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# FL Teachers' Awareness and Tolerance of Thai Undergraduates' Syntactic Writing Errors

## ความตระหนักและความทนของอาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศต่อข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ในงานเขียนของนักศึกษาไทยระดับปริญญาตรี

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### บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจความตระหนักและความทนของอาจารย์ผู้สอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศต่อข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ ในงานเขียนของนักศึกษาไทยระดับปริญญาตรี โดยใช้แบบสอบถามจำนวน 20 หน้า สำหรับข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ 19 ชนิด จากประสบการณ์การสอนของผู้ทำวิจัยเองและจากผลงานวิจัยต่าง ๆ ผลการวิจัย (ไม่รวม Miscellaneous Errors) มีดังนี้คือ พบความถี่ของข้อผิดพลาด 16 ชนิด อยู่ในระดับกลาง (41-60%) 2 ชนิด พบบ่อย (61-80%) ได้แก่ Article และ Verb Tense ข้อผิดพลาดที่พบบ่อยมากที่สุด 5 อันดับแรก ได้แก่ Article, Verb Tense, Run-on Sentence, Fragment และ Subject-verb Agreement ตามลำดับ ข้อผิดพลาดที่อาจารย์คิดว่ามีอิทธิพลมาจาก

ภาษาแม่เกือบ 50% หรือมากกว่า ได้แก่ Word Order, Fragment, Run-on Sentence, Over-marking of Conjunction และ Singular or Plural Form ส่วนข้อผิดพลาดในกลุ่ม Intralingual พบว่ามีสาเหตุมาจาก Incomplete Application of Rules and Ignorance of Rule Restrictions มากกว่าสาเหตุอื่น ๆ ส่วนในเรื่องความทนต่อข้อผิดพลาดพบว่าอาจารย์แก้ไขข้อผิดพลาด 17 ชนิดทันทีหรือเร็วที่สุดเท่าที่ทำได้ มีเพียง 1 ชนิด ได้แก่ Preposition ที่แก้ไขเมื่อจบบทเรียน นอกจากนั้นยังพบว่าไม่มีความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความถี่ของข้อผิดพลาดที่พบกับความทนต่อข้อผิดพลาด ยกเว้นกับ Article (Insertion) และ Subject-object Pronoun และพบว่าไม่มีความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างชนิดของข้อผิดพลาด (Global/ Local) กับความทน ยกเว้นกับ Verb Tense (Sequence) และ Modal Verb

**คำสำคัญ:** ข้อผิดพลาดทางไวยากรณ์ ความตระหนักต่อข้อผิดพลาด ความทนต่อข้อผิดพลาด

## Abstract

This survey study investigated non-native EFL teachers' awareness and tolerance of Thai undergraduates' syntactic writing errors. The instrument for collecting data was a twenty-page questionnaire based on the nineteen types of Thai students' written errors personally experienced by the researcher and revealed by other research. Excluding miscellaneous errors, the results show that 16 errors were moderately found (41-60%) and 2 errors were close to most frequently found (61-80%). They were article and verb tense. The top-five most frequently found errors included article, verb tense, run-on sentence, fragment, and subject-verb agreement, respectively. Five errors with percentages of L1 interference close to 50% or higher were word order, fragment, run-on sentence, over-marking of conjunction, and singular or plural form. Among all given intralingual causes, incomplete application of rules and ignorance of rule restrictions received higher percentages than others. Regarding teachers' tolerance of the 18 errors, all except one error (preposition) were to be corrected immediately or as soon as possible. There was no correlation between error frequency and error tolerance except from article (insertion) and subject-object pronoun. There was also no correlation between error type (global or local) and error tolerance except from verb tense (sequence) and modal verb.

**Keywords:** Syntactic Error, Error Awareness, Error Tolerance

## Introduction

Since English has become an international language, Thai undergraduate students' English writing ability has become essential for their ongoing successful academic studies and social lives. However, English writing is a difficult skill to acquire for Thai students. Writing is the most difficult skill for language learners when compared with other fundamental language skills such as speaking, listening, and reading (Tangpermpoon, 2008: 1). 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 (Allwright, 1975; Krachen and Seliger, 1975; Hendrickson, 1983)

The problem is raised, however, concerning how to distinguish between major errors, which should be corrected first, and minor errors that may be tolerated temporarily. Allwright (1975) said that teachers' error correction is so imprecise and inconsistent that it is often difficult for students to distinguish the major from minor errors. Moreover, for teachers to correct all errors creates a serious work overload. 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.

An analysis of Thai EFL writers' errors, especially at the tertiary level is; therefore, crucial for the effective EFL teaching-learning process. It is; nevertheless, quite difficult, costly, time-consuming, and probably impossible to conduct a collaborative error analysis of English-major undergraduates' free writing compositions between campuses throughout Thailand. It was then proposed to study non-native English speaking EFL teachers' awareness and tolerance of Thai undergraduate students' syntactic writing errors instead. The findings from teachers' perspectives reflected common areas of syntactic difficulties in Thai undergraduate students' writing and their critical levels as well as how these errors were treated. This provided fundamental insights and implications for administering further error analysis and treatment that can yield more practical results.

Definitions of terms in the study include the following:

**1. Syntactic writing errors** refers to grammatical errors, not mistakes in any free compositions by English-major Thai undergraduates. These were overt errors, which were ungrammatical at the sentence level.

**2. Awareness (of error)** refers to acknowledgement of sentence-level syntactic

English writing errors, frequently found errors, error types (global or local) and possible causes of errors. The degree of error frequency was classified by the researcher into 5 levels based on experience encountering each error.

Level 1: 0-20% (least frequently found)

Level 2: 21-40%

Level 3: 41-60%

Level 4: 61-80%

Level 5: 81-100% (most frequently found)



**3. Tolerance (of errors)** refers to judgment as to what extent errors should be overlooked. The degree of error tolerance was classified by the researcher into 5 levels based on the immediacy in giving correction feedback. (any type of correction feedback)

Level 1: 0-20% tolerance (immediate correction or as soon as possible)

Level 2: 21-40% tolerance (correction at the end of the lesson/unit)

Level 3: 41-60% tolerance (correction in the middle of the semester)

Level 4: 61-80% tolerance (correction at the end of the semester)

Level 5: 81-100% tolerance (no correction at all)

Based on the definitions of terms above, the two research questions of the study were:

1. To what extent are EFL teachers' aware of their undergraduates' syntactic writing

errors in terms of frequently found errors, error types (global or local) and possible causes of the errors?

2. To what extent do EFL teachers tolerate their undergraduates' syntactic writing errors?

## Literature Review

### Definition of Errors

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: 204; Ellis, 1997: 139). To make it easier for the research participants, errors referred to in the present study included only overt errors, which were ungrammatical at the sentence level.

### Error Theories

#### Error Analysis (EA)

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, initially arguing for the significance of learners' errors, has therefore emerged in the field of second language acquisition, 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.

### ***Interlanguage Theory (IL)***

IL is the study of language learners' language (Corder, 1981: 66), which is systematic and rule-governed (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: 60). 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 state of a native speaker, but never reaching 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).

### **Classification of Errors**

EA errors are classified into various types and in various ways according to psychological causes or sources of errors. Of all classifications, it can be concluded that the errors can be categorized within two domains: interlingual and intralingual errors (James, 1998; Richards,

1971; Richards and Simpson, 1974; Selinker, 1972). Interlingual errors are caused by L1 interference and intralingual errors are caused by the students' strategies or efforts to learn the second or the foreign language.

### **Error Correction and Error Tolerance**

Based on EA and IL, the errors found were classified into major and minor errors (Norrish, 1983) as well as global and local errors (Burt and Kiparsky, 1972). Major errors are those caused by the violation of major grammar rules including all fundamental grammar rules. Minor errors are those caused by the violation of minor grammar rules such as exceptions to grammar rules. 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.

In short, it can be said that all the major errors that are also global errors, which inhibit understanding, are considered very important errors for correction. Minor errors that are also global errors are considered moderately important, and the major or minor errors that are also local errors are considered the least important type of error. However, the degree of importance for the correction or tolerance of each error also depends on other factors, such as the frequency and effect on the reader/researcher. Moreover, the likelihood that highly

frequent local errors may become fossilized should also be considered and discussed. Where necessary, they would also be treated.

## **Methods**

### ***Sample***

The sample comprised 69 full-time EFL teachers of the Faculty/School of Arts, Liberal Arts, or Humanities of seven public and three private universities in Thailand. Since public universities are located throughout Thailand, seven public universities were selected to represent all regions (Northern, Southern, North Eastern, and Central). All of the teachers had taught or were at that time teaching English writing course(s), or at least an English course having some writing tasks. The average teaching experience was 12 years.

### ***Instrument***

A twenty-page questionnaire was designed based on the nineteen types of Thai students' writing errors, namely 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. (The miscellaneous errors were finally excluded from the analysis.) To facilitate more

accurate findings, ten error types were also categorized into error subcategories. For example, under an error type Article, its 3 subcategories included omission, insertion, and wrong use of a, an, the. (See subcategories of other error types in Table 3). All of the errors selected were based on the researcher's teaching experience as well as former research (Ubol, 1981; Wongsothorn, 1983). The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section was about the respondents' personal data. The second section consisted of four parts: A, B, C, and D. Parts A and C were five-point Likert scales asking questions concerning error awareness and their tolerance toward the nineteen types of student errors. Part B and D were checklists to collect error types and possible causes for the students' errors. (See Appendix) After three experts had reviewed its validity, the questionnaire was revised according to the experts' comments and pilot-tested. The reliability value of the questionnaire was 0.927 (Cronbach's Alpha).

### ***Data Collection***

In June 2012, 200 copies of the questionnaire were sent by hand and by post to universities participating in the research. However, only 76 questionnaires were returned to the researcher. After discarding all the incomplete questionnaires, data obtained from sixty-nine questionnaires were ready for calculation, analysis, and interpretation.

## Results

### 1. EFL Teachers' Awareness of Thai Undergraduates' Syntactic Writing Errors

- *Frequently found and Most Frequently Found Errors*

**Table 1** Order of Frequently Found Errors

Order	Errors types (overall picture of each error)	Mean from 5 levels	Remark
1	Article	4.06	Level 1: least frequently found ↓ Level 5: most frequently found
2	Verb tense	4.01	
3	Run-on sentence	3.97	
4	Fragment	3.93	
5	Subject-verb agreement	3.81	
6	Infinitive or gerundive construction	3.77	Level 1 = 0-20% Level 2 = 21-40% Level 3 = 41-60% Level 4 = 61-80% Level 5 = 81-100%
7	Singular or plural form	3.75	
8	Part of speech	3.72	
9	Preposition	3.71	
10	Active/passive form	3.70	
11	Modal verb	3.64	
12	Causative verb	3.55	
13	Word order	3.51	
14	Conjunction	3.39	
15	Verb be	3.30	
16	Possessive adjective and attributive structure	3.12	
17	Pronoun	3.07	
18	Negative construction	3.00	

Based on Table 1, it was found that none of the 18 errors were least frequently found (0-20%) or close to least frequently found (21-40%). Most of them (16 errors) were moderately found (41-60%). There were only 2 errors close to most frequently found (61-80%). They were article and verb tense with mean

scores of 4.06 and 4.01, respectively. Other errors' mean scores ranged from 3.00-3.97. The top-five frequently found errors included article, verb tense, run-on sentence, fragment, and subject-verb agreement, respectively.

- *Error Types (Global or Local)*

**Table 2** Error Types of Frequently Found Errors

Order	Errors types (overall picture of each error)	Global in percent	Local in percent	Remark
1	Article	23.2	75.4	<b>Global error</b> = an error which results in a misinterpreted or incomprehensible message for a native speaker. <b>Local error</b> = an error which results in an awkward message for a native speaker, but who has little or no difficulty in understanding the intended meaning of the sentence.
2	Verb tense	43.5	53.6	
3	Run-on sentence	56.5	42.0	
4	Fragment	65.2	30.4	
5	Subject-verb agreement	23.2	75.4	
6	Infinitive or gerundive construction	17.4	79.7	
7	Singular or plural form	15.9	79.7	
8	Part of speech	34.8	63.8	
9	Preposition	15.9	82.6	
10	Active/passive form	30.4	65.2	
11	Modal verb	20.3	75.4	
12	Causative verb	18.8	78.3	
13	Word order	53.6	42.0	
14	Conjunction	39.1	58.0	
15	Verb be	27.5	66.7	
16	Possessive adjective and attributive structure	24.6	72.5	
17	Pronoun	18.8	78.3	
18	Negative construction	40.6	58.0	

Table 2 shows that of the 18 errors, 15 errors were considered local rather than global. The three errors with 'global' percentages, which were higher than those considered as 'local', included fragment: 65.2, 30.4, run-on sentence: 56.5, 42.0, and word order: 53.6, 42.0, respectively. The three errors with the highest 'local' percentages included preposition: 82.6, infinitive and gerundive construction: 79.7, and singular or plural form: 79.7. There

were two other errors that were considered local rather than global, but the percentages between global and local were not much different. The two errors were verb tense: 43.5, 53.6 and negative construction: 40.6, 58.0. The findings showed neither absolute global errors nor absolute local errors.

- *Possible Causes of the Errors*

Table 3 shows percentages of six



possible causes of each error given by sixty-nine EFL teachers. Number 1-6 in the table below refer to the following causes.

1 = false concept hypothesized

2 = incomplete application of rules

3 = ignorance of rule restrictions

4 = interference of Thai language

5 = overgeneralization

6 = other causes

**Table 3** Percentages of Six Possible Causes of Each Error (%)

Error categories		Error subcategories	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. article	1.1	omission	15.94	43.48	37.68	23.19	5.80	2.90
	1.2	insertion	18.84	31.88	39.13	5.80	21.74	2.90
	1.3	wrong use of a, an, the	24.64	24.64	13.04	10.14	11.59	4.35
2. verb tense	2.1	wrong tense selected	20.29	31.88	31.88	24.64	4.35	2.90
	2.2	wrong verb form	8.70	42.03	39.13	14.49	24.64	2.90
	2.3	wrong tense sequence	13.04	26.09	11.59	8.70	13.04	2.90
3. run-on sentence			34.78	43.48	55.07	47.83	11.59	4.35
4. fragment			40.58	50.72	57.97	52.17	15.94	5.80
5. subject-verb agreement			28.99	46.38	56.52	21.74	20.29	0
6. infinitive or gerundive construction			31.88	50.72	66.67	23.19	24.64	1.45
7. singular or plural form			23.19	37.68	55.07	43.48	23.19	0
8. part of speech	8.1	wrong selection for a verb	33.33	33.33	31.88	11.59	8.70	2.90
	8.2	wrong selection for a noun	27.54	39.13	27.54	18.84	7.25	2.90
	8.3	wrong selection for an adjective	30.43	33.33	23.19	15.94	5.80	7.25
9. preposition	9.1	omission	17.39	43.48	26.09	31.88	1.45	4.35
	9.2	insertion	20.29	30.43	31.88	28.99	21.74	4.35
	9.3	wrong selection	20.29	39.13	28.99	15.94	5.80	2.90
10. active or passive form	10.1	omission of be	14.49	28.99	33.33	21.74	1.45	2.90
	10.2	use of have, has, had	20.29	13.04	30.43	14.49	4.35	5.80
	10.3	wrong voice	30.43	43.48	31.88	17.39	23.19	4.35

**Table 3** Percentages of Six Possible Causes of Each Error (%) (continued)

Error categories		Error subcategories	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. modal verb			30.43	43.48	63.77	17.39	28.99	2.90
12. causative verb			34.78	47.83	52.17	17.39	27.54	2.90
13. word order			37.68	42.03	49.28	63.77	18.84	1.45
14. conjunction	14.1	wrong selection	34.78	37.68	30.43	18.84	7.25	5.80
	14.2	over-marking of conjunction	18.84	30.43	27.54	44.93	15.94	1.45
15. verb be	15.1	omission	14.49	39.13	31.88	33.33	2.90	1.45
	15.2	insertion	15.94	21.74	23.19	13.04	10.14	4.35
	15.3	use of have, had	15.94	11.59	23.19	36.23	7.25	2.90
16. possessive adjective and attributive structure	16.1	Omission of apostrophe-s or a possessive adjective	18.84	37.68	31.88	18.84	7.25	1.45
	16.2	wrong use of apostrophe-s	24.64	33.33	37.68	5.80	2.90	4.35
	16.3	use of there to replace their	15.94	21.74	13.04	4.35	0	2.90
17. pronoun	17.1	subject-object pronoun	21.74	43.48	30.43	10.14	10.14	4.35
	17.2	relative pronoun	13.04	46.38	28.99	31.88	10.14	2.90
18. negative construction	18.1	over-marking of negative construction	17.39	33.33	31.88	4.35	14.49	5.80
	18.2	wrong auxiliary verb	21.74	40.58	36.23	4.35	14.49	2.90

Based on Table 3, it was found that there were five errors with percentages of L1 interference close to 50% or higher. They were (1) word order: 63.77%, (2) fragment: 52.17%, (3) run-on sentence: 47.83%, (4) over-marking of conjunction: 44.93%, and (5) singular or plural form: 43.48%. Among all given intralingual causes, incomplete application of rules and ignorance of rule restrictions

received higher percentages than other causes. There were seven errors with percentages of incomplete application of rules higher than ignorance of rule restrictions. Only two of these errors received more than 50%, fragment and infinitive and gerundive construction. There were eight errors with ignorance of rule restriction percentages higher than incomplete application of rules. All of these eight errors

received more than 50%, except word order.


## 2. EFL Teachers' Tolerance of Thai Undergraduates' Syntactic Writing Errors

### • Order of Error Tolerance and Least Tolerated Errors

Table 4 shows that 17 errors were rated in Level 1, which means that they were among the least tolerated errors; they were to be

corrected immediately or as soon as possible. The only error rated in Level 2, which was to be corrected at the end of the lesson, was preposition. The top-five least tolerated errors included (1) verb tense: 1.67, (1) subject-verb agreement: 1.67, (1) modal verb: 1.67, (2) verb be: 1.71, (3) fragment: 1.75, (4) pronoun: 1.77, and (5) word order: 1.78.

**Table 4** Order of Error Tolerance

Order	Errors types (overall picture of each error)	Mean from 5 levels	Remark
1	Verb tense	1.67	Level 1: least tolerated  Level 5: most tolerated  Level 1 = 0-20% (correct immediately or as soon as possible) Level 2 = 21-40% (correct at the end of the lesson) Level 3 = 41-60% (correct in the middle of the semester) Level 4 = 61-80% (correct at the end of the semester) Level 5 = 81-100% (no correction at all)
1	Subject-verb agreement	1.67	
1	Modal verb	1.67	
2	Verb be	1.71	
3	Fragment	1.75	
4	Pronoun	1.77	
5	Word order	1.78	
6	Singular or plural form	1.80	
7	Active/passive form	1.81	
8	Conjunction	1.83	
9	Part of speech	1.86	
9	Negative construction	1.86	
10	Infinitive or gerundive construction	1.90	
11	Article	1.91	
11	Possessive adjective and attributive structure	1.91	
12	Causative verb	1.93	
13	Run-on sentence	1.96	
14	Preposition	2	

• *Correlation of Error Frequency and Error Tolerance*

There were no correlations between error frequency and error tolerance, except for two subcategories of article and pronoun. Table 5 shows that the correlation coefficients between the frequency of an article (insertion) and its tolerance was significant ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This means that, generally speaking, high-frequency articles (insertion) tended to have low tolerance and this case was also true for low-frequency articles (insertion) (to have high

tolerance). However, the correlation was very low ( $r_{xy} = -.272$ ).

Table 6 shows that the correlation coefficients between the frequency of subject-object pronoun and its tolerance was significant ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This means that, generally speaking, high-frequency subject-object pronouns tended to have low tolerance and this was also true for low-frequency subject-object pronouns (to have high tolerance). However, the correlation was very low ( $r_{xy} = -.260$ ).

**Table 5** Correlation Matrix of Error Frequency (Article) and Error Tolerance

Error frequency	Tolerance article	Tolerance article a	Tolerance article b	Tolerance article c
Article (overall picture)	-.221			
a. Article (omission)		-.196		
b. Article (insertion)			-.272*	
c. Article (wrong use of a, an, the)				-.104

\*p < 0.05

**Table 6** Correlation Matrix of Error Frequency (Pronoun) and Error Tolerance

Error frequency	Tolerance pronoun	Tolerance pronoun a	Tolerance pronoun b
pronoun (overall picture)	-.234		
a. Subject-object pronoun		-.260*	
b. Relative pronoun			.040

\*p < 0.05

• *Correlation of Error Type (Global or Local) and Error Tolerance*

There were no correlations between error type and error tolerance except for verb tense (subcategory) and modal verb. Table 7

shows that the correlation coefficients between the error type of verb tense (sequence) and its tolerance was significant ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). This means that, generally speaking, verb tenses (sequence) marked as global errors tended to have low tolerance and the case was also

true for verb tenses (sequence) marked as local errors (to have high tolerance). However, the correlation was very low ( $r_{xy} = .284$ ).

Table 8 shows that the correlation coefficients between the error type of modal verb and its tolerance was significant

( $\alpha = 0.01$ ). This means that, generally speaking, modal verbs marked as global errors tended to have low tolerance and the case was also true for modal verbs marked as local errors (to have high tolerance). However, the correlation was low ( $r_{xy} = .308$ ).

**Table 7** Correlation Matrix of Error Type (Verb Tense) and Error Tolerance

Error type (global or local)	Tolerance verb tense	Tolerance verb tense a	Tolerance article b	Tolerance article c
Verb tense (overall picture)	.159			
a. Wrong tense selected		.095		
b. Wrong verb form			.149	
c. Wrong tense sequence				.284*

\*p < 0.05

**Table 8** Correlation Matrix of Error Type (Modal Verb) and Error Tolerance

Error type (global or local)	Tolerance modal verb
Modal verb (overall picture)	.308**

\*\*p < 0.01

## Discussion

The discussion section was based on the findings of the study as follows:

### 1 EFL Teachers' Awareness of the Errors

- *Frequently Found and Most Frequently Found Errors*

Based on the findings that none of the 18 errors were least frequently found (0-20%) or close to least frequently found (21-40%), it can be said that EFL students in Thailand

had probably made all the errors at a moderate and high level throughout their learning process. This does not always mean that the students are not successful in language learning. Some errors such as articles and prepositions naturally have more opportunities to occur, even in simple sentences. Consequently, these high frequency items should not be compared to other errors which have fewer chances to occur in sentences.

Moreover, it cannot be concluded that less frequently found errors were less important or less difficult (Duskova, 1969). The students might use the strategy of avoidance to produce fewer errors (Schachter, 1974).

However, the fact that the frequencies of all the eighteen errors were not much different from one another indicates that there was an abundance of errors for EFL teachers to deal with. As a result, it is necessary that EFL teachers know what errors are more important than others. This would be of great help to manage a more effective error correction feedback for Thai students.

- *Error Types (Global or Local)*

According to the findings, all eighteen errors were considered neither absolute global errors nor absolute local ones. This might be because there were also subcategories of most of the errors. For example, there were three subcategories of preposition, namely omission, insertion, and wrong selection. Furthermore, there could be more than one sample erroneous sentence for each subcategory. Thus, both global and local errors were likely to be found under the same category: preposition.

EFL teachers in Thailand viewed most errors as local rather than global. This means that most of the errors in the majority of cases were considered less important or they did

not significantly hinder communication of a sentence's message, in which case they can be tolerated. Only fragment, run-on sentence, and word order were considered global rather than local errors. If so, this means that in general fragment, run-on sentence, and word order errors were more important than others. They significantly affected the communication and needed to be treated before other errors.

Verb tense and negative construction were the two errors considered local rather than global, but the percentages between global and local were not much different. This means that erroneous points under verb tense and negative construction had almost equal chances to impair communication. EFL teachers should always take these errors under judgment. If they are considered global errors, they deserve correction. If not, they can be tolerated.

Sometimes even local errors need to be treated, especially when they occur very frequently in individual students' interlanguage. An absence of corrective feedback can sometimes result in the errors becoming fossilized, causing non-progression of learning (Selinker, 1972: 216). As a result, EFL teachers in Thailand again have to judge if tolerated local errors would become fossilized or not. If so, they all need to be treated more or less like other global errors.

- *Possible Causes of the Errors*

The findings showed that more than 50% of word order, fragment, run-on sentence, conjunction (over-marking of conjunction), and singular and plural form were caused by L1 interference. L1 interferes with L2 when the learner carries over the habits of his mother tongue into the second language (Corder, 1971). Word order, fragment, and run-on sentence are usually found among Thai students, especially when they're confused. These erroneous sentences are probably simply a result of word-for-word translation from Thai. Boonpattanaporn (2008: 81) reported that the most used strategy in essay writing was consulting a Thai-English dictionary, which resulted in a direct translation from Thai to English.

This reason is also true for over-marking of conjunctions. When a Thai student is thinking in Thai, a sentence using two conjunctions such as 'Although....., but...' or 'Because....., so ...' can also often be found in his/her writing. Plural forms are unmarked in Thai, so, when a student is not sure about the language, he/she sometimes simply uses word-for-word translation and just ignores pluralization.

Since there were altogether eighteen errors and only five were thought to be caused 50% or more by L1 interference, this showed that most of the errors were considered

intralingual or developmental errors rather than interlingual. It is possible that while L1 transfer played a less important role along the continuum, the majority of errors were caused by developmental factors. Research done by Chan (2004) and Bataineh (2005) found that ESL students of lower proficiency levels made more interlingual errors than those of higher levels.

Based on the findings of the present study, incomplete application of rules and ignorance of rule restrictions received higher percentages than other intralingual causes. This would suggest that the communicative approach adopted throughout Thailand is probably not enough to promote accuracy in Thai students' writing. This might be because the approach cannot reach its potential due to the fact that Thai students rarely use English in their daily lives because Thailand uses English as a foreign language. Homework and classroom writing tasks alone seem not to give them enough practice to boost accuracy. Furthermore, classroom language is probably meaningless or unrealistic enough to not motivate them to write accurately.

## **2. EFL Teachers' Tolerance of the Errors**

- *Order of Error Tolerance and Least Tolerated Errors*

The findings showed that the preposition was the only error warranting correction at the

end of the lesson, while the seventeen other errors were considered important enough to be corrected immediately or as soon as possible. In other words, 94.44% were least tolerated errors and only 5.55% could be tolerated until the end of the lesson or unit.

The issue raised was how EFL teachers in Thailand dealt with these errors almost simultaneously when most of them required feedback immediately or as soon as possible. Moreover, no matter what type of correction feedback was used, it implied that they had worked hard against huge numbers of errors.

Chandler (2003) reported that grammar correction boosted accurate revisions and did not reduce fluency in subsequent writing over one semester, and that students preferred direct correction from the teacher to self-correction based on the teacher's marking of errors for students. However, the students felt that they learned more from the latter method. This was similar to the findings of other researchers such as Sheen's (2007), Truscott and Yi-ping Hsu's (2008), and Srichanyachon's (2011). Nevertheless, accuracy improvements based on corrective feedback during revision, are not evidence for improving writing ability on other similar occasions (Bitchener, Young, and Cameron, 2005: 191; Truscott and Yi-ping Hsu, 2008: 292).

Furthermore, some previous research questioned the effectiveness of teacher

feedback techniques. Erel and Bulut (2007) and Chatranonth (2008) found that direct feedback from the teacher was ineffective and caused students to make more errors. The findings supported Truscott's (1996: 327) argument that direct teacher feedback is merely a provision of correct grammatical forms, which does not help improve students' writing ability.

Consequently, EFL teachers in Thailand should reduce their work load in correcting all the errors. Sheorey (1986) and Hyland and Anan (2006) found that non-native teachers were less tolerant of errors than native teachers. They were generally more severe in grading errors, and relied more on rule infringement rather than judging the seriousness of the errors (Hyland and Anan, 2006: 509).

The most important and very frequently found errors should be dealt with first, as discussed above, using a corrective feedback technique best suited to the teacher and the students based on different occasions and different objectives. For instance, if one of the learning objectives is to develop learner autonomy in EFL writing classrooms, peer feedback is recommended, rather than teacher correction (Kulsirisawad, 2012).

- *Correlation of Error Frequency and Error Tolerance*

The findings showed no significant correlation between error frequency and



error tolerance except in a subcategory of article (insertion) and a subcategory of pronoun (subject-object pronoun). This means that less than 10% of high-frequency errors tended to have low tolerance and less than 10% of low-frequency errors tended to have high tolerance. Generally speaking, in most cases EFL teachers in Thailand seemed not to judge the seriousness or the importance of errors based on the frequency of error occurrence. This also supported the findings by Hyland and Anan (2006).

- *Correlation of Error Type (Global or Local) and Error Tolerance*

The findings showed no significant correlation between error type and error tolerance except in a subcategory of verb tense (sequence) and modal verb. This means that less than 10% of global errors tended to have low tolerance and less than 10% of local errors tended to have high tolerance. Generally speaking, in most cases EFL teachers in Thailand seemed not to judge the seriousness or the importance of errors based on error

type. Consequently their degree of tolerance toward errors did not rely on whether an error was global or local. This also supported the findings by Hyland and Anan (2006).

## Conclusion

When not only fluency but also accuracy are learning objectives in EFL writing classrooms, EFL teachers in Thailand have worked hard to correct the errors of individual students in large classrooms. The study showed that they were likely to correct their students' errors regardless of how frequently individual errors were found, and no matter whether the errors were considered global or local. Since written errors are naturally abundant, especially during students' interlanguage development, selective correction of more important errors at a time would suggest higher classroom-learning motivation for writing improvement while the teachers can work more efficiently without a heavy workload.

## Appendix

Directions: Please mark ✓ in the box that best reflects your experience, opinion, and action (Part A, B, and C). Then, follow the instructions for Part D.

Error Item	Error Classification with Examples	Part A Frequency of Errors Found					Part B Error Type		Part C Tolerance towards Errors					Part D Possible Causes of Error
		1 0-20%	2 21-40%	3 41-60%	4 61-80%	5 81-100%	global error	local error	1 0-20%	2 21-40%	3 41-60%	4 61-80%	5 81-100%	
1	<b>Verb Tense (overall picture)</b> <i>Examples:</i> a. <b>Wrong tense selected</b> 1) I <u>had</u> two sisters. 2) I <u>go</u> to Australia last year. b. <b>Wrong verb form</b> 1) I <u>thinked</u> to become a nurse. 2) I have never <u>forget</u> my teacher. c. <b>Tense sequence</b> 1) I couldn't do anything I <u>want</u> . 2) We cooked our dinner and <u>take</u> a bath.												Please write <b>a, b, or c</b> in the boxes. You can select more than one cause for each type of example errors. (You can write a 1 and a 2 instead of 'a' if their cause(s) are different.) <b>verb tense</b> .....false concept hypothesized .....incomplete application of rules .....ignorance of rule restrictions .....interference of Thai language .....overgeneralization .....other causes (Mistakes are excluded.)	

Remark: A global error is an error which causes a misinterpreted or incomprehensible message for a native speaker.

A local error is an error which causes an awkward message for a native speaker, but he/she has little or no difficulty in understanding the intended meaning of a sentence.

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