

# Common Grammatical Errors in Academic Writing: How are They Treated by NNE Raters?

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## Abstract

This research aimed to investigate common errors produced by Thai EFL learners in their academic writing and to investigate non-native English raters' perceptions of the common errors. There were two phases: 1) error analysis and 2) raters' perceptions survey. The samples for the error analysis were 49 written responses from a university entrance examination. The errors were first identified by using Grammarly, and they were coded following the Error Code adapted from Ampornratana (2009), Bootchuy (2008), and Phetdannuea (2016). The research results were found as follows:

1. The results revealed 24 error categories with 97 error types. The 42 sentences that contained the 14 error types that were produced more than 30 times in the samples were used in the questionnaire. The experienced raters rated the sentences in the questionnaire with scores from 1 (i.e., most serious) to 3 (i.e., no error).

2. The results of the raters' perceptions revealed that the errors concerning articles could be mostly overlooked by experienced raters. Interestingly, none of the 14 common errors was rated "1" more than fifty percent. In other words, although the experienced raters saw the errors, they didn't see them as serious features of academic writing.

The findings also suggested potential issues for future studies to investigate the application of this phenomenon in pedagogy and assessment.

**Keywords:** Academic Writing; Common Errors; Error Analysis; Raters' Perception

## Introduction

The most commonly used for writing testing is the essay writing test (Mulvaney et al., 2005). The purpose of a writing test is to infer writing ability, and the inferences from the test can be data for deciding other setting such as a classroom or individual level (Weigle, 2002). As mentioned about the emphases of academic writing, the aspects of writing performance were developed in various frameworks such as Four Skills Model – mechanics, vocabulary choice, grammar and usage, and organization (Madsen, 1983), Models of Communicative Language Ability – organizational knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, and strategic competence (Bachman and Palmer, 1996), Model of Text Construction – grammatical, functional, and stylistic features (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996), and Taxonomy of Writing Skills and Contexts (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

One of the shared aspects in considering academic writing is grammar which is considered the main problematic aspect in the writing of Thai students (Ampornratana, 2009; Bootchuy, 2008; Phetdannuea, 2016). Thai students produced several errors in writing due to two main factors: the lack of English linguistic knowledge and the interference of L1 or the Thai language (Kaweera, 2013; Phetdannuea, 2016). The errors that are occurred as the writer lack linguistic knowledge is called intralingual errors; for example, misuse of prepositions, wrong word choice, and misspelling (Richard, 1974). Another type of error that occurs due to the L1 interference is called interlingual error. It happens when the writers adopt patterns, systems, or rules of their native language (L1) to use for producing the target language. The most common interlingual errors from the previous study include agreement errors (i.e. subject–verb agreement, determiner–noun agreement, and noun/pronoun–antecedent agreement), run–on, verb tense errors, incomplete sentences, pluralization errors, and punctuation errors (Ampornratana, 2009; Bootchuy, 2008; Kaweera, 2013; Phetdannuea, 2016). The previous studies concerning errors analysis aimed to figure out the common errors produced by Thai students in their essay writing. The results, then, were suggested to be applied in developing writing pedagogy – teaching and pointing out the common errors students may produce in their writing.

Considering how teachers deal with errors, Seifried and Wuttke (2010) indicated that there were four situation types when teachers respond to students' errors. Situation type 1 is when the teacher points out the error and corrects it elaborately. Situation type 2 is when the teacher points out the error, but no feedback is given. Situation type 3 is when the teacher does not explicitly point out the error, but the explanation of the error is clearly mentioned. Situation type 4 is when the teacher does not identify the error, and no feedback is given. Interestingly, situation type 4

was the most frequent one. The findings suggested that the teacher may somehow overlook the errors happening obviously in front of them as those errors were seeable by the observers, but no response had been given to deal with them. The conclusion of the study, however, did not conclude to what extent situation type 4 happened in their study. The assumption was made whether the teachers were not qualified or they were just not willing to deal with those errors.

Thailand is in an expanding circle where English is taught and used as a foreign language (Kachru, 1992). Similar to many countries in the expanding circle, most English language teachers in Thailand are non-native, in other words, Thai-native teachers. Traditionally, English language teachers may see grammatical errors through the English Language Teaching (ELT) lens which focuses on achieving a native-like language. That is, the teachers are usually trained to diagnose students' grammatical errors and give feedback to students to correct the errors. This ideal in ELT was then named "Native Speakerism" (Holliday, 2005). On the other hand, now English that is used among the speaker in the expanding circle is described as a variety of English that has its own right and can be described in its own ways (Cogo & Dewey, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Mauranen, 2003; Pakir, 2009). Consequently, it became Lingua Franca which is the term to describe a language that is used by speakers who have different mother tongues and different cultural backgrounds with the aim of communication (Daiya, 2015). With this English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) lens, some grammatical errors are seen as varietal features such as the use of an article before an uncountable noun or the transformation of an uncountable noun into a plural form (Lowenberg, 2000; Seidlhofer, 2010). Thus, some common errors may be perceived by non-native speakers as varietal or acceptable rather than serious errors. Whether or not this ELF concept exists among Thai teachers are still unanswered.

To shed light on such issue, the present study focused on error analysis and extended the error analysis by adding a survey on how raters perceive common errors appearing in essay writing responses to investigate how raters diagnose errors and how they deal with errors in their rating. The objectives of this study were to investigate common errors that were produced by Thai EFL learners and to investigate raters' perceptions of the common errors in academic writing. The findings revealed the common errors and how raters perceived them in terms of how serious those common errors are. Additionally, the findings indicated the actual phenomenon that suggested the need for rater training in ELT pedagogy and created a room for discussing ELF-aware pedagogy and assessment.

## Research objectives

This study consists of two phases: error analysis and raters' perception survey. Error analysis was conducted to get the authentic and actual production from essay writing responses produced by Thai learners. Then, the authentic sentences produced in writing responses that contain different types of errors were used in a questionnaire in the raters' perception phase to investigate how raters perceive those common errors. The study was conducted to answer two research questions as follows:

1. What are the common errors produced by Thai learners?
2. How do raters perceive the common errors produced by Thai learners?

## Literature Review

### Writing Assessment

There are factors that the test developers should focus on consisting of candidate, instrument, performance, scale, rater, and rating scale (Weigle, 2002). Two main stakeholders in writing assessments are a test taker and a rater. The candidate performs their writing ability through instruments (i.e., tests or assessments). Then, candidates' performances are scored using writing scales. Therefore, the main significant factor to reflect candidates' performances is the instrument or the test or task in the writing assessment. Among the various types of essays, the argumentative essay is claimed to be the most common form in the educational setting (Schneer, 2014). Argumentation concerns a controversial topic, writer's position, critical argument, and reason to support the position to convince the reader to accept the writer's position. Therefore, it can reflect the original thought, the development of ideas, and the soundness of the writer's logic (Weigle, 2002)

Writing rubrics were developed following writing performance frameworks. The most commonly used one is the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981) that is an analytic rubric consisting of five traits: Mechanics (5 total scores), Language Use (25 total scores), Vocabulary (20 total scores), Organization (20 total scores), and Content (30 total scores). The examples of writing rubrics of standardized tests are TOEFL independent writing score rubric and IELTS writing band descriptors. TOEFL independent writing score rubric describes the characteristics of the test-takers in four bullets concerning topic address, topic development, unity and coherence, and vocabulary and grammar. IELTS writing band descriptors describe test-taker writing performance in four traits consisting of task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and

grammatical range and accuracy. Thus, grammar is considered one major trait in all rubrics. To illustrate, it was weighted higher than other traits in the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981).

### **Common errors in Thai students' essay writing**

Grammar is considered the main problematic aspect in the writing of Thai students among the traits in writing rubrics (Ampornratana, 2009; Bootchuy, 2008; Phetdannuea, 2016). The factors that influence the students' writing errors are the lack of English linguistic knowledge and the interference of L1 or the Thai language (Kaweera, 2013; Phetdannuea, 2016). These factors cause different types of errors namely intralingual and interlingual errors. Intralingual errors are caused by the lack of target language knowledge such as misuse of prepositions, wrong word choice, and misspelling (Richard, 1974). Interlingual errors are considered the interference of the native language L1 as writers apply patterns, systems, or rules of their native language to the target language. The most common interlingual errors from the previous study include agreement errors (i.e. subject–verb agreement, determiner–noun agreement, and noun/pronoun–antecedent agreement), run–on, verb tense errors, incomplete sentences, pluralization errors, and punctuation errors (Ampornratana, 2009; Bootchuy, 2008; Kaweera, 2013; Phetdannuea, 2016).

### **The perceptions to Errors from English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) Perspective**

In the globalization era, English plays a role as a medium of international communication that is used among speakers with different L1 via various channels (Ostler, 2010). Consequently, it became Lingua Franca which is the term to describe a language that is used by speakers who have different mother tongues and different cultural backgrounds with the aim of communication (Daiya, 2015). Therefore, it has its own right and can be described in its own ways (Cogo & Dewey, 2007; Jenkins, 2007). It is described as a variety of English that is used among speakers in the expanding circle countries (Cogo & Dewey, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Pakir, 2009), and it is used as a contact language among non–native speakers of English (NNS) with the different first language (Jenkins, 2016; Saraceni, 2008). English as a Lingua Franca, as used by NNS, shows functional flexibility and acceptance (Daiya, 2015). Some functional ELF produced by the speakers of the expanding circle may be judged by the native norm as “deficiencies”; for example, the use of article before uncountable nouns such as “a hard work” or “a great patience”. These functional features produced by speakers of ELF (i.e., a variety of English), therefore, were called varietal features (Lowenberg, 2000). These features are accepted in use as they are comprehensible and do not affect the understanding of the interlocutors. Examples of the varietal comprehensible

features are the dropping of redundant third person s, the substitution of relative pronouns who and which, the non-standard use of prepositions (Cogo & Dewey, 2012), and the transformation of an uncountable noun into a plural such as the word “evidences” that was used by Ban Ki-moon (Seidlhofer, 2010). As mentioned earlier about the types of errors, these varietal features are considered errors under the native-speakerism scheme and affect the score in writing. It also affects writing pedagogy as mentioned by Jenkins (2016) that the NNS students also got feedback or comments on their incorrect grammar rather than the contents while those who are NSs of English do not face this problem. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate ELF-aware into English language pedagogy and also English language assessment (Jenkins, 2016).

Laitinen (2020) studied the emergent modals in ELF corpora compared to the core corpora. The results suggested that the emergence of the ELF grammar that showed metonymy, more emphatic meaning, and grammaticalization appeared in the various genres in the compiled corpora including in the Academic prose which was a corpus of Master-level theses of the discipline other than language studies. The study suggested that the emergence of the so-called natural evolutionary process that affects the varieties of English will further shape English.

In Asian countries that are in the expanding circle, the perspective of ELF was positive (Mairi, 2016; Zhang & Du, 2018). The studies with Indonesian, Japanese, and Chinese teachers and students revealed that they were aware of the ELF, but their teaching and learning still relied on standard English due to the policy. However, they wanted to change it. They commented that they used English mostly with non-native speakers of English and may not have much chance to talk with the native speaker of English. They also thought mentioned that they didn't have to be able to use English like a native speaker. An understanding of intercultural communication is enough. Thus, a variety of English was allowed in this Asian setting, and those that were considered errors in standard English can be more acceptable as they are considered varietal features rather than errors through the eyes of non-native speakers in Asia.

The results of the raters' perception of this study will leave room for discussion concerning this ELF-aware pedagogy. We may think about whether we should consider these errors as inaccuracies and focus on pointing these out for raters to notice these types of errors. The raters may overlook or consider the errors as varietal features that even experienced raters cannot detect some types of errors and define as acceptable features in writing.

### Conceptual Framework

This study contained two phases namely error analysis and perception survey. The results of the error analysis were used for developing the questionnaire used in the perception survey. The details are as follows.

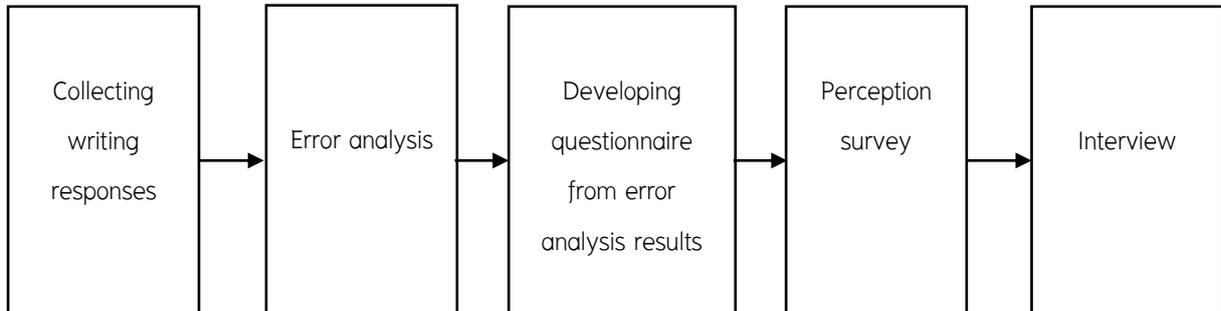


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

### Research Methodology

#### *Scope of the Study*

#### *Essay Writing Responses used in the Error Analysis*

Writing responses were used in phase 1 of the study to investigate the most common errors produced by Thai learners. The samples were 49 essay-writing responses from a university entrance exam produced by students who were applying to study in graduate school. However, the general information of the test takers was confidential. The test takers were required to write a 250-word argumentative essay to express their ideas whether they agreed or disagreed with the argument “Education is not the key to success.” The writing responses were then rated by the university essay writing raters.

#### *Participants of the Survey Study*

Phase 2 was a survey study whose participants were 15 English lecturers from a university in Thailand who were experienced in teaching writing. All of them were responsible for teaching writing courses. All of them got a master’s degree, and two of them got a doctoral degree. One of the participants got two years of English writing experience while ten of them got six to ten years of English writing experience. Moreover, five of them got more than ten years of English writing experience. In terms of English proficiency, they were all required by the university to get one certificate from a list of standardized tests – at least 550 pts of TOEFL (paper-based), 213 pts of TOEFL (CBT), 79–80 pts of TOEFL (IBT), 6.5 of IELTS, 75 pts of CU-TEP, 65 pts of KU-

EPT, or 700 pts of TOEIC. The general information of all 15 participants made them qualified and experienced raters in this study. After the questionnaire collection, five participants were selected to attend a semi-structured focus group interview session to get in-depth information about their perception of common errors and how they think about the results of the survey.

#### *Research instruments*

##### *Grammarly*

This study aimed to identify how raters perceive errors. It implied that raters may overlook or cannot identify some errors produced by the writers. A tool for grammar checking namely Grammarly then was selected for detecting errors appearing in the writing responses. Grammarly is an automated grammar checker available online. It is a tool for checking ungrammatical features in writing. The program is installed and run on Microsoft Word as an add-in tool. Grammarly was selected to use in this study as it is a freeware that is easy to use. Grammarly is also claimed as the most accurate automated grammar checker that was used as a tool to provide feedback to students' writing (Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016; Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018, O'Neill & Russell, 2019; Qassemzadeh & Soleimani, 2016). It can suggest ungrammatical features around ten times than Word Processing (Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016). In this study, Grammarly is used for pointing out errors, and the underlined errors were coded following errors code adapted from Ampornratana (2009), Bootchuy (2008), and Phetdannuea, (2016).

##### *Error Code*

In order to categorize the inaccuracies figured out by Grammarly, those inaccuracies were coded by using the Error Code adapted from Ampornratana (2009), Bootchuy (2008), and Phetdannuea (2016). There were 24 error categories concerning incomplete sentences, run-on sentences, comparison, word order, there be, tenses, voices, agreement, infinitive, gerunds, nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, pronouns, modal/auxiliary, possessive, conjunctions, prepositions, articles, punctuations, capitalization, spelling, and word choice. The codes were listed under the categories; for example, "omission of verbs" is a code in the "incomplete sentences" category.

##### *Raters' perception questionnaire*

The questionnaire was used in phase 2 to investigate how raters perceive errors in academic writing. Three sentences of each type of error were selected from the list after coding to make 42 items from the 14 most common error types that appeared in the whole writing

responses more than 30 times. Raters were responsible to rate the 42 sentences in 3 scales as follows:

“1” refers to “This sentence contains a serious ungrammatical feature that affects comprehension and needs correction.”

“2” refers to “This sentence contains an ungrammatical feature that is acceptable and does not affect comprehension.”

“3” refers to “This sentence does not contain any ungrammatical features.”

#### *A group interview*

After the questionnaires were analyzed, five participants were selected to attend a semi-structured focus group interview session to get in-depth information about their perception of common errors and how they think about the results of the survey. At the beginning of the interview session, the participants were informed that actually all of the sentences that appeared in the questionnaire contained different types of errors.

#### *Data collection and data analyses*

The study was separated into two phases: error analysis and raters’ perception survey. In the error analysis phase, the data set was prepared by the test center staff. Then, they were retyped into Microsoft Word to be able to analyze by using Grammarly. The sentences that contained errors were listed in Excel and categorized by using the error code adapted from Ampornratana (2009), Bootchuy (2008), and Phetdannuea (2016). The data were analyzed by counting the frequency of each type of error. In the raters’ survey phase, the most common errors were selected by using criteria of at least 30 times of occurrences through the whole 49 writing responses. The sentences that contained the most common errors were listed in the table in the raters’ perception questionnaire. Raters who were 15 experienced English writing raters rated each sentence according to the survey directions. Data were analyzed by counting the frequency and percentage of the score levels that were rated by the raters. Then, the results of the survey were used in the interview. The results of the interview were presented in descriptive analysis.

## **Research Results**

### *RQ 1: What are the common errors produced by Thai learners?*

There were 619 sentences with errors out of 777 sentences in the whole 49 writing responses which can be counted as 79.67 percent. The results of the Grammarly detection coded by error codes revealed the number of inaccurate features from the 49 writing responses. The

total numbers of errors found in the samples were 1,279 times. The most common error was the Omission of the article “the” which appeared 94 times throughout the whole 49 essay responses. Other most common errors were considered from the number of occurrences at least 30 times through the whole 49 essay responses. Thus, the results of the most common errors were 1) Omission of the article “the,” 2) Omission of the comma, 3) misspelling, 4) Subject–verb agreement, 5) Unnecessary insertion of "the," 6) Omission of articles “a, an,” 7) Misuse of other parts of speech for adjectives, 8) Determiner–noun agreement, 9) Misuse of prepositions after adjective, verb, 10) Misuse of singular for plural nouns, 11) Unnecessary insertion of prepositions, 12) Misuse of other parts of speech of verbs, 13) Word Choice, 14) Run–on sentences, 15) Misuse of prepositions before nouns, and 16) Misuse of other parts of speech for nouns, respectively.

Among these 16 common errors, three types of errors concerning articles namely Omission of the article “the,” Unnecessary insertion of "the," and Omission of articles “a, an” can be combined and make the accumulated number of the occurrences in the sample up to 253 times or 19.78% of the total number of errors. As these three ungrammatical features deal with articles, they were grouped together in the questionnaire, and only one sample sentence from each of these three features concerning articles was selected for the questionnaire. Three sample sentences that contained each other type of error were selected to add to the questionnaire. Thus, the rater’s perception questionnaire consisted of 42 items (i.e., sentences) that were categorized into 14 error types (table 1).

**Table 1.** The Most Common Errors Identified by the Error Codes

Error types	Frequency (times)
Omission of article “the” *	94
Omission of comma	92
Random misspelling	89
Subject–verb agreement	76
Unnecessary insertion of “the” *	70
Omission of articles “a, an” *	61
Misuse of other parts of speech for adjectives	54
Determiner–noun agreement	39
Misuse of prepositions after adjective, verb	37
Misuse of singular for plural nouns	36
Unnecessary insertion of prepositions	35
Misuse of other parts of speech of verbs	34
Word Choice	33
Run–on sentences	31
Misuse of prepositions before nouns	31
Misuse of other parts of speech for nouns	30

Note: \*represents the latter grouped feature as articles

*RQ 2: How do raters perceive the common errors produced by Thai learners?*

The results of the raters’ perception survey were very surprising. The results revealed that most of the Thai experienced English writing raters did not perceive these 42 sentences as containing serious errors. They mostly considered these errors as minor errors that do not affect comprehension. Interestingly, no one considered the ungrammatical features concerning articles (i.e. Omission of the article “the,” Unnecessary insertion of “the,” and Omission of articles “a, an”) as serious ungrammatical features that affects comprehension and needs correction. The interesting point is that the ungrammatical features concerning articles were the most common errors produced by Thai learners, and from another angle, they were not considered serious errors through the eyes of the experienced raters. Furthermore, 37.78 percent of the raters could not even see these ungrammatical features concerning articles. The results also revealed that all error types except run–on and misuse of prepositions after adjectives, verbs were considered acceptable as they all were mostly rated 2 which referred to “This sentence contains an ungrammatical feature that is acceptable and does not affect comprehension.” The results of the raters’ perception survey were presented in order by considering the frequency and percentage of 1 score level rate (Table 2).

The results of the rater's perception survey were consistent with the results of the error analysis. The more common that the errors appeared in the writing response, the less serious they were rated by the experienced raters. Table 2 presents the results of the rater's perception in the order of how they consider these errors serious, and the ranks of the common occurrence of these errors from the error analysis are presented in parentheses. Articles, as mentioned earlier, were the most common error and were the least serious through the eyes of the experienced raters. On the other hand, the misspelling that was the third most appeared in the sample was also considered serious as it affects the comprehension of the sentence. Other inconsistent ranks were of "Misuse of prepositions after adjective, verb." It was because the sample sentences in the questionnaire were obviously ungrammatical. For example, the sample sentence "I disagree in the sentence" obviously shows the misuse of "in" which also does not make any sense in the Thai language when it was translated. Therefore, it was rated as the most serious in the questionnaire.

**Table 2.** Raters' Perception of the Common Errors in Academic Writing

Common Errors	Rating Score					
	1		2		3	
	total	%	total	%	total	%
Articles (1)	0	0	28	62.22	17	37.78
Subject-verb agreement (4)	3	6.67	38	84.44	4	8.89
Omission of comma (2)	4	8.89	24	53.33	17	37.78
Misuse of singular for plural nouns (8)	5	11.11	21	46.67	19	42.22
Misuse of prepositions before nouns (13)	6	13.33	23	51.11	16	35.56
Misuse of other parts of speech for adjectives (5)	8	17.78	30	66.67	7	15.55
Determiner-noun agreement (6)	9	20	27	60	9	20
Unnecessary insertion of prepositions (9)	10	22.22	20	44.45	15	33.33
Misuse of other parts of speech of verbs (10)	11	24.44	30	66.67	4	8.89
Misspelling (3)	14	31.11	19	42.22	12	26.67
Misuse of other parts of speech for nouns (14)	14	31.11	26	57.78	5	11.11
Word Choice (11)	15	33.33	23	51.11	7	15.56
Run-on sentences (12)	18	40	27	60	0	0
Misuse of prepositions after adjective, verb (7)	19	42.22	16	35.56	10	22.22

*Note: Numbers in parentheses represent the rank of the occurrences from the error analysis*

Then the results of the questionnaire were revealed to five participants in a semi-structure interview, and the interview took place with the following questions:

1) *What do you think is the reason that most of you rate 2 for these sentences that contains errors?*

The participants agreed with the results that most of the common error types were rated 2 which refers to “This sentence contains an ungrammatical feature that is acceptable and does not affect comprehension.” They mentioned that in the writing rating process, they focused more on content and organization; thus, they didn’t consider all errors as serious errors. They also mentioned that most of the common error types that were presented in the questionnaire did not affect the meaning of the whole sentence, so they seem acceptable to happen in their writing as the receivers still get the idea from those ungrammatical sentences. Another interesting reason that led to more acceptance of the common errors was their familiarity with these common errors. Reading and identifying errors is a routine that they are familiar with; thus, they see the common errors as normal occurrences that always appear in their students’ writing responses. With this perception from their familiarity with the common errors, they accepted more varietal features that led to the surprising answer to the latter question about the most serious error.

*2) From the 14 types of the most common errors here, what is the most serious error in your opinion, and why?*

The participants mentioned that the most serious error out of the 14 common errors was run-on. The reason was that run-on makes the sentence unclear, confusing, and incomprehensible. It was really hard for them to understand some run-on sentences, and it was harder when they have to give feedback to their students. They were also asked about their opinions on word choice. They referred to the previous answer to the first question that they are familiar with what students are trying to express in their writing. Therefore, when the wrong word choice appears in students’ writing responses, they can notice it and give feedback more easily compared to run-on. To clarify, the lecturer can understand the sentence “I watched leather last night” and can give feedback to his student to edit the word “leather” to “movie” which both are pronounced as “/nang/” in Thai. Referring back to the questionnaire, these common errors were also the second and the third most serious in the questionnaire.

*3) Do you think this phenomenon affects the way you rate your student’s work? If yes, to what extent does it affects your rating?*

The participants agreed that this phenomenon absolutely affects the way they rate their student’s work. They referred back to the answer to the first question again that they weigh the score of content and organization more than grammar; thus, they focus more on content and organization. One mentioned the emergence of world Englishes. She explained that these common errors were influenced by the Thai language, so sometimes the language produced by Thai

students contains varieties of English. As long as it is comprehensible, she does not consider it serious. The other also replied that the results seem not to be problematic, on the other hand, the results of the survey made them see the same clear picture of how we deal with errors in academic writing. They would further apply the results to improve their rating process and use it in their classroom in the future.

## **Discussion**

The results of the study revealed the most common types of errors that were 1) Omission of the article “the,” 2) Omission of the comma, 3) Misspelling, 4) Subject–verb agreement, 5) Unnecessary insertion of “the,” 6) Omission of articles “a, an,” 7) Misuse of other parts of speech for adjectives, 8) Determiner–noun agreement, 9) Misuse of prepositions after adjective, verb, 10) Misuse of singular for plural nouns, 11) Unnecessary insertion of prepositions, 12) Misuse of other parts of speech of verbs, 13) Word Choice, 14) Run–on sentences, 15) Misuse of prepositions before nouns, and 16) Misuse of other parts of speech for nouns, respectively. Similar to the previous study that the most common errors produced by Thai learners were agreement errors (i.e., subject–verb agreement, determiner–noun agreement, and noun/pronoun–antecedent agreement), run–on, verb tense errors, incomplete sentences, pluralization errors, and punctuation errors (Ampornratana, 2009; Bootchuy, 2008; Kaweera, 2013; Phetdannuea, 2016).

The raters’ perception survey revealed that Thai lecturers who were experienced in teaching English writing and proficient in English still sometimes overlook the errors produced by Thai learners in their academic writing. This reflected similar results to the error culture that sometimes teacher does not see the error nor correct it (Seifried & Wuttke, 2010). The findings of this study also answered the question raised by Seifried and Wuttke (2010) that when the error was not responded to, it was because the teacher is unqualified or the teacher was just not willing to do so. This study controlled the group of participants to have experiences in rating writing responses according to their educational background, teaching background, years of teaching, and English proficiency. The results from the interview also suggested that they focus less on error compared to content and organization in their writing rating process. Thus, in this study, the overlook was made by their willingness rather than their qualification.

The ungrammatical features concerning articles were the most common errors that were not only mostly produced by students but were not also considered serious errors in academic writing by raters. Some experienced raters even did not notice the errors concerning articles.

Other common errors were mostly rated as acceptable features rather than serious errors. From the ELT lens which focuses on achieving a native-like language, the improvement on the error diagnosis ability should be enhanced in order to give feedback to students to correct the errors (Holliday, 2005). Thus, the findings led to the need for rater training sessions to raise the awareness of the raters in rating academic writing. According to the results, we can see that each item was scored differently for each rater; therefore, the agreement on how to deal with these common errors should be emphasized in the rater training sessions.

On the other hand, if we consider this phenomenon as a real situation that is happening in language teaching, changing the way we weigh grammar trait in the writing rating process was recommended. According to the results of the interview, the raters now focus more on content and organization rather than grammar. In academic writing, normally the score on grammar is weighed higher or equal to other traits. ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981); for example, weighs Language Use by 25 points and Mechanics by 5 points making grammar traits worth 30 points. That makes the Grammar trait equal to the content trait (30 points) and higher than the Vocabulary trait (20 points) and Organization trait (20 points). Thus, this rubric may not reflect the actual rater's perception in today's context. The weight of grammar traits can be one aspect of scale revision.

The results of the raters' perception survey revealed the phenomenon of how non-native speaker raters perceived common errors in academic writing. Some errors were even unnoticeable by the raters. This phenomenon raised the issue that may be these common errors can be considered as varietal features from the ELF point of view. Again, the example was of the ungrammatical features concerning articles which is the use of articles before uncountable nouns such as "a hard work" or "a great patience" which was seen as a varietal feature when it is produced by non-native speakers of English (Lowenberg, 2000). Other ungrammatical features that were suggested to be varietal features were the dropping of redundant third person s, the substitution of relative pronouns who and which, the non-standard use of prepositions (Cogo & Dewey, 2012) and the transformation of an uncountable noun into a plural such as the word "evidences" that was used by Ban Ki-moon (Seidlhofer, 2010) were also in the list of common errors produced by Thai learners. Some were considered acceptable by Thai raters; for example, the misuse of singular for plural nouns that was also suggested to be a varietal feature. Additionally, the findings of this study can be another empirical evidence of how varietal features appeared in academic writing as they were found in academic prose corpora (Laitinen, 2020).

From the results of the interview, Master-level theses whose content, methodology, findings, and discussion are more focused, grammar may get less participation, and varietal features are more likely to emerge during the process of peer review. The empirical evidence of this study may reflect how the actual natural use of language, investigated through the understanding of raters' perception, shape English (Laitinen, 2020). The findings of this study may raise ELF awareness in English writing pedagogy and assessment as mentioned by Jenkin (2006) that the conventional language assessment does not match to deal with ELF.

### **Knowledge from Research**

The empirical results provided the issue to be further discussed in the language testing and assessment field. Previously, only errors produced by learners were focused on, and the improvements were mainly focused to provide for the learners' writing. This study, on the other hand, studied the performance of another stakeholder in academic writing namely the rater. The results revealed the crucial issue that the more common the errors are, the more they were overlooked by the raters. This phenomenon was the result of the raters' focus on content rather than grammar in academic writing, the familiarity with the common errors of the raters, and the more acceptance of the World Englishes and ELF perspectives. Thus, the findings exposed the actual phenomenon in academic writing assessment and provide room to discuss how academic writing assessment could be in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study revealed the common errors that appeared in Thai EFL academic writing responses. The perceptions of raters on the common errors were investigated. The results of the survey revealed the interesting results that the more common the errors are, the more chance that raters will overlook them. An example was the ungrammatical use of articles which was the most common error and had not been rated "1" as the most serious error in this study. The findings suggested the need for rater training and the development of rubric redesign in terms of ELT. On the other hand, it could be claimed as empirical evidence of how varietal features emerge and leave room for further discussion concerning ELF-aware pedagogy and assessment.

## Suggestions

The suggestion of this study for the researcher was that the samples of the sentences with errors will be used in rater training sessions; thus, it did not discuss deeply in terms of ELF pedagogy. The discussion concerning ELF here was to create room for further discussion. Therefore, the recommendations for future studies were studies on the use of the findings of both the error codes and the questionnaire in enhancing English writing pedagogy. Another recommendation was the studies concerning ELF-aware pedagogy and assessment as can be seen here that some common errors can be described as varietal features in ELF's point of view.

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