

## **Thai University Undergraduates' Errors in English Writing<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This research is an investigation of syntactic and morphological errors, including errors of word usage, in paragraphs written by 100 Thai university undergraduate students of English as a second language. Its purposes are to analyze the errors in the data and to present statistics to indicate the frequencies of errors and also to draw conclusions about the causes of these errors.

Contrastive analysis is the principal method used to account for the errors. On the basis of the contrastive analysis performed, explanations in terms of interlingual interference were used to account for the various errors found in the students' paragraph writing. The analysis is helpful in understanding the difficulties that Thai university undergraduate students encounter in writing English paragraphs and in helping them to reduce errors in their paragraph writing. Based on the implications and results of the contrastive study, the data put forth might eventually serve as a base for further studies on the pedagogical prevention and correction of errors in the teaching of English.

To ensure efficient teaching of English for Thai undergraduate learners, the present research recommends that the focus of teaching be on selected syntactic and morphological problems, including problems of word usage, instead of a general presentation of English.

### **1. Introduction**

Errors from learning foreign languages, no matter which skills, are a common matter. From my experience of teaching English to Thai learners, I have found various types of error in their work. It is noticeable that some errors occur more often than others. Making the learners aware of how to correct their errors is important. In the same way, making them understand the causes of those errors is of equal necessity. If teachers realize what types of error Thai learners usually make, how often they occur and what the causes are, it could equip them with information about how to prepare

teaching materials that focus on those erroneous points. It should then be possible to combat errors, and to make teaching and learning more effective.

One important cause of errors in language learning is the existence of different linguistic systems between the source language and the target language. Corder (1981:101) says that certain errors of learners are relevant to a system that differs from the mother tongue. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982: 94) noted that good teaching material must focus on those aspects of the target language which are different from those of the source language.

Chaiyaratana (1961) analyzed syntactic structures that differ between Thai and English, and Lekawatana et. al. (1969) did contrastive studies of English and Thai language systems. Bhandhufalck (1983) focused her work on contrastive analysis of modals in English and Thai. Khoosamit (1982), Rattanothayanon (1982) and Soithuram (1985) performed contrastive analyses on language systems that differ between Thai and English regarding past, present and future time expressions respectively. Batainch (1993) investigated of the major syntactic errors in compositions written by Jordanian learners of English as a second language. Error analysis was the principle method used and interlingual interference was used to account for the majority of the errors. Samperri (1993) examined compositions of Italian children in a multilingual context. The purpose of the work was to find errors students made in Standard Italian and the result was that interference was a source of the errors found and so the study could be used for pedagogical prevention and correction of errors. Hsieh (1995) studied word order systems of English and Chinese and found interference problems affecting Chinese students learning English as a second language. Nakagawa (1994) analyzed errors in Japanese-to-English translation. Through contrastive analysis, translation errors reflect the learner's desire to encode L1 cultural information in the L2.

This study concentrates on errors in English writing made by Thai learners - Thai university undergraduates - through contrastive analysis.

Thai and English are languages with different systems. This causes errors in English learning among Thais. The purpose of this paper is to analyze errors in English writing from real data and to focus on the causes of these errors in terms of contrastive analysis and error analysis. It will be shown that interlingual interference can account for the majority of errors.

The objectives of the paper will be presented, followed by a review of interference, contrastive analysis and error analysis. Then the procedure used, an analysis of the data and the results will be introduced.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The study aims at the following :

1. classifying types of errors Thai learners make in writing English – syntactic errors, morphological errors and errors in word usage – and the subtypes of these errors. Spelling errors were not taken into account.
2. studying the frequency of each error type and subtype.
3. exploring and analyzing the causes of these errors through the application of error analysis and contrastive analysis between Thai and English so that the findings – areas of errors and possible causes – provide a basis for remedying the errors for the benefit of Thai learners.

## 3. Review of the Literature

### 3.1 Interference

Interference is a language system existing between the mother tongue and the target language. It has characteristics of the two languages and is a linguistic system based on an attempt to use the second language. In other words, it is a continuum between two languages. Corder (17) illustrated interference in the following way:

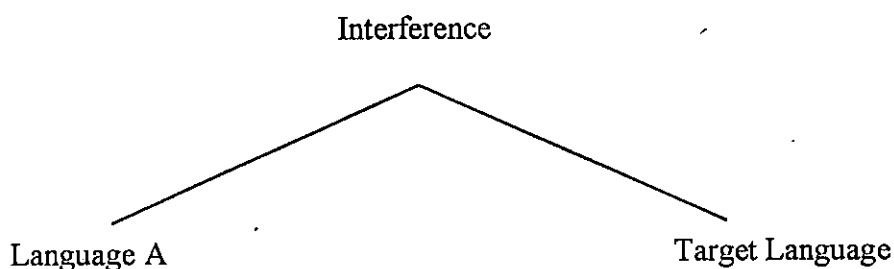


Figure 1: Corder's Interference

Weinreich (1953:1) observed that interference is a deviant form of language arising because of learners' acquaintance with their own languages. Similarly, Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:108) noted that if structures in the mother tongue are different from those in the target language, errors which reflect structures in the mother tongue will arise. Furthermore, the less fluent a language learner is in using the second language, the more chance there is of negative transfer arising.

According to Lado (1957:2), "there is a relationship between contrastive analysis and interference in that there's a tendency of learners to

transfer forms and meanings from the native language to the second language.”

Hammerly (1982:146-7) talked about two types of transfer:

a) Positive transfer – occurring when two systems are the same. Positive transfer facilitates language learning.

b) Negative transfer – occurring when two systems are not the same but relevant in some ways. Negative transfer causes difficulties in language learning.

Nickel (1971:35) proposed that rules that differ between two languages cause negative transfer and that there should be careful consideration of this cause, as getting rid of negative transfer means analyzing and classifying errors systematically.

Hammerly (1982:146-7) also talked about two kinds of interference: preclusive interference and intrusive interference. The former type of interference arises when things not existing in the mother language have an impact on foreign language learning, and the latter takes place when things in the mother language have a negative effect on second language learning.

According to contrastivists, differences between languages cause an enormous barrier in second language learning. Richards (1974:207) believes that interference is a main source of problems in foreign language learning and it has been shown that contrastive analysis can locate aspects of interference.

Although Thai and English are languages having the same word order, SVO, there is a variety of differences; for example, Thai is an isolating language but English is an inflective one. While most of the original words in Thai are of a single-word type, there are morphological changes in many English words. The syntactic aspect is also different.

Brown (1980:148) stated that, basically, second language learning involves winning differences between the mother tongue and the foreign language. Errors lead to language skill development of learners. Language behavior transformation occurs as a result of these differences and one of the linguist's duties is to investigate language errors. The language curriculum planners' duty is to prepare teaching materials based on the differences found, and the teachers' duty is to make learners aware of the mentioned differences. Lastly, the learners' duty is to understand those differences.

### 3.2 Contrastive Analysis

One important cause of errors in foreign language learning is the existence of different systems in the source language and the target language.

For learners, the system in their mother tongue can influence their acquisition of the target language.

Contrastive analysis, which is based on the hypothesis that a prominent barrier to second language learning is different systems in two languages, was well known in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and it had many proponents, including Fries, Lado, Weinreich, and Di Pietro. It stemmed from structural linguistics and its purpose was to solve foreign language teaching problems. The belief that many errors arise as a result of language transfer gave rise to contrastive analysis.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:97-8) discussed Lado's ideas about the contrastive analysis hypothesis, particularly "language learning is habit formation" and "whether the old habit (mother tongue usage) is an obstacle or facilitator to new habit formation (second language usage) depends on similarities-differences between two languages. If the old habit exists during an attempt to form a new habit, that means interference arises."

Selinker (1992:18) stated that Lado (1957:59) said each learner tends to bring forms, meanings, and structures that are similar to those in the target language into learning, which can help facilitate the learning. That is to say, similarities or differences between two languages are important causes of ease or difficulty in language learning. He further remarked (1957:59) that contrastive analysis is a key to obstacles and facilitation in the learning process.

James (1980:142) talked about Fisiask et al.'s idea (1978:10) that there are two types of contrastive analysis: 'Theoretical Contrastive Analysis' and 'Applied Contrastive Analysis.' While the former is solely concerned with contrasting two languages, the latter has the objective of using contrastive analysis for the benefit of language teaching and learning.



Figure 2: Theoretical Contrastive Analysis & Applied Contrastive Analysis

For Theoretical Contrastive Analysis, the universal category X in each language (language A/ language B) has a particular form and structure. However, for Applied Contrastive Analysis, the form and structure (Y) of

language A is investigated to see how universal category X is, so that it will be contrasted with (?) in language B.

James (1982:142) mentioned that while Theoretical Contrastive Analysis is "static," as it does not reflect any directions in language learning, Applied Contrastive Analysis is "unidirectional". My idea is that, for the benefit of teaching and learning, this paper will be based on Applied Contrastive Analysis.

Svartvik (1973:8) said, according to Wardaugh's analysis, in Schumann and Stenson (1974:14), there are two claims about contrastive analysis: a strong claim and a weak claim. The objective of the strong claim is prognostic whereas that of the weak claim is diagnostic. That is to say, the strong claim predicts problems of language learning in terms of a contrastive analysis between two languages before the actual learning situation, but the purpose of the weak claim is to explain already discovered deviations by using distinctions between two linguistic systems. As for this point, DiPietro (1971:29) also mentioned that contrasting two languages enables one to predict difficulties in language learning. However, the weak claim does not require what the strong version requires (the prediction of the difficulties of learning points). It is an attempt to explain and analyze observed errors by using characteristics that differ between the source language and the target language. Corder (1981:71) claimed that, for the weak version, how language learners develop learning depends on the characteristics of the mother language. Waudhaugh (in Schumann and Stenson 1974:14) gave an opinion on these two versions in that the strong version is impracticable and unrealistic while the weak one is beneficial for foreign language teaching and learning. The guideline this study follow is that of the weak claim.

### 3.3 The Relationship between Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis

Error analysis involves collecting errors, studying them, classifying them in various ways and suggesting possible causes.

Schumann and Stenson (1974:3) said that if we compare the weak form of contrastive analysis to error analysis, we will find that both are specific forms of linguistic analysis and "make a departure from the same point: the target language." He suggested that contrastive analysis in the weak version should be regarded as one aspect of error analysis.

Svartvik (1973:8) stated that there is no conflict between the two approaches and error analysis is considered to be a more general term, incorporating contrastive analysis for the explanation of interference phenomena. In this study, it is probable that most errors were actuated by

negative transfer. Error analysis is used and contrastive analysis centers on the origin of the errors.

#### **4. Procedure**

##### **4.1 Subjects and Data Collection**

The subjects in this study were 100 first-year Faculty of Arts students at Chulalongkorn University. Data collection was undertaken during the second semester of the academic year 1997. The subjects were of the same chronological age, 16-18 years.

According to the Faculty's curriculum, all freshmen are required to take two integrated courses: English 1 and English 2 in the first and second semesters respectively. In these two courses, students practice all skills, including writing. They practice writing a paragraph once a week. In this study, one paragraph of writing was taken from each subject in the English 2 Course. The 100 paragraphs on different topics<sup>2</sup> were collected from 5 random groups. Students in each group were arranged according to alphabetical order and so there was a random sampling of the subjects. They could then be reliable representatives to some extent.

For each paragraph, students were required to write about 120-150 words.

##### **4.2 Analysis of the Data**

The statistical analysis of errors was carried out according to the following process. The papers were read and errors were identified. Each error item was then recorded under the category provided by the classification. The errors were counted and totalled separately according to each type. Then overall totals for all errors were derived. The percentage of each error group was calculated. After that each error type was diagnosed. Subcategories of each error type were also identified, counted, and calculated in terms of percentage. Next came the descriptions and explanations of possible causes of errors in terms of error analysis and contrastive analysis. The classification of errors provided a basis for determining causes and remedying the problems.

#### **5. Analysis**

From the data, 3 types of errors were identified: syntactic errors, morphological errors and errors in word usage.

The total number of errors is 1,038. There are 203 syntactic errors, accounting for 19.56% of the total. Morphological errors constitute 408, equaling 39.31%. As for errors in word usage, they number 427, which is 41.14% of the total.

Table 1: Classification, number and percentage of total errors

Error Type	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Errors in Word Usage	427	41.14%
Morphological Errors	408	39.31%
Syntactic Errors	203	19.56%

It can be noticed that the greatest number of errors is in word usage. Morphological errors come next and the least numerous category is syntactic errors.

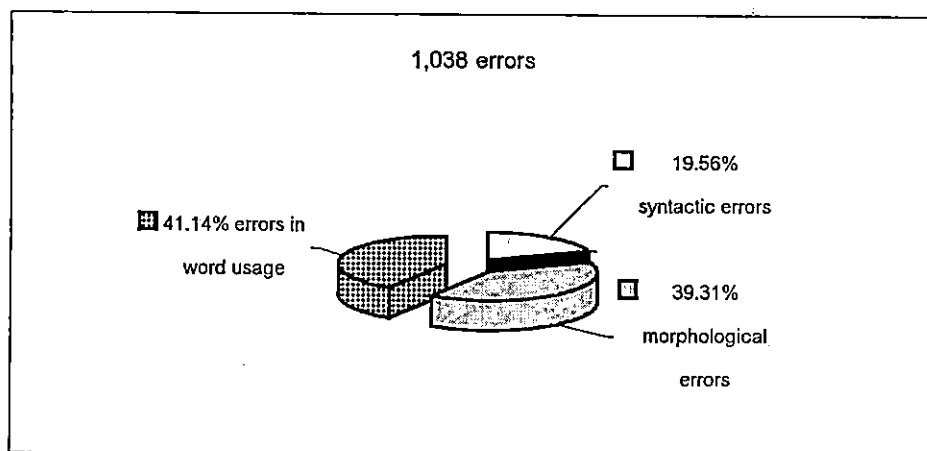


Figure 3: Chart of Syntactic Errors, Morphological Errors and Errors in Word Usage

### 5.1 Syntactic Errors

“Syntax” concerns the arrangement of morphemes and words into larger units: phrases, clauses and sentences. It is related to internal parts of a sentence, their structures and relationships, as well as the relationships among various kinds of sentences.

Syntactic errors in this paper refers to errors arising from wrong arrangements of morphological and lexical units. Types of error recorded in this group are in syntax only. Different sources of problems are to be pointed out in terms of possible syntactical interference.



### 5.1.1 *Classification of Syntactic Errors*

From the corpus, there are 203 syntactic errors out of the total of 1,038, equivalent to 19.56%. The types of syntactic errors, the number of occurrences of each, and percentages are as follows:

Table 2 : Classification, number and percentage of syntactic errors

Syntactic Error Type	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
*Domains of errors in constructions	98	48.28%
*Sentence boundary	67	33%
Word order	24	11.82%
Misused demonstratives and Indefinite determiners	14	6.90%

\*There are subtypes of these syntactic errors, and they will be discussed later.

#### 5.1.1.1 *Domains of Errors in Constructions*

From the data, the amount of difficulty in the syntactic aspect is the highest with domains of errors on constructions which can be divided into complex sentence constructions, expletive constructions, adjectival constructions and transitive verb phrase constructions.

Out of 98 errors in constructions, the subtypes of errors, number of occurrences of each, and percentage are as follows:

Table 3: Classification, number and percentage of domains of errors in constructions

Syntactic Error in Construction	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Complex sentence constructions	38	38.78%
Expletive constructions	26	26.53%
Adjectival constructions	25	25.51%
Transitive verb phrase constructions	9	9.18%

#### 5.1.1.1.1 Complex Sentence Constructions

A complex sentence is a sentence containing an independent clause (main clause) and a dependent clause (subordinate clause). Clauses are combined by a subordinator (relativizer or relative pronoun).

From the data, most of the errors in complex sentence structure lie in relative clause constructions. A few are in the use of two subordinators when there are only two clauses.

Characteristics of the errors are as follows:

1. Lack of a subordinator -- Students do not have a subordinator combining the main clause and the subordinate clause.

Examples:

- (1) *That's why we still believe in something \_\_\_\_ might look silly.*
- (2) *There were many people \_\_\_\_ were killed.*
- (3) *This is a reason \_\_\_\_ I like her.*

2. Redundancy of a subordinator and a pronoun referring to the noun or noun phrase that the subordinator refers to (a subject or an object).

Examples:

- (4) *I have a friend that I love her very much. (the appearance of 'her' with the subordinator 'that' referring to the object 'a friend')*
- (5) *This is the thing that I think it is an attractive point. (the appearance of the pronoun 'it' with the subordinator 'that' referring to the complement 'the thing')*

3. Redundancy of two conjunctions/subordinators with two clauses

Examples:

- (6) *Although it seems a long time ago, but I still remember it clearly. (two connectors with two clauses)*
- (7) *Even though we do not see each other much now, but we are still best friends. (two conjunctions with two clauses)*
- (8) *She does not know that where her uncle and aunt are now.*
- (9) *Do you know that why we should exercise? (two subordinators with two clauses)*

4. A wrong subordinator

Examples:

- (10) *My bedroom has curtains which their color is light blue.*
- (11) *I have a secret place that I like to relax.*

The errors that may stem from systems that differ in Thai and English are those in items 2, 3 and 4. (As for the first type, there must be a subordinator combining the dependent clause and the independent clause in Thai, as in English.)

Regarding the errors in item 2, it can be observed that in both English and Thai, relative clauses are constructed by the subordination of a sentence to another through the use of a relativizer. However, in Thai, although there is a relativizer functioning as a referent to a noun or a noun phrase (a subject or an object), there can be an ellipsis of the pronoun referring to the subject or the object.

Examples :

- (12) I have a friend who I love her very much.

*chǎn mi phôn khon nòu sôu chǎn rāk (thə) māk*

*I have friend cl one that I love (her) very much*

- (13) Yesterday, I had a lot of activities which I had to finish them.

*môuwanní chǎn mi kījākam mâ kmai sôu chǎn*

*yesterday I have activity many that I*

*tôu thā m (man) hāi sēj*

*have to do (them) give finish*

- (14) He has many problems which (they) make him upset.

*khǎo mi pa nhǎ mākmai sôu (man) thamhāi khǎo klū mjai*

*he have problem many that (they) cause him upset*

- (15) Swimming is a hobby which I think it is useful for health.

*kanwāmām pen ganàdīrēk yàu nòu sôu phǎm khíd*

*swimming be hobby type one that I think*

*wā (man) pen prâyôt tō sòkkhāphāb*

*that (it) be useful to health*

In Thai, use of the subject and object pronouns in these sentences is not wrong and they can also be omitted. It is probable that students making this type of mistake subconsciously use the Thai structure in the English system.

Another aspect of relativization that presents a problem for Thai learners is the case where two subordinators occur together in two clauses, as in item 3. It is clear that there is interference.

Examples:

- (16) Although my bedroom is small but it looks very comfortable.

*mwa hŏŋnɔn khŏŋ chǎn lék tǎe man du*  
*although bedroom of I small but it look*  
*sàdùaksàbaI*  
*comfortable*

- (17) Because Ann is very kind and gentle, she has a lot of friends.

*phrŏ æn jǎdi læ ònyon dagnán thə jəuŋ mi*  
*because Ann kind and gentle so she so have*  
*phŏuŋ mǎk*  
*friend many*

These errors may also arise from mother tongue interference. In Thai, it is not wrong to use two connectors “mǎewā” (although)- “tǎe” (but) and “phrŏwā” (because) – “jəuŋ” (so) with two clauses. Furthermore, the students probably do not observe the English grammatical rule that only one connector combines two clauses.

The problem of a main clause and a relative clause with two subordinators may arise because the learners transfer the relative clause pattern in Thai to English and this leads them to use “that” together with a subordinator.

Examples:

- (18) She does not know that where her uncle and her aunt are now.

*thə mǎi rú wǎ luŋ læ pǎ khŏŋ thə*  
*she not know that uncle and aunt of her*  
*yù thĩnǎi tɔnni*  
*be where now*

- (19) Do you know that why we should exercise?

*khun rú mǎi wǎ tha mmai rau khua nǎ òkka mlaŋkai*  
*you know q-marker that why we should exercise*

A wrong subordinator, as in item 4, is another case where the students may have translated Thai into English.

Examples:

- (20) I have curtains that the color is similar to the bedspread's.

*dìchăn mi phâmân sôun sǎ khlái kàb sǎ khǎn*  
*I have curtain that color similar to color of*  
*phâ khlumtraŋ*  
*bedspread*

- (21) There is a balcony that I like to enjoy reading novels.

*mi rábraŋ sôun chăŋ chǎb phlǎp phlən kàb kanànníyáŋ*  
*have balcony which I like enjoy with reading novels*

In Thai, the use of the equivalent subordinators is not wrong. Thai has relative pronouns “thî”, “sôun” and “an” (equivalent to “that”, “which” and “who”) whereas there are more subordinators in English. Therefore, there is no one-to-one correlation of relative words in the two languages.

As for the case of a lack of subordinators modifying subjects, both Thai and English have a correlative system. That is, there must be a subordinator referring to the subject and it cannot be omitted. Therefore, the cause of this type of error does not result from differing systems in the two languages.

#### 5.1.1.1.2 Expletive Constructions

There is a construction that is completely different in the two languages. This is the syntactic expression “there + verb to be”, which is entirely foreign to Thai learners and may cause confusion for them. Kolln (1994: 323) calls “there” an empty word. He states it is a sentence element that has no meaning and plays no grammatical role in itself. In Thai, the equivalent construction is “mi + noun” (“mi” = “have”).

Characteristics of the incorrect structures found are:

1. The use of the existential pronoun “it” with the verb “to be or have”:  
“it + verb to be” and “it + verb to have”.
2. The redundancy of “there” and the verb “to have.”

Examples:

- (22) *It was plenty of rubbish in the area.*

- (23) *It has a lot of things in a department store.*

- (24) *There have 5 people: the father, the mother, one son and two daughters.*

- (25) *There have two buildings, a cafeteria and a playground.*

#### 5.1.1.1.3 Adjectival Constructions

This type of error probably occurs as the result of a syntactic discrepancy between Thai and English. In Thai, an adjective is placed right after a noun it modifies without having to have a copular verb, while in English, there are “predicate adjectives” occurring after a copular verb, and “prenominal adjectives” preceding the nouns modified (to be discussed in 5.1.10: word order).

Examples:

(26) I have never afraid of snakes.

*chăn mât khai glua nu*

*I neg ever afraid snake*

(27) The sky dark

*fă mătud*

*sky dark*

The data indicates that copular verb are missing in many adjectival constructions.

Examples:

(28) I have never \_\_\_ afraid of snakes.

(29) The place \_\_\_ attractive and beautiful.

(30) My mother \_\_\_ angry with me.

#### 5.1.1.1.4 Transitive Verb Phrase Constructions

There are transitive verbs in both languages. However, in Thai, ellipsis of an object can happen if the context makes it clear what the object is. Therefore, Thai learners tend to neglect the obligatory noun phrase after the transitive verb, probably because of its optional nature in Thai. It is impossible to leave out the noun phrase in English.

Examples:

(31) You can decorate \_\_\_ with toys.

(32) I can see \_\_\_ through the windows of my bedroom.

(33) After we washed \_\_\_, it was very beautiful.

(34) We are best friends and we will love \_\_\_ forever.

Direct objects are missing in the errors.

#### 5.1.1.2 Sentence Boundaries

There are two subtypes of errors in sentence boundaries: run-on sentences and sentence fragments.

Out of 67 errors in sentences, the subtypes of errors, number of occurrences of each, and their distribution are as follows:

Table 4: Classification, number and percentage of errors in sentence boundaries

Errors in Sentence Boundary	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Run-on sentences	46	68.66%
Sentence fragments	21	31.34%

##### 5.1.1.2.1 Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence is a continual occurrence of two or more sentences before the period.

Examples:

(35) *There were many broken windows, when the wind blew they made a sound.*

(36) *My best friend is a very considerate person, her name is Nid.*

(37) *I looked at the clock, I felt time passed very fast.*

(38) *She has black hair, her hair is very beautiful.*

The structures of sentences in Thai and English differ fundamentally in that, in Thai, there is no punctuation mark anywhere. Sentences in Thai follow one after another continuously and spacing is used to indicate phrase sentence boundaries. Students making this type of error may not have a clear understanding of the English system and so they put a comma between sentences without observing the rule that sentences in English cannot be combined in this way. It is probable that they do not understand well enough the concept of a single sentence in English. Confusion about sentence boundaries in English probably occurs because, in Thai, there is no formal marker of a sentence. Thus, interference may be pinpointed as the source, as learners write sentences continuously in English as in Thai, using just a comma to separate them.

##### 5.1.1.2.2 Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence. It is only a part of a sentence and contains an incomplete idea. According to English syntactic

structure, a sentence is composed of a subject and a predicate. Two clauses can be combined and, in this way, neither can stand alone.

Examples:

(39) *The first time I went to the old school in Australia.*

*I immediately felt that it was as beautiful as before.*

(40) *When I first met her. We were twelve.*

(41) *The process for taking care of your dog is not as difficult as you think. If you do these ways.*

(A main clause and a subordinate clause cannot be separated this way.)

(42) *The favorite table in Chula.*

(43) *Recently, the phenomenon of the eclipse of the moon.*

(44) *And about my best friend.*

(There is no predicate in these sentences and it is impossible to know what the function of the existing part is.)

As in the case of errors in run-on sentences, the error defined may result from native language influence. Students making an error of this type probably do not realize that an English sentence consists of a subject and a predicate, or that a dependent clause cannot be separated from an independent clause. Another characteristic of an English sentence is demarcation through the use of a period. In Thai, there is no period at the end of a sentence and therefore students who are still confused by English syntactic usage just put a period at the end of a fragment, as they think that it is already a sentence.

#### 5.1.1.3 Word Order

The word order in both Thai and English is SVO. However, concerning the word order of the constituents in a string, the two languages have different arrangements. Points of contrast are the structures of questions, indirect speech, positions and sequential orders of a series of adjectives, positions of adverbs, etc. Errors can therefore be attributed to the fact that Thai learners may confuse these English orderings.



Examples:

(45) *When she cries, what you should do with her?*

(46) *He asked me when would I finish the exam.*

(45) – (46): Errors of inversion.

(45) There must be an inversion in a question, but the sentence does not contain one.

(46) There must not be an inversion in indirect speech, but the sentence contains one.

(47) *The grass was high about one meter.*

(48) *She is older than her friend about 14 months.*

(49) *Her brown big round eyes*

(50) *It is a pink square table.*

(47) – (50): Errors in the word order of modifying elements

These errors may result from a mixture of the systems of the two languages. For example,

(51) When she cries, what you should do with her?

*môu thə rǒŋhǎi khun khua nǎa tham àraɪ kà b thə*  
*when she cry you should do what with her*

(52) The grass is tall about one meter.

*yǎ sǎŋ prà ma n nǎuŋ mét*  
*grass tall about one meter*

Thai students may not clearly understand the word order system in English and so there is a mixture of the systems of both languages. For example, the word order in the recorded error (45) is similar to Thai in that there is no inversion of the modal and the subject. As for the case of indirect speech, students tend to be confused and so they use an inversion like that in an English question, as in (46). Actually, the word order in English indirect speech is the same as that in Thai. Another case is shown in examples 47 and 48, where students carry a feature of Thai into English – adverbial phrases are placed after the adjectives just as in Thai. The last two examples (49-50) result from the different word orders of adjectives in the two languages. That is, in the case of prenominal adjectives, the corresponding modifiers in Thai must be placed postnominally — in the reverse order from English. Many Thai learners tend to omit the verb “to be”, as it does not exist in the equivalent form in Thai, and they misplace adjectives by putting them after

nouns as a result of the equivalent structure in their native language (the positions of a noun and its modifier are reversed).

#### 5.1.1.4 *Demonstratives and Indefinite Determiners*

There are four demonstratives and a lot of English noun determiners, some of which are used with singular nouns while others are used with plural nouns. Furthermore, different words in these groups are used with count nouns and non-count nouns. The two languages are incompatible in this respect as the Thai language does not have this system. This type of error, then, may stem from interference.

The following errors show confusion in demonstrative and indefinite determiner use.

Examples :

(53) *that flowers*

(54) *Let's follow those easy process.*

(55) *There are so much cars.*

(56) *a little examples*

The analysis indicates that most of the syntactic errors in the corpus may result from a lack of correlation between the structures in Thai and English. There is a lack of one-to-one equitability and the errors can then be traced to language 1 influence.

## 5.2 Morphological Errors

Another type of error found in the data is morphological errors. Thai is an uninflected language whereas English is an inflected one and therefore English morphemes do not have corresponding constructions in Thai. This type of error, therefore, occurs as the result of interference in that there is an inflection system in one language (English) while there is no such system in the other (Thai).

### 5.2.1 Classification of Morphological Errors

Out of the 1,038 errors, there are 408 morphological errors, equivalent to 39.31% of the total. Errors found in the data are mostly concerned with suffixes, of which there are 2 types: derivational and inflectional suffixes. The rest are misuse of morphemes.

Derivational suffixes are suffixes added to a word or morpheme to form a new word. Inflectional morphemes are those attached to a base or

stem to express grammatical functions. When an inflectional morpheme is added, the part of speech does not change. As there is a discrepancy between Thai and English with regard to morphology, errors in these two types of suffixes stem from the learners' using the wrong forms of suffixes.

The remaining errors found in the data, pronoun morpheme misuse refer to cases where students have used incorrect forms of morphemes.

The number of occurrences and the percentage of each type of morphological error, out of 408 total morphological errors, are as follows:

Table 5: Classification, number and percentage of morphological errors

Morphological Errors	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
suffixes	394	96.57%
pronoun morpheme misuse	14	3.43%

5.2.1.1 *Errors in Derivational and Inflectional Suffixes*

Regarding errors in suffixes, the number of occurrences and the percentages of the two subtypes of error, out of 394 total errors in suffixes are as follows:

Table 6: Classification, number and percentage of errors in suffixes

Errors in Suffixes	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Inflectional suffixes	323	81.98%
Derivational suffixes	71	18.02%

It should be noted that errors in inflectional suffixes figure prominently, and occur much more often than those in derivational suffixes.

The types of errors in inflectional suffixes, the frequency of each type of error, and the percentages (out of 323 errors) are as follows:

Table 7: Classification, number and percentage of errors in inflectional suffixes

Errors in Inflectional Morphemes	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
present tense morpheme	173	53.56%
plural morpheme	87	26.93%
past tense morpheme	21	6.50%
present participle morpheme	21	6.50%
past participle morpheme	17	5.26%
comparative/superlative morpheme	2	0.62%
possessive morpheme	2	0.62%

#### 5.2.1.1.1 Characteristics of Errors in Derivational and Inflectional Suffixes

The characteristics of errors in suffixes are as follows:

1. Using an incorrect suffix

Students misuse suffixes by adding the wrong morpheme to a part of speech.

Examples:

(57) *Some people spend a lot of money on fortune teller.*

(58) *Making omelette is very easily.*

(59) *Giving too much water can make your plants died.*

(60) *Students should work hardly.*

(61) *My home is my happily place.*

2. Omitting grammatical morphemes

Students do not add a required suffix to a part of speech.

(Uninflected forms are used where inflected ones are required.)

Examples:

(62) *I like listening to stories about ghost.*

(63) *When I have problems, she always give me encouragement.*

(64) *I found the room have a lot of books.*

(65) *Pets can be your best friend.*

(66) *It is thrill.*

3. Double marking

Students use two inflected forms when only one is required.

Examples:

(67) *We did not knew about this at all.*

(68) *I asked her, "Does she smokes?"*

(69) *His height is six feets.*

(70) *She is the most loveliest teacher in the world.*

4. Regularizing

Students use common grammatical rules in a place where special rules are required, resulting in generalized forms.

Examples :

(71) *I wanted to pass this temple fastly.*

(72) *She teached and advised me a lot of things.*

(73) *A newspaper is one of the mediums.*

### 5.2.1.2 *Errors in Pronoun Morphemes*

The data show that morphological errors in pronoun morphemes consist of using two or more forms in random alternation.

Examples:

(74) *My best friend's house is next to me.*

(75) *The secret was between our.*

(76) *She stood between Nid and I.*

(77) *When she is near I, ...*

(78) *My mother is the person I admire because he helps me a lot.*

(79) *She always keeps his room (=her room) neat and tidy.*

The names of all the types of errors, except “using an incorrect type of suffix” and “errors in pronoun morphemes”, are from Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982).

This type of error probably occurs because students do not understand the use of inflected forms of English pronouns, each of which has its own particular grammatical usage.

The morphological errors in this section could thus be ascribed to interference, as they may arise as a result of the learners’ not applying morphological rules. Students know there must be morpheme usage, but the rules or paradigms of inflected forms may be neglected.

The data also contains errors arising from wrong semantic aspects. This will be discussed below in “errors in word usage.”

### 5.3 Errors in Word Usage

This type of error occurs as a result of morphosyntactic interference blending with incorrect semantic aspects. It is not the same as morphosyntactic errors in that morphosyntactic errors occur because of points of contrast – inaccordance with morphological and syntactic rules. Here, more than morphosyntactic categories and rules for their use, there are grammatical features and semantic attributes – concepts of word usage – involved. That is, semantic notions permeate beyond words and into concepts or patterns of thinking in English that do not exist in Thai.

The fact that the Thai and the English languages exhibit distinctive concepts makes it difficult for Thai learners to use English correctly. Even when they observe rules, they may not be able to apply them to an actual usage. It is probable that the learners fail to acquire competence in the semantics of the English language. As a result, semantic distortion occurs.

The idea of different ways of thinking – semantic implications – associated with different languages and cultures derives from the linguistic relativity hypothesis<sup>3</sup>. Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) shared the idea that differences among languages in the grammatical structuring of meaning influence habitual thought. The principle of the hypothesis is that languages are profoundly different and that there are conceptual perspectives pertinent to them. Duranti (1997:56) stated that linguistic anthropologists have been interested in the hypothesis and many people call this ‘the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.’ During the 1950s and the early 1960s, there was a great deal of interest in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and many empirical studies were done within anthropological linguistics. Whorf’s idea of the linguistic relativity hypothesis is outlined in the diagram below (Lucy 1992b:259):

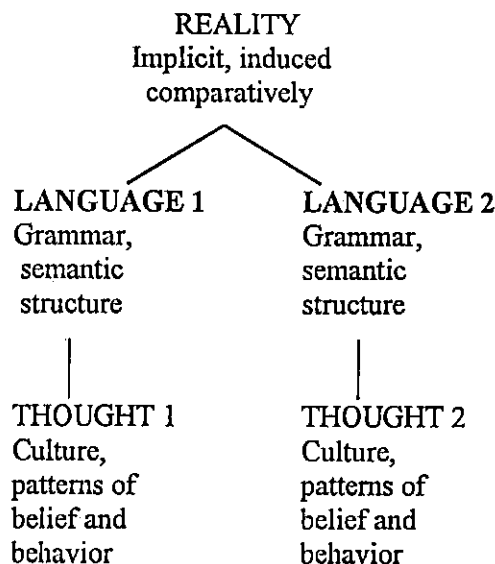


Figure 4 : Whorf’s Formulation of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis

Lucy (1992b:22) presented Sapir’s idea (1947:162) about this hypothesis by saying “No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.”

Lucy (1992b:36) also mentions Sapir’s and Whorf’s claims that thought is channeled and influenced by linguistic classifications and so diverse classifications signal different thought patterns among speakers of different languages. Lucy (1992b:31) quoted Whorf as saying “... differences

in the classification of various languages are *semantically* integrated and *structurally* pervasive.”

Interference between thought patterns and languages has semantic implications with structural differences. Lucy (1992b:81) quotes Hoijer (1954:95) as follows:

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, it is evident, includes in language both its structural and its semantic aspect. These are held to be inseparable... the semantic aspect consists of a self-contained system of meanings, inextricably bound to the structure but much more difficult to analyze and describe. Meanings, to reiterate, are not in actual fact separable from structure...

Grammatical categories are types of formal apparatus contributing to the English structural classification. According to Lucy (1992b:32), many of Whorf's studies show that distinctions in language classifications “may range on the whole of morphological and syntactic structures of the languages.” There are grammatical categories with reference to semantic considerations.

Grace (1987:4) gave his ideas about the effect of language on thought when he said, “...the compulsory categories of a language exercise an influence on the thought processes, especially the perception, of its speakers.” According to Whorf, people hold the conceptual perspectives and share the beliefs of their language group. Whorf studied different grammatical categories by making comparative linguistic studies of the perspectives denoted by the grammatical patterns of languages. Different languages have different categories of thought. Language categories, as a result, are very specific.

Other proponents of the hypothesis include Dorothy D. Lee (1959 [1944]), who is quoted in Lucy (1992b:70) as having written, “regarded language as reflecting the accumulated perspective of the cultural group”; Lucy (1992b:70), who considered “grammar as a direct reflection of culture”; and Harry Hoijer, also cited in Lucy (1992b:75), whose view was, “Language was a part of culture.” Therefore, diverse languages have an influence on the thoughts of their speakers. Duranti (1997:62) shared a similar idea when writing “... language is a powerful instrument that allows us to make sense of the world - it provides categories of thought...” Thus, each language has a different convention for encoding concepts which must be realized.

### 5.3.1 *Classification of Errors in Word Usage*

Grammatical categories in the data pertinent to the Thai subjects' errors in the English language are number, preposition, tense and article. These categories, correlating with semantic elements, are explicitly signalled by morphemes and syntax or a combination of both and are not arbitrary at all.

Out of the total errors in the data (1,038), there are 427 in word usage, equivalent to 41.14%.

Classifications of errors in word usage, the number of occurrences of each type, and their percentages are as follows:

Table 8 : Classification, number and percentage of errors in word usage

Classification of Errors in Word Usage	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Articles	224	52.46%
Prepositions	120	28.10%
Tense	44	10.30%
Number	39	9.13%

#### 5.3.1.1 *Articles*

The cause of this type of error can be traced to the absence of an equivalent system in the native language of the learners. There is no article in Thai, while there are 3 in English: 'a', 'an', and 'the'. Although Thai learners learn rules for using the English articles, there seem to be problems with correct usage. This is because of different concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness in the two languages. Givon (1984:387) stated that "Definiteness is clearly a discourse-scope phenomenon." There is a semantic difference between the articles 'a' and 'the'. There is, therefore, a semantic basis for the article category.

In the data, there are three types of errors in using articles:

- Missing articles: There is no article when there must be one.

Examples:

(80) *She was \_\_\_ real angel to me.*

(81) *I saw \_\_\_ movie and I really liked it.*

(82) *It was \_\_\_ dark blue room.*

(83) *My sister took the dog to \_\_\_ veterinarian.*



- Unnecessary articles: There is an article where one is not required.

Examples:

(84) *There are the mirror walls in the room.*

(85) *I enjoy watching a TV a lot.*

(86) *We are the good friends of each other.*

(87) *The house was on the fire last night.*

- Misuse of articles: The wrong article is used.

Examples:

(88) *He usually drives his car at the unbelievable speed.*

(89) *My aunt has the large nose.*

(90) *This is the very good place for me to relax.*

(91) *I was in the good mood that day.*

For the first type of error, learners do not observe the rule of putting an article before a noun or a noun phrase in English. In this case, there is no sign at all of definiteness and indefiniteness. The second type is the reverse of the first type. When there is indefinite plurality and indefinite non-countability, there is no need of an article. Furthermore, there are English expressions which have no articles. As for the third type, there is a mismatch between definiteness and indefiniteness; i.e., a definite article is used with an indefinite noun whereas an indefinite article is used with a definite noun.

Of the three types of errors, the number of occurrences of each and their percentages, out of 224 errors in the category of articles, is as follows:

Table 9 : Classification, number and percentage of errors in articles

Types of Errors in Articles	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Misuse of articles	84	37.5%
Missing articles	81	36.16%
Unnecessary articles	59	26.34%

### 5.3.1.2 Prepositions

Another category of incorrect usage relates to prepositions, of which there are many in both Thai and English. Distinguishing the usages of prepositions in the two languages causes problems in English language learning.

Like errors in articles, there are three types of errors in prepositions:

- Missing prepositions: There is no preposition when there must be one.

Examples:

(92) *You must not be annoyed* \_\_\_\_ *her voice.*

(93) *When I have a free time, I like to listen* \_\_\_\_ *the radio.*

(94) *She is crazy* \_\_\_\_ *this superstar.*

- Unnecessary prepositions: There is a preposition when there must not be one.

(95) *Human beings have to contact* with *nature.*

(96) *He asked me* about *my name and address.*

(97) *The white T-shirt should suit* with *the blue jeans.*

- Misuse of prepositions: The wrong preposition is used.

(98) *She tried to find fault* of *me.*

(99) *The children tied balloons* with *all the chairs.*

(100) *I love phoning* in *my bedroom.*

(101) On *the middle of the ceiling, there is a beautiful chandelier.*

In the data, there are 2 types of errors in prepositions: errors deriving from the semantic aspect in choice of preposition and errors deriving from the semantic aspect of construction.

Errors deriving from the semantic aspect in choice of preposition arise as a result of different conventionalized relationships in each language. It can be said that there is no objectivity in choice of prepositions.

For example,

(102) There are birds in the sky.

*mi nók bon thóŋfá*

*have bird on sky*

(103) The boy is sleeping in the bed.

*dêkphûchar kamləŋ nɔn yù bon tɪaŋ*

*boy prog sleep prog on bed*

There are then different perspectives in enhancing relationships.

Some examples from the data signifying this include:

(104) *The solution* of *the problem is not difficult if we try.*

(105) *There are a lot of people* in *the pavement.*

(106) *You can cook it* in *taste you like.*

(107) *My friend always brings it* for *me.*

Since there are semantic aspects underlying preposition usage, it is possible that Thai students have difficulty understanding them.

The other type of error is in errors arising from the semantic aspect of constructions. As seen earlier, errors prepositions can occur when there are different constructions in the two languages. For example, in English, there must be a preposition with a verb or an adjective while, in Thai there is no need of this.

For example,

(108) *You have to watch out \_\_\_\_ it.*

(109) *If you raise pets, you should take care \_\_\_\_ them well.*

(110) *She has never been angry \_\_\_\_ me.*

(111) *I provide him delicious \_\_\_\_ meals.*

(112) *You must not be annoyed \_\_\_\_ her voice.*

(113) *We are good friends \_\_\_\_ each other.*

There are also reversed cases where English constructions do not need prepositions while in Thai there must be one.

For example,

(114) *Human beings contact with nature all the time.*

(115) *This is a belief regarding to their customs.*

(116) *The colors match to one another.*

(117) *I phoned to my parents once a week.*

(118) *Her house is opposite to mine.*

This type of error arises as the result of different constructions and, thus, students transfer constructions in their native language into English. Wrong semantic aspects then occur.

Out of 120 errors in prepositions, the subtypes of errors and their distribution are as follows:

Table 10: Classification, number and percentage of errors in prepositions

Errors in Prepositions	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Prepositional errors caused by choice of preposition	63	52.5%
Prepositional errors caused by a difference in constructions	57	47.5%

The two types of errors in prepositions occur with about equal frequency.

### 5.3.1.3 Tense

Since there is no morphological marker for tense in Thai, it is a source of difficulty for students. In English, there are different tenses used according to differences in the points and periods of occurrences. A semantic property – a concept of time – exists in the category of tense. Givon (1984:272) says that “Tenses involve primarily – though not exclusively – an experience / concept of time as *points in a sequence*, and thus the notions of **precedence** and **subsequence**.” It can be noticed that, in English, bound morphemes express several categories of meaning including tenses while in some languages tense is denoted by separate lexical items. This is a distinction between Thai and English. That is, different patterns of verb phrases in English – in terms of morphology and syntax – signify tense distinctions. Every single verb in English must denote a tense and there is a larger number of tenses in English than in Thai. In Thai, there is no morphological marking conveying tenses like in English. Particular words are used to show the time of a particular event; for example, /jà/ for an event that will happen; /kamlaŋ/ for an event that is going on; and /læw/ for an event happening already. Also, the time of an event is usually known from the context. Therefore, even though there are rules for using the English tenses, it is not that easy for Thai learner when it comes to actual usage as Thais are not familiar with the tense distinctions in English.

Examples:

(119) *The first time I went to the haunted house, I had immediately felt scared.*

(120) *I remembered my hometown very well.*

(121) *When I got low grades, she will console me.*

(122) *She sympathized with people who are poor.*

### 5.3.1.4 Number

Another category which is quite a problem for Thai learners is number. The category of number refers to the matter of singularity versus plurality and count nouns versus non-count nouns. This is an interlingual aspect. Chaiyaratana (1961:120) states “...English noun phrases are first classified as countable and uncountable, whereas Thai first divides its noun phrases into animate and inanimate (in which nouns referring to animals are included).” Lucy (1997b:55) quotes Whorf as saying that there is a “count – mass distinction” or “individual” and “mass” nouns in English. Givon (1984:57) states that there are properties of countability – the distinction

between count and mass nouns and “the fact that all these morphemes cluster around nouns is not an arbitrary morphosyntactic phenomenon. Rather, they either pertain to the lexical-semantic features of nouns, or to their propositional – semantic role, or to some aspect of their discourse-pragmatic function.” The nominal number marking enhances indications of number. (However, Givon (1984:60) further states “If pluralization can be applied to mass nouns, it usually denotes different instances / batches of the mass”).

Grace (1987:123) says that English singularity and plurality are compulsory grammatical categories representing “rather straightforward semantic choice”. That is, such a distinction affects the speaker’s perception.

Different number markings are used for pluralization in English and Thai. In English, the morphological aspect is involved. That is, there are plural inflectional processes and plural concord. In some cases, changes in the word form - irregularities in the plural form - are used to indicate a multiplicity of referents. Unlike in English, there is no affixation in Thai at all.

As for countability and noncountability, in English, a count noun is signalled by an article to express singularity and a morphological marker to indicate plurality. In Thai, there are also count and non-count nouns. However, number in Thai is not a grammatical category as there is no grammatical distinction. Quantity is usually denoted by a number. Lucy (1997a:25) talks about mass nouns by saying, “Some lexical nouns indicate multiplicity of referents as part of their referential meaning” and “the meaning is indicated in grammatical number patterning”. A plural verb concord with nonplural lexical nouns also denotes plurality.

Words like “people” indicate an aggregation of referents. Some words like “jeans” and “scissors” are regarded as plural (notice the usage “a pair of jeans” and “a pair of scissors”). However, these two kinds of things are considered to be singular in Thai.

Examples:

(123) *The grasses in my backyard is very tall.*

(124) *The room was full of old furnitures.*

(125) *She has black hairs.*

(126) *There are many pollutions in Bangkok.*

(127) *It seems like she has magics.*

(128) *Stationeries are on the desk.*

(129) *He gave me many useful advices.*

(130) *Her hairs are long and shiny.*

It can be seen from the above examples that there are different semantic implications in Thai and English. For example, “furniture” in Thai is regarded as countable (each piece) whereas in English, it is a mass noun. “Hair” in English is a non-count noun but in Thai it is countable.

Out of the total errors in number (39), the distribution of errors is as follows:

Table 11: Classification, number and percentage in errors on number

Errors in Number	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Countability-noncountability	30	76.92%
Singularity-Plurality	9	23.08%

Since different grammatical categories penetrate specific thought patterns, English language teachers must recognize these semantic implications of distinctive grammatical categories and try to make students approximate the appropriate concepts in order to capture the link between morphosyntactic and semantic varieties.

## 6. Conclusions

This study has attempted to identify errors that Thai students make in written English and then to compare, speculate on and explain the possible causes of errors for pedagogical purposes. On the basis of contrastive analysis and error analysis, Thai students’ problems are established.

The results demonstrate that there exist syntactic, morphological and word usage problems for which contrastive analysis-based explanations can be found. The findings support the hypothesis that, based on the analysis of errors, providing with contrastive comparisons between the native and the target languages, these three types of errors will be found. Teaching can then focus on selected problems found.

The data should serve as a basis for further studies on the pedagogical prevention or correction of errors in the teaching of English. By looking at the analysis, one can have a better understanding of Thai students’ problems and help prevent and reduce them. It is hoped that through contrasting the differences in the patterns and structures of Thai and English, English teachers will be able to present their material more effectively to Thai students. Also, the findings can profitably serve as systematic guidelines for setting up the proper approach and selecting the proper teaching materials to improve strategies and classroom techniques in English language classes for Thai learners.

### Notes

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2. Errors in English writing can occur in any type of paragraph topic and so there was no control in this aspect.
3. A detailed analysis of this hypothesis is beyond the scope of this paper.

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