

False concept hypothesized and ignorance of rule restrictions were the second and third possible causes. This showed that the students were learning the target language, but made faulty comprehension distinctions in the target language and ignored some rule restrictions. Since these were developmental errors, the students found the errors positive as part of their learning process. They were not afraid of making the errors and were willing to correct them with self-confidence and enthusiasm.

Since only 8.3 percent of the errors were caused by incomplete application of rules, this reflected that the students in the study could for the most part apply the grammar rules taught. Furthermore, it was

shown that overgeneralization and the learning strategy of simplification were rarely utilized by the students. The students might use these strategies more when they move closer toward fluency in the target language. Bataineh (2005) found that senior students used more overgeneralization and simplification than junior students, and senior students used them more than sophomore students. That is, overgeneralization and simplification reflected a common learning process at higher levels.

As Cohen (1975: 419) stated, knowing the source of an error helps the teacher to choose the best means of dealing with the errors, and being aware of these possible causes signifies a hope that EFL teachers would be able to take an appropriate error-correction approach that does not diminish the students' interest in foreign language learning and interlanguage development.

Error Treatment

Errors are usually abundant in writing classes, and dealing with all errors of every individual student is impossible and very time-consuming. The very first step for a writing teacher is to be aware of his/her students' common errors and able to separate them from mistakes. Following that, they need to think about selective error correction for productive results. To do so, he/she must know the importance of each common error.

Table 2 of the present study provides a rough guideline for EFL writing teachers in Thailand to deal with their students' errors.

Based on Table 2, the most important errors (***) were fragment, run-on sentence, singular or plural and verb tense (wrong selection) respectively. These errors should be corrected first. The moderately important errors (**) were infinitive and gerundive construction, part of speech (wrong selection for an adjective), preposition (omission), article (omission and wrong selection), part of speech (wrong selection for a noun), and preposition (wrong selection), respectively. These errors can be tolerated for correction later. Least important errors (*) were preposition (insertion), verb tense (wrong verb form), and article (insertion), respectively. These errors can be tolerated for final correction or be disregarded in that class. However, regarding IL, the importance of these errors is changeable. For example, if that least important error seems to occur frequently with individual students, it should be corrected promptly before becoming a fossilized item. This fossilization would severely hinder accuracy in L2 acquisition. Furthermore, excessive correction on even very important errors may affect students' interlanguage development. As a result, each student error needs his/her teacher's judgment for more appropriate treatment.

Limitation of the Study

Because of only a 33.33% return rate of the graduate-corrected compositions, the study could present the comparison of the mean values of numbers of common errors found from 20, not 60 compositions, before and after self-correction. Consequently, findings in terms of self-correction ability of this study were limited, and replication of this part was needed.

Conclusion

When both fluency and accuracy are required as learning objectives in EFL writing classrooms, an accuracy order of common errors in students' free compositions becomes essential. The study presented the top nine syntactic errors, which were analyzed based on Error Analysis. Moreover, their possible psycholinguistic causes were discussed. It was found that interlingual errors were equally as important as intralingual errors during the students' interlanguage development. In terms of error treatment, it was confirmed that all errors in the student's composition should be treated (corrected or tolerated), not just ignored in the curriculum. For a more appropriate error treatment, the importance of the errors should not merely rely on the frequency of the occurrence, but also error correction from the view of Error Analysis and Interlanguage Theory should always be taken into account.

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