CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research procedures used in the study. It contains a description of the subjects, the research instrument, the data collection and data analysis procedures.

3.1 Subjects of the Study

The subjects participating in the study were 30 first-year students taken from students scoring between 34-74 in their EEE who were attending FE I, a three-credit compulsory course in the first semester of the academic year 2004 at PSU, Hat Yai Campus. At this campus, the students whose EEE scores were between 0-33 were placed into a Preparatory English course before taking FE I, while those scoring between 75-100 were exempted from both FE I and II.

All of the subjects were distributed across the faculties to cover PSU students. They are described as follows:

Fifteen students with high EEE scores were taken from three faculties that principally consisted of students who had high EEE scores (71-74): the Faculty of Medicine, Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Dentistry. The number of subjects from each faculty was allocated to proportionately represent the number of students of that faculty. The subjects included seven students from the Faculty of Medicine, six from the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, and two from the Faculty of Dentistry.

The other 15 students who had low EEE scores were taken from seven faculties that were mainly composed of students with low EEE scores (34-35). The number of subjects was also allocated to proportionately represent the number of students of each faculty. The subjects were three students from the Faculty of Management Sciences, two from the Faculty of Natural Resources, two from the

Faculty of Nursing, two from the Faculty of Liberal Arts, two from the Faculty of Agro-Industry, two from the Faculty of Economics and two from the Faculty of Law.

All of the subjects spent two periods of 50 minutes each per week studying this course in their regular classes. When the students were assigned writing, their assignments were collected and divided into two groups based on their EEE scores for data analysis.

3.2 Research Instrument

The students' FE I written assignments were used as a research instrument in order to obtain the data for the study. The coursebook for FE I was *New Interchange* developed by Richards et al. (2000). The course covered four units and each unit lasted 7-8 periods. All language teachers of FE I followed the same teacher's manual. Beginning with the snapshots which presented real-world information and introduced the topic of a unit, the teachers encouraged discussion in class by using questions. Then, they had the students listen to the conversations introducing the new grammar and presenting functional and conversational expressions. The new grammar in grammar focus was presented and followed by controlled and freer communicative practice activities. Pronunciation was also taught and the listening activities were used to develop a variety of listening skills. After that, the teachers employed the word power activities to develop the students' vocabulary. In addition, reading passages adapted from authentic sources were employed to promote a variety of reading skills. At the end of each unit, the students were required to write an essay of about 150-200 words on the topic using grammatical knowledge and vocabulary learned. They were supposed to spend 50 minutes in class completing each assignment and were able to do the rest at home if they could not finish in time. The FE I written assignments required pair work except assignment 3, and one of four assignments, assignment 2, involved both pair work and peer review activity. In case the students could not find someone to work with, they could work alone.

In this course, the assignment in unit 3 was taken directly from the coursebook and those in units 1, 2, and 4 were adapted by the teaching staff of the Department of

Languages and Linguistics, the Faculty of Liberal Arts. The details of assignments, grammar, and vocabulary focus of each unit are outlined below.

Unit 1: That's what friends are for!

In the first unit, students described basic characteristics of their personality type. The grammar points students were expected to master were relative pronouns as subjects and objects (e.g. *I like people **who** aren't too serious* and *I'd prefer someone **(who)** I can talk to easily*) and clauses containing *it* with adverbial clauses (e.g. *I like **it when people are direct***). The vocabulary focus in this unit was positive and negative adjectives describing personal characteristics (such as *easygoing, modest, stingy, moody, etc.*) (see Appendix A).

Unit 2: Career moves.

The second unit required students to write about advantages and disadvantages of an interesting job. In the assignment, gerund phrases as subjects and objects (e.g. ***Working in the media** could be fun* and *I'd love **working in the media***) and comparisons with *–er / more / less than* and *as…as* were the grammar points students were supposed to use. Also, expressions for adding information (such as *In addition, Further, On the other hand, etc.*) were emphasized in this assignment. The vocabulary focus was the use of collocations by joining gerunds with phrases to describe occupations (such as *doing medical research, being a college professor, etc.*) (see Appendix B). This task also called for peer review in which the students worked in pair and exchanged their paper with that of another pair to check their friends' paper and give comments or suggestions before rewriting their paper to include their friends' suggestions.

Unit 3: Could you do me a favor?

The assignment in the third unit required students to write a note to a friend or classmate to borrow things. The grammar points were making direct and indirect

requests with modals and *if* clauses (e.g. ***Would it be OK if*** *I used your fax machine?*). The vocabulary focus in this unit was collocations of words and phrases often used when making requests and responding to them (such as *deny an accusation, offer an explanation, etc.*) (see Appendix C).

Unit 4: What a story!

In the fourth unit, students wrote a story, using past simple-past continuous and past simple-past perfect (e.g. *While they **were crossing** the Pacific, their boat **hit** a whale and **sank*** and *When I **came back**, someone **had stolen** my wallet*). Vocabulary related to various types of common events (such as *coincidence, emergency, lucky break, etc.*) was also focused on (see Appendix D).

3.3 Data Collection

The data of grammatical errors of students with high and low EEE scores obtained in the study were from their four FE I written assignments in the first semester of the academic year 2004. Each student was required to write four assignments and there were 60 pieces of assignments written by 15 students of each group. Consequently, the total number of written assignments produced by the two groups was 120. At the end of the last period of each unit, FE I teachers collected the submitted drafts of each assignment and gave them to the researcher. Then the students' assignments were photocopied before returned to the teachers. The students followed the same procedures in all assignments except the second one in which they had to review their classmates' assignments. In this case, only its first draft which was used as the data was collected before the teachers had the students exchange their paper with that of their classmates.

3.4 Analysis Framework

The initial analysis framework of this study was developed on the basis of the researcher's teaching experience in marking written assignments and the findings of

grammatical errors reported in previous studies. It consisted of 21 grammatical types. Ranging from a sentence level to word level, the framework began with incomplete sentences followed by run-on sentences, word order, there-be, tenses, voice, agreement, infinitives and gerunds, nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, pronouns, modal/auxiliary, possessive ('s), conjunctions, prepositions, articles, punctuation, capitalization, and ended up with spelling (see Appendix E).

However, the 21 main categories in the initial framework needed to be refined because they did not contain details which would help classification process. The framework was, therefore, refined based on Srichai's (2002) taxonomy, which included useful sub-types of misuse, omission, wrong form and unnecessary insertion of English structures. All the four sub-types were added to 16 main categories in the initial framework, namely incomplete sentences, there-be, tenses, voice, infinitives and gerunds, nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, pronouns, modal/auxiliary, possessive ('s), conjunctions, prepositions, articles, and punctuation. Moreover, Swan's (1984) taxonomy was employed for the inclusion of sub-types of spelling in the initial framework. They were misspelling concerning grammatical rules e.g. doubling final consonants, the suffix –ful and words ending in **y** or **f**, and other problems that could not be classified were placed into the 'others' sub-type.

On analyzing the errors, the researcher found that the refined framework still could not adequately accommodate the errors frequently occurred in the written work. To cover all grammatical problems produced by the students in this study, four types of modification were made as follows:

1. One more type of errors was added, that is, comparison including three sub-types based on Srichai's (2002) taxonomy (see Appendix F).

2. Infinitives and gerunds were split into two types. Moreover, sub-types were added to each of the two types. The modification of types of infinitives and gerunds are as follows:

The refined analysis framework	The actual analysis framework

• **Infinitives and Gerunds**
 	
◻Misuse of gerunds after 'to'
 	
◻Misuse of gerunds for infinitives
 	
◻Misuse of infinitives for gerunds
	• **Infinitives**
	
	◻Infinitives with 'to'
	
	    ■To + simple past tense
	
	    ■To + gerunds
	
	    ■To + verb + s/es
	
	    ■Misuse of infinitives without 'to'
	     for infinitives with 'to'
	
	◻Infinitives without 'to'
	
	    ■Misuse of gerunds for infinitives
	
	    ■Misuse of infinitives with 'to' for
	     infinitives without 'to'

	• **Gerunds** ◻Misuse of infinitives for gerunds

3. The following type of modification involves addition of sub-types.

        3.1 Two sub-types in errors using past tenses were added i.e. misuse of past continuous tense for simple past tense in sentences with 'While clause', and misuse of simple past tense for past continuous tense in sentences with 'While clause'. The changes are summarized below:

The refined analysis framework	The actual analysis framework

• **Tenses**
 	
Simple past
 	
  ■Misuse of other tenses for simple past tense
 	
  ■Wrong form of verbs in past tense
 	
Past continuous
 	
  ■Misuse of other tenses for past continuous tense
 	
  ■Omission of 'V. to be'
	• **Tenses**
	
	Simple past
	
	  ■Misuse of past continuous tense for simple past tense in sentences with 'While clause'
	
	  ■Misuse of other tenses for simple past tense
	
	  ■Wrong form of verbs in past tense
	
	Past continuous
	
	  ■Misuse of simple past tense for past continuous tense in sentences with 'While clause'
	
	  ■Misuse of other tenses for past continuous tense
	
	  ■Omission of 'V. to be'

3.2 The 'others' sub-type of spelling errors was delineated into three more sub-types. They were the sub-types of splitting, merging, and mispronouncing of words frequently made by the students in this study. Other misspelling with no obvious patterns were still put in the 'others' category. The following is an illustration of changes in spelling errors:

The refined analysis framework	The actual analysis framework
• **Spelling** Doubling final consonants Final –e The suffix –ful **ie** and **ei** Words ending in **y** Words ending in **f** Hyphens Full stops with abbreviations Others	• **Spelling** Doubling final consonants Final –e The suffix –ful **ie** and **ei** Words ending in **y** Words ending in **f** Hyphens Full stops with abbreviations Splitting Merging Mispronouncing Others

4. Sub-types of four types of errors were merged and renamed under the same category. They were sub-types of nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. For example, there were both misuse of verbs for nouns and adjectives for nouns under the type of noun errors, so they were rearranged as misuse of other parts of speech for nouns. The changes in noun errors are illustrated below:

The refined analysis framework	The actual analysis framework
• **Nouns** Misuse of verbs for nouns Misuse of adjectives for nouns Misuse of singular for plural nouns Misuse of plural for singular nouns Unnecessary insertion of plural markers Unnecessary insertion of nouns	• **Nouns** Misuse of other parts of speech for nouns Misuse of singular for plural nouns Misuse of plural for singular nouns Unnecessary insertion of plural markers Unnecessary insertion of nouns

All the modifications described above resulted in the actual analysis framework which covered 23 types of grammatical category (see Appendix F).

3.5 Data Analysis

In analyzing students' errors, the researcher followed these steps:

1) All errors in each photocopied assignment were identified, coded and classified into types. To demonstrate, errors were identified and coded as follows:

Cap., SP

Example 1: *morever, I'm really more interested in working with computers.*

SV

Example 2: *It bother me when people aren't reliable.*

In the first example, the sentence contained two errors. The first one was lack of capitalization for the beginning of a sentence and the other was misspelling. The second example contained an error in subject-verb agreement.

2) All errors were further described for sub-types of errors e.g. misuse, omission, wrong form and unnecessary insertion.

3) The number of errors in each type was tabulated and counted.

4) The total number of all errors produced by students in each group was summarized in percentages in order to provide an answer to the first research question.

5) After all students' written assignments in each group were analyzed for grammatical errors, the total numbers of each type of error in each group were compared to determine common grammatical errors of the two groups of students in order to answer the second research question.