

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The content of this chapter covers four main areas. First, significance of errors in language learning is reviewed in brief to provide background knowledge. Secondly, causes of errors are explored. The third part concerns error analysis. The last section deals with related research on Thai students' errors.

2.1 Significance of Errors in Language Learning

Brown (2000: 217) defines an error as “noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner.” This is supported by James (1998), Ellis (1997), and Bell (1981) who affirm that errors are seen as the deviation which arises as a result of second language learning. Errors are normal and unavoidable. Therefore, they are regarded as a necessary part of language learning that could reveal learners' underlying knowledge of the language.

Errors can be described in two terms: systematic and non-systematic errors. As Brown (2000) and Richards (1974) point out, systematic errors are the sort of errors we might expect from anyone learning English as a second language and also persist or recur within any group of learners. Errors under the category of systematic errors seem to occur in case in which learners reveal more consistency in producing the second language and when learners produce incorrect language because they do not know the correct form. Besides, second language learners also seem to make non-systematic errors (James, 1998; Edge, 1989; Jain, 1969). They are the slips –failures to utilize known systems correctly – of the tongue or pen caused by psychological conditions such as intense excitement, or psychological factors such as tiredness, which change from moment to moment and from situation to situation. Errors under these circumstances are unsystematic and may be called ‘mistakes’ – performance errors that are either random guesses or slips. They can occur when learners produce

incorrect language although they know the correct form. Carelessness of learners is a good sign of why non-systematic errors occur.

According to James (1998), Ellis (1997) and Corder (1967), learners' systematic errors can provide evidence of the language system that they are using or have learned at a particular point. There are three good reasons for pointing out errors. First, it is necessary for language teachers to know what types of errors learners make so that they can know what needs to be taught and find ways to help learners remedy those errors. Second, specific errors are an obvious point of reference that raises the important question of 'Why do learners make errors?' This could allow language teachers to know how learning proceeds and to understand causes of learners' errors. Errors also provide evidence of how learners learn a language, and what learning strategies they are employing. This can tell the teachers what skills learners have achieved and what remains for them to learn. Brown (1994) also states that errors are viewed as windows to the learner's comprehension of the second language. Therefore, they reflect learners' underlying system and enable teachers to provide appropriate feedback. Third, errors are an important device for learners as well as teachers because they are part of a process in which learners prove or disprove their hypotheses about the second language. Learners can learn from errors particularly when they take part in correcting their own errors. As a result, learners might not make the same errors again.

2.2 Causes of Errors

In the language-learning process, errors occur because of two main reasons: interlingual and intralingual transfer.

2.2.1 Interlingual Transfer

L1 transfer is seen as a process in which learners use their knowledge of the first language in learning a second language. As stated by Brown (1994), most of the learner errors in the second language result primarily from the learner's assumption that the second language forms similar to the native language.

It appears that transfer can take place in two different ways. Transfer can be positive in cases in which the first and second languages are similar and learners can apply the knowledge of their first language to the second language learning task. Then, the similarities between the first and second languages can benefit or facilitate second language learning. In contrast, where there are differences between the first and second languages, learners' first language knowledge interferes with second language learning. This is referred to as negative transfer, or interference, which can become the source of errors in the second language. When second language learners commit errors which could be traced back to the first language, those errors are known as interlingual errors (Brown, 2000; Lightbown and Spada, 1999; James, 1998; Ellis, 1997 and 1985; Norrish, 1993; Krashen, 1981; Richards, 1974).

Negative transfer or interference is considered the most frequent cause of second language learners' errors. It can lead to language patterns which are not found in that of the native speaker when the first and second languages differ on a particular point. Moreover, Towell and Hawkins (1994) point out that L1 transfer is likely to affect all linguistic levels including phonetics/phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, and discourse. *'I hungry very much'* produced by Thai learners is a clear example of a transfer of Thai grammatical structures into English. According to Thai grammatical structures, adjectives exist in the verb position and do not need the verb *'be'* in front of an adjectival complement. For this reason, Thai learners frequently apply this rule in written English by omitting the verb *'be'* preceding an adjectival complement. Moreover, adverbs *'very much'* are put in wrong orders as learners use Thai structure in which adverbs normally follow adjectives. This example illustrates that learners' first language, Thai, has a negative effect on their second language learning which results in interlingual errors.

2.2.2 Intralingual Transfer

A large number of errors committed by second language learners are similar, regardless of their first language. Those errors are caused by intralingual transfer. As James (1998) defines, intralingual errors are created without referring to L1 resources. The outcomes produced by the learner are non-existent in the second language but

result from the misapplication of language rules. Intralingual errors are found to involve overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and false concept hypothesized (James, 1998; Ellis, 1985; Norrish, 1983; Richards, 1974).

In the context of second language learning, intralingual transfer is frequently referred to as *overgeneralization* – a process that occurs as the second language learners act within the target language. It can be explained as extensions of general rules to specific items where the general rules do not apply. Overgeneralization basically concerns cases in which the learner creates a deviant structure based on his experience of other structures in the target language. That is, the learner generalizes a particular rule or item based on partial knowledge of the target language. Moreover, many intralingual errors represent difficulty in learning the rules of the target language. Errors caused by overgeneralization help to reveal how learners learn the language. The use of ‘*womans*’ instead of ‘*women*’ is an example of an overgeneralization error when learners create their own rules for the plural noun form.

Ignorance of rule restrictions involves a failure to perceive the restrictions of existing structures when rules are extended to other contexts. It might result from analogical extension or the rote learning of rules. For example, misuse of the infinitive form of the verb in ‘*I made her to do it*’ reflects how learners may ignore limitations in the use of the verb ‘*make*’. They may feel that there is something missing in ‘*I made her do it*’ as they have been taught the constructions of ‘*tell*’, ‘*allow*’, or ‘*enable*’ + object + ‘*to*’ infinitive. Therefore, incorrect rules are applied through analogy when they use the infinitive with ‘*to*’ after the object following ‘*make*’.

Incomplete application of rules or a failure to achieve complete knowledge of the second language occurs in cases where the learner finds he can have successful communication by using simple rules rather than more complex ones. The learner tends to apply some of the rules and continues to make deviant forms in order to make himself easily understood. A good example of this is seen when learners do not conjugate verbs in relation to their antecedent, for instance, ‘*she know what she want*’. This can reflect learners’ incomplete application of agreement rules since they are

supposed to add –s to ‘know’ and ‘want’ in accord with a third person singular pronoun, ‘she’.

False concept hypothesized refers to errors derived from faulty knowledge of target language distinctions or inaccurate ideas about language rules. One example is that learners often substitute one word for another such as ‘bring’ for ‘take’ in ‘I will bring it to you’. Though these two words, in fact, have contrasting meanings, learners may assume that this pair is a synonym and can be used interchangeably.

2.3 Error Analysis

As defined by Brown (2000) and Ellis (1985), error analysis is the study of learner errors to reveal the target language system operating within the learner. It involves collecting samples of learner errors, identifying the errors, classifying them in accord with their hypothesized causes, and evaluating their seriousness.

Error analysis is seen as a useful process for both teachers and researchers. For teachers, an error analysis can be used as a device to specifically show how their teaching can assist learners, and help perceive problems in a class (Norrish, 1983). As for researchers, various approaches are taken to analyzing the kinds of errors second language learners make. The aim of doing this is to discover what learners really know about the language. James (1998), Ellis (1997) and Bell (1981) propose four steps in analyzing errors. The steps are 1) identification, 2) description, 3) explanation, and 4) evaluation. They are described as follows:

To identify or recognize errors, comparing the sentences learners produce with what would be the correct sentences in the target language is needed first. If the sentences are judged wrong for the target language or inappropriate for a particular context, they are labeled as errors.

Second, all errors can be described and classified into types. There are three main purposes for describing errors. The first purpose is to make explicit what is implied and to justify the learner’s intuitions. The second purpose for description is that it is a prerequisite for counting the frequency of various types of errors. The third function is to create categories for errors. To do this, researchers may either classify errors into categories, such as grammatical, phonological, lexical, or morphological

categories, or identify ways in which the learners' utterances differ from those of the target language. Such errors include 'omission' of a grammatical item, 'misinformation' or using one grammatical form inappropriately, or 'misordering' which is putting words in wrong orders. Classifying errors in such ways can help language teachers analyze learners' problems in their target language development.

The third task is trying to explain why errors occur. This is a far more difficult task since errors have varying sources. That is, some errors seem universal such as when learners attempt to simplify the use of the second language which results from intralingual transfer. Other errors caused by interlingual transfer could reflect learners' attempts to make use of their first language knowledge. Thus, this step enables language teachers to identify the processes in learners' mind, which have caused errors to occur.

Fourth, evaluating errors is also needed. Some errors seem to be more serious than others since they tend to hinder comprehension in communication. Global errors can interfere with the whole structure of a sentence. The sentence might be difficult to understand because its basic structure is wrong. Local errors, on the other hand, can affect a single element in the sentence. This kind of error might not create any processing difficulty. The distinction between these two types of errors can help teachers judge to what extent the outcomes produced by learners are likely to be understandable. Also, global errors seem to need more attention and treatment than local errors.

It can be seen that among the four steps of error analysis described above, the step of identification and description are fundamental steps in error analysis because they are the basis of exploring types of errors. Without these two steps, errors cannot be categorized into types and causes are difficult to explain. Explaining the causes of errors produced by learners is also a valuable step in that it can help learners become more aware of their problems when writing. Language teachers can also benefit from the explanation by improving teaching methods and materials to prevent error occurrence. This would, in turn, help students improve their second language writing and, eventually, communicate better. This study will focus on these three steps of error analysis: identification, description and explanation. Evaluation – assessing the comprehensibility of learners' writings – is not included in this study.

2.4 Related Research on Thai students' errors

Several studies on error analysis have been conducted both in the Thai and non-Thai context, but only studies conducted in the Thai context are reviewed here.

Studies on error analysis conducted with Thai students learning English were found both at university level (Lush, 2002; Srichai, 2002; Abdulsata, 1999; Srinon, 1999; Boon-Long, 1998; Lukanavanich, 1988; Ubol, 1979), and at lower level (Chownahe, 2000; Choksoongnoen, 1994).

At university level, there are studies focusing on errors of English major students (Lukanavanich, 1988; Abdulsata, 1999; Boon-Long, 1998) and errors of non-major students (Srichai, 2002; Lush, 2002; Srinon, 1999; Ubol, 1979).

Three studies on errors made by English major students are first reviewed. Lukanavanich (1988) studied the kinds of errors 256 first-year students from Bangkok University made in writing composition and analyzed the causes of errors. The instrument used in the study was a set of eight sequential pictures from which the students wrote a composition of 150-200 words within 60 minutes. The results revealed that the written errors were grammatical errors or structural errors, lexical errors and stylistic errors. The most frequent errors were grammatical errors: tense, determiners and agreement. Most of the frequent errors in this study were caused by ignorance of rule restrictions, mother tongue interference, incomplete application of rules, overgeneralization and false concepts hypothesized respectively.

Unlike Lukanavanich (1988) who specially designed the instrument used in the study, Abdulsata (1999) and Boon-Long (1998) conducted a classroom-based study of errors of students' written work. Abdulsata (1999) aimed to analyze errors at both sentence and word levels in the second-year English major students' compositions. The focuses of the study were on examining types of errors made by the students, determining the frequency of those errors, and giving some plausible explanations to account for the errors. The findings revealed six main types of errors at the sentence level in the students' compositions: relative clause, tense, singular and plural nouns, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and fragments and run-ons. Errors at the word level included article, preposition, diction, and adjective respectively. The study suggested that the differences between the Thai and English languages were

among the major plausible sources of errors. The students tended to make a direct translation from Thai to English without realizing the differences in sentence structures and differences in grammatical rules of the two languages.

Boon-Long (1998) conducted an error analysis of writing of the English major students at Chiang Mai University taking English 221 and English 222 courses. In this study, the students were divided into three groups of different grade point averages (GPA): 2.01-2.50, 2.51-3.00 and 3.01-3.50. In English 221, there were 104 students and 6 written assignments for each student, while in English 222, there were also 104 students and also six assignments for each student. Errors were grouped into 22 types. It was found that the three most problematic errors were spelling, subject-verb agreement, and repetition of words. Moreover, the levels of GPA of the students did not seem to have a strong effect on the students' performance. In other words, students of 2.51-3.00 GPA committed the highest number of errors whereas students of 3.01-3.50 GPA made the fewest errors of all. Surprisingly, students of 2.01-2.50 GPA did not commit the highest number of errors. However, the data revealed that the top three errors were repeatedly committed and arose more often in English 222. This might be due to certain differences between the two courses. These differences were caused by various factors involved in the two writing courses: 1) the topic, 2) the length of written assignment, 3) types of writing, 4) instructors, 5) classroom environment, and 6) course time.

There are four studies on error analysis in writing conducted with non-major students. Srichai (2002) aimed to investigate the types and frequency of global and local errors in 59 written works of first year Business Administration students at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai campus. She also wanted to further identify those written works which were more incomprehensible in order to investigate the types and frequency of global errors they contained. A writing task consisting of three sequential pictures and some useful vocabulary with Thai equivalents was used as a research instrument. In this study, errors found in the students' written work were evaluated as global or local errors and were classified into four categories: 1) lexicon, 2) syntax, 3) morphology, and 4) orthography. It was found that both global and local errors with a high frequency of occurrence were errors of lexicon and syntax.

Moreover, global errors that were frequently found in those written works identified as more incomprehensible were lexical and syntactic errors.

Srinon (1999) investigated types and frequency of errors, sources of errors and mother tongue interference in free compositions written by 50 first year students of Mahamakut Buddhist University, Mahavajiralongkonrajawitthayalai campus. The research instruments generated by the researcher consisted of eleven writing topics and three picture stories used for collecting the data. As for data analysis, the scheme of 47 types of error classification and an interview of a random sample of ten students were employed. To do so, a total of 85 copies of written compositions was analyzed for errors which were classified by percentage of total errors, and an interview was conducted. A total of 47 different types of errors were found. Ordered from most frequent to least frequent, they were 1) tenses, 2) determiners, 3) prepositions, 4) verb forms, 5) punctuation, 6) literal translation from Thai to English, 7) adverbs, 8) wrong choice of words, 9) nouns and 10) agreement. The sources of errors were mother tongue interference, carelessness, overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, false concept hypothesized and incomplete application of rules.

Unlike Srichai (2002) and Srinon (1999), whose studies investigated students' errors by using specifically designed instruments, Lush (2002) used 30 English essays written by 15 third-year undergraduate students at Thammasat University to analyze errors and discover the causes of the errors. It was found that the grammatical errors in essay writing mostly fell into five main categories: 1) definite and indefinite articles, 2) singular and plural nouns, 3) tense, 4) subject-verb agreement, and 5) prepositions. The main cause of these errors was L1 interference. That is, the students appeared to use their knowledge of Thai grammar to write English essays.

As for Ubol (1979), one of his purposes was to examine types of errors found in English compositions written by 150 first-year students at Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus. Errors were classified under three main categories: 1) grammatical or structural errors, 2) lexical errors, and 3) errors of style uses. The main types of errors were tenses, verbs, determiners, spelling, spoken forms, and prepositions.

It should be noted that the data for the studies reviewed above were only obtained from university-level students' compositions. Other studies examining errors

of lower-level students (Choksoongnoen, 1994; Chownahe, 2000) are reviewed below.

As presented in many studies on error analysis, data were collected from students' writing. However, Choksoongnoen (1994) collected data by using a test instead of a composition. In his study, he investigated the errors in English language performance of Vocational Certificate Students in Khon Kaen and Udon Thani Vocational College by using a grammatical test which included 84 multiple choice items of four alternatives. The sample group consisted of 96 and 108 vocational certificate students in level 3 from both vocational colleges. Results were summarized in percentage and mean scores. It was found that the top 12 types of errors which were made by more than 50 percent of students were: irregular verb, spelling, capitalization, linking verb, hypothetical sentences, indirect speech, choosing tense, auxiliary verb, adverb clause, subject-verb agreement, noun clause, and passive voice.

In Chownahe's (2000) study, errors in English compositions written by 178 Mattayomsuksa Six students at Kaengkrowittaya School in Chaiyaphum Province were analyzed, and interlingual errors and intralingual errors were examined. The study also aimed to compare errors in the first and second compositions after remedial teaching lessons for the low-, mid-, and high-grade level students. One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design was utilized in the experimental study. The instruments developed by the researcher were a) a first composition; b) eleven remedial teaching lesson plans; c) a second composition, the same story as the first one; d) an observational form for teaching activities and e) a questionnaire for evaluating remedial lessons. The data were summarized using percentage and mean. Also two statistical techniques were used: the standard deviation and the Chi-square. The results of the study showed that within the ten categories of errors committed by Mattayomsuksa Six students, both interlingual errors and intralingual errors were found. The frequently made interlingual errors were word-by-word translation and adjectives used as main verbs. The problems of intralingual errors included singular versus plural nouns, tenses, word selection, determiners, punctuation and capitalization, form of pronouns, prepositions and subject-verb agreement. The causes of errors were omission, addition and misformation. Moreover, it was found that the proportions of both interlingual and intralingual errors found in the second compositions were significantly less ($p =$

0.05) than those in the first compositions after remedial teaching lessons. The number of errors produced by students of the three grade levels also decreased in the second compositions. However, the low-grade level students did not make the highest number of errors. The mid-grade level committed the highest number of both interlingual and intralingual errors in both compositions. This might be because the low-grade level students paid closer attention to remedial lessons than the other two groups since they were afraid to fail in the course. In addition, the students in the mid- and high-grade levels tried to write longer paragraphs and use more new words and various structures whereas the low-grade students used words or structures that were familiar to them, hence a reduction in errors.

All of the studies on error analysis conducted in Thailand reviewed above suggested that main grammatical or syntactic errors were incomplete structures, articles, tenses, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and spelling. This indicates that grammatical errors are still problematic in Thai students' language learning both at university and lower levels. Most of the errors made by Thai students were caused by mother tongue interference or interlingual transfer. As for intralingual errors, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, overgeneralization and false concepts hypothesized were major causes for the errors.

It should be pointed out that only a few studies addressed the issue of students' language proficiency which could also have influenced the types and frequency of the grammatical errors students made. The findings of these studies were surprising in that low-proficiency students did not produce the highest number of errors in their written work. Middle-level students, instead, committed the highest number of the errors. Such findings indicate further study. The studies which address the proficiency levels of the students tend to provide a quantitative perspective of student errors. That is, the frequency of errors produced by each group of students, above all, appeared to be the main purpose of the studies whereas types of errors of students at each level were not addressed. A qualitative analysis is, therefore, needed to help reveal the nature of problematic errors. In particular, if specific errors are committed by both high- and low-proficiency students in their written work, it would indicate that some common problems occur across proficiency levels in students' learning processes and this highly deserves attention. In addition, most of the research instruments of the

studies were specially developed by researchers whereas only a few studies used the classroom context. The findings derived from a classroom-based study, in fact, could help language teachers directly perceive students' problems in the course and could provide useful implications for ways to cope with students' errors.

A study in a classroom context focusing on grammatical errors made by students with different language ability is, thus, needed. This leads to the purpose of the present study, which attempts to investigate the types of grammatical errors both students with high and low EEE scores usually produce and have in common in their FE I written assignments. The findings of this classroom-based study might help confirm the results of previous studies regarding the types and frequency of grammatical errors made by Thai students and could enable FE I teachers to provide appropriate teaching techniques or feedback according to students' language proficiency in order to help the students at any proficiency level learn from their errors.