CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the study

This study attempted to investigate the types and frequency of grammatical errors that FE I students commonly made in their written assignments. The subjects in the study were 30 first-year students who had EEE scores between 34-74 and who were attending an FE I, a three-credit compulsory course in the first semester of the academic year 2004 at PSU, Hat Yai Campus. All of the subjects were distributed across the faculties to cover PSU students. Fifteen students with high EEE scores were from three faculties which principally consisted of students who had high EEE scores (71-74): the Faculties of Medicine, Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Dentistry. The other 15 students, who had low EEE scores, were from seven faculties which were mainly composed of students with low EEE scores (34-35): the Faculties of Management Sciences, Natural Resources, Nursing, Liberal Arts, Agro-Industry, Economics and Law. The number of subjects from each faculty was allocated to proportionately represent the number of students of that faculty. All of the students studied in their regular classes. Their four written assignments for FE I were collected and divided into two groups, based on their scores, for analysis.

The analysis framework of this study covered 23 types of grammatical category with sub-types of misuse, omission, wrong form and unnecessary insertion ranging from a sentence level to word level. This framework was the result of the modifications of the initial analysis framework which could not adequately accommodate the actual errors the students in this study made in their written work.

The types and frequency of grammatical errors made by students with high and low EEE scores in FE I written assignments can be summarized as follows:

1. Grammatical errors produced by all the students in this study were categorized into 23 types ranging from sentence to word levels. As a whole, the six

main types of errors occurring most frequently were errors in incomplete sentences, nouns, agreement, spelling, tenses, and articles. Among these, errors in incomplete sentences were the most frequent type of errors that the students made. As for students with high EEE scores, the type of grammatical errors with the highest frequency of occurrence found in their written assignments was errors in agreement. This was followed by errors in incomplete sentences, errors in nouns, errors in articles, errors in tenses and errors in spelling. In comparison, the type of grammatical errors made by students with low EEE scores' written assignments which occurred most frequently was errors in incomplete sentences. This was followed by errors in nouns, errors in spelling, errors in agreement, errors in tenses and, lastly, errors in articles.

2. Grammatical errors that both students with high and low EEE scores had in common in their FE I written assignments included six types: errors in incomplete sentences, nouns, agreement, spelling, tenses, and articles. For errors in incomplete sentences, students with high EEE scores made more fragment errors than students with low EEE scores, whereas students with low EEE scores had more errors in omission than the other group. In particular, for fragment errors, students with high EEE scores made the highest number of errors in 'but clause' while students with low EEE scores had far more difficulty with 'when/while clause' than students with high EEE scores. Errors in omission that occurred with the highest frequency in both students with high and low EEE scores' assignments were omission of verbs together with object pronouns. Second, among errors in tenses, both students with high and low EEE scores committed the highest percentage of errors in simple past tense, mainly misuse of other tenses for simple past tense. Third, for errors in agreement, subject-verb agreement and noun/pronoun-antecedent agreement were most problematic for students in the two groups. Fourth, errors in nouns, particularly misuse of singular for plural nouns were frequent in both students with high and low EEE scores' written assignments. Fifth, both groups of students similarly made a high percentage of total errors in articles namely omission of indefinite (a, an) and definite (the) articles. Finally, errors in spelling occurred with a high percentage in the two groups of students' written assignments and mostly fell into the 'others' category.

3. The findings of the study indicated that most common source of error in English written assignments might be the influence of the native language. The students' inadequacy of knowledge, incomplete application of rules, false concept hypothesized, ignorance of certain rules, avoidance strategy, and carelessness were among the major possible causes of error occurrence.

5.2 Pedagogical implications

Several implications emerge from the findings of this study. They are as follows:

1. It should be noted that the first-year students in this study have produced errors of the most fundamental elements of English grammar such as incomplete sentences, nouns, agreement, spelling, tenses, and articles that are taught in the FE I course. Teachers should encourage students to learn from their errors and should motivate them to overcome their weaknesses. Since students will learn best what teachers make them concentrate on, some teaching methods and activities focusing on these problems should be employed to help students learn English more effectively. For example, since errors in incomplete sentences were most frequently produced in this study, the focus of well-formed sentences should be taken into account first. It is essential for teachers to provide students with knowledge of the relationship of main and subordinate clauses and how simple and complex sentences are formed. Therefore, practice in constructing sentences from simple sentence patterns to complex ones should be employed to help students master sentence structure and also to provide students with awareness of important elements in sentences.

2. Knowing the major causes of students' errors should prompt teachers to prevent the occurrence of errors. Some explanation can be given to students so as to lead students to understanding of the causes of errors. Since most errors in this study are caused by L1 interference, contrastive analysis should be adopted to help explain the difference of the features in L1, Thai, and L2, English. It is important that teachers inform students about the difference between Thai and English and the use of obligatory features in English that are absent in Thai such as the addition of plural marker –s and changing of noun forms, subject-verb agreement, the use of both

definite and indefinite articles, and tense forms. The explanation can be followed by reinforcing exercises. That is, teachers might motivate students to practice writing following the explanation. Well-selected materials should be provided that get students' attention and lead them to accurately applying grammatical aspects. In addition, spelling can cause difficulty for students as well. The misspelling in this study occurred in several forms. Some can be traced to students' mispronunciation. Teachers can help students gradually reduce this type of error by encouraging students to remember the vocabulary taught in class by introducing word spelling as well as pronunciation followed by meaning.

3. Appropriate correction techniques should be used to support effective learning. Teachers may expose students to other types of correction apart from teacher correction. In some settings, learner's self-correction of errors might be more beneficial for language learning than teacher correction (Kees, 2004; Madylus, 2004; Kavaliauskienė, 2003; Wood, 1993). There are various ways of indicating errors which is the initial task to promote self-correction. Teachers can underline errors, code them or just tick the erroneous line. They can use a friendly color of marker, such as green or blue, which is more pleasant to the eyes than red. Moreover, students should have a space in their notebooks to write down their errors and the correct version. Sometimes tests based on the frequent errors students make in class should be provided at the end of each unit. This could encourage students to look over their notes and try to learn from them, and could help students avoid repeating the same errors again (Budden, 2004; Kavaliauskienė, 2003).

4. It is important that input for the students in language classroom should be increased. Writing practice and rewriting activities, if time allows, should be taken into account as worthwhile classroom activities. Students will have chances to discover what they frequently have problems with and, accordingly, they can learn from their errors. If the class period cannot provide ample opportunities for students to practice, self-study materials geared towards the difficult areas, particularly six types of common errors might fulfill their needs.

5.3 Recommendations for further study

Based on this study, some recommendations for further study are indicated:

1. Since this study was limited to a small sample size of subjects, the results could not be generalized to all first-year university students. Therefore, additional studies might be conducted with first-year students in other universities to compare the types of grammatical errors obtained from various groups of students. In case the frequently produced grammatical errors made by those students are the same as those in the present study, this could shed light on common errors of Thai university students which would help language teachers to find ways to tackle their student errors.

2. To obtain more accurate explanations of the reasons why students committed the errors, an interview might be used. In addition, further research should focus on errors found in students' written work which reflect their language competence and are systematic in nature. To do so, the researcher might consider using self-correction as a technique to eliminate non-systematic errors which result from students' carelessness.

3. It would also be interesting to conduct a further study on grammatical errors in speaking skill obtained from other language courses, particularly elective ones. This is because doing such study could help teachers learn about problematic kinds of errors and see whether they are the same as the errors found in writing. If so, teachers should adapt their teaching methods and create proper materials in order to build up students' fundamental grammatical knowledge. This can help overcome major problems that students have in learning productive skills of English.

4. It should be noted that the results of this study are based on an analysis of errors made by FE I students in the course assignments. This could lead to an experimental study comparing teaching methods and error treatment methods. The findings derived from such a study might enable teachers to find appropriate ways to cope with students' errors during language learning.