

# An Error Analysis in Paragraph Writing in Academic Writing Class of Thai Undergraduate Students, Rajamangala University of Technology

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## Abstract

The research aimed to study the error analysis in paragraph writing in academic writing class of Thai undergraduate students by focusing on the frequency distribution of error types in the paragraph. The subject was 34 undergraduate students which are gathered by purposive selection. The finding indicated that the students made 10 mistakes in every type of the error which were verb tense, singular/plural form, preposition, subject/ verb agreement, run-on sentences, spelling, verb form, capitalization, sentence fragment, and punctuation/ comma splice. Moreover, the most frequent error was subject-verb agreement and the least frequent error was punctuation-comma splice.

**Keywords:** Error Analysis, Paragraph Writing, Subject-Verb Agreement

# การศึกษาวเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดจากการเขียนระดับย่อหน้า ในวิชาการเขียนเชิงวิชาการของนักศึกษาไทยระดับปริญญาตรี มหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีราชมงคล

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## บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดจากการเขียนระดับย่อหน้าในวิชาการเขียนเชิงวิชาการของนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี โดยมุ่งเน้นถึงการศึกษาค้นคว้าหาความถี่ของความผิดพลาดชนิดต่าง ๆ จากการเขียนระดับย่อหน้า โดยมีการเก็บข้อมูลจากนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรี จำนวน 34 คน โดยใช้วิธีสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจง ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ลักษณะข้อผิดพลาดในการเขียนระดับย่อหน้ามีจำนวน 10 รูปแบบ ได้แก่ กริยาแสดงกาลเวลา, รูปเอกพจน์/พหูพจน์ คำบุพบท การใช้คำกริยาให้ถูกต้องสอดคล้องกับประธาน ประโยคที่ใช้การเชื่อมไม่ถูกต้อง การสะกดคำ รูปคำกริยา การใช้อักษรพิมพ์ใหญ่ ความไม่สมบูรณ์ของประโยคและการใช้วรรคตอน และการเชื่อมโยงประโยคหลักสองประโยค อย่างไรก็ตาม ข้อผิดพลาดที่พบบ่อยมากที่สุดคือ การใช้คำกริยาให้ถูกต้องสอดคล้องกับประธาน และข้อผิดพลาดที่พบน้อยที่สุดคือ การใช้วรรคตอนและการเชื่อมโยงประโยคหลักสองประโยค

**คำสำคัญ:** การวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาด, การเขียนระดับย่อหน้า, นักศึกษาไทยระดับปริญญาตรี

## Introduction

English is not the most spoken language in the world, but it is the official language in many countries. English-speakers are likely to number in the billions. English is the mainstream language and it has become almost a necessity for people to speak English. Research from all over the world illustrates that global business communication is most often conducted in English. Many of the world's top companies produce documents in English. Besides, most of the content on the internet are written in English. Understanding English language allows us to access to a variety of information in this world. Consequently, English is an international language which opens the door to communicate with people from all over the world. Normally, billions of people speak and write English to at least in a basic level. Many people from different countries take English as the first language. Also, English is a widely spoken and written language. A bunch of information in this world is mostly written in English.

When learning English language, there are four skills that we need for completing the communication. Those skills are reading, listening, speaking, and writing. However, writing is one of the basic skills of English language. It is generally considered one of the most difficult skills for foreign language students (Padgate, 2008). Even native speakers feel difficulty in showing a good command of writing (Johnstone, Hollis, & D., 2002). In order to write effectively, we need productive skill to enhance writing since it requires not merely a graphic representation of speech, but also the step

of development and presentation of thoughts in terms of structure and grammar.

Hence, writing is somewhat the tough skill for students because writing ability needs practicing. It is generally studied through a set of instructional practices. Mastering writing skill is a complicated process as it involves a number of backward and forward movements between the ideas of the writer and the written text (Harris & Cuuningham, 1994). Moreover, writing is essential features in learning a language because it provides a very good means of fixing the vocabulary, spelling and sentence pattern (Patel & Jain, 2008). The ability to write something in a productive way is an indicator of success during the learning process (Geiser & Studley, 2001).

Accordingly, writing in English is a task that is often required in the university. Therefore, having good writing English skills are important for a positive passing of university assignments. However, writing is considered as the most difficult skill for language learners because they need to have a certain amount of L2 background knowledge about the rhetorical organizations, appropriate language use or specific lexicon with which they want to communicate to their readers (Tangpermpoon, 2008). Writing skill is still rated to be a hard task for most first and foreign language learners (Ingels, 2006). English writing is a crucial part of learning for Thai undergraduate students.

By the way, in Thailand, Thai undergraduate students come from the background which English is not the first language. Thus, writing has dramatically become a difficult task and skill to develop because writing is an accuracy activity as

well as the way of communication. Also, one can practice the skills in terms of using grammars, vocabularies and consolidate them in accurate way of academic writing. Through writing, students can express the individual view and involve processing, editing, and while writing, there is more time available to the students for thinking and accessing familiar language. Writing is a very important activity and set of skills to develop as part of your academic study. It is a complicated process that requires strict correctness of grammar and mechanics. While teaching writing skills, the major problems encountered by the teachers include students' lack of command over grammatical patterns and vocabulary, lack of interest, motivation and less time for writing practice (Almubark, 2016). Furthermore, effective writing requires a high degree of organization in the development of ideas and information, a high degree of accuracy so that there is no ambiguity of meaning; the use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis; and a careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and the eventual readers (Hedge, 1988)

Then, error analysis has become curious mission for the teachers teaching writing. To support, Robinson (1998) states that researchers and teachers of foreign language came to realize that the mistakes a learner made in the process of constructing a new system of language need to analyze carefully. In the light of this research, it will explore the error analysis in paragraph writing of Thai undergraduate students. The finding will shed the light on the task of the

English teacher in terms of planning the decent lessons or teaching material to improve student's writing skills and taking for granted as a mechanism for developing students writing skill.

## Objective

1. To analyze the types of errors in paragraph writing.
2. To analyze the frequency distribution of error types in Thai undergraduate students.

## Literature Reviews

This part states the explanation regarding the concepts which are used in this study which contains: the concepts of writing errors analysis, the previous studies regarding error analysis from abroad and the previous studies regarding error analysis in Thailand. The first part is the literature reviews in the field of error analysis.

### 1. The concepts of writing errors analysis

Error analysis theory is employed to challenge and criticize of the comparative analysis in the early 1970s. The error analysis is focused on second/foreign language acquisition. However, the traditional comparative analysis is the major obstacles to foreign language learning derive from the interference of mother tongue. The main objective is to have the effective teaching method by comparing systematically the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and English language. Besides, the interference of mother tongue, and many factors effect in the course of English writing too.

According to Corder (1974), error analysis has two objectives: one theoretical and another applied. The theoretical objective serves to “elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language.” and the applied object serves to enable the learner “to learn more efficiently by exploiting our knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes”. The investigation of errors can be at the same time diagnostic and prognostic. It is diagnostic because it can present us the learner’s state of the language (Corder, 1967) at a given point during the learning process and prognostic because it can inform course organizers to reorient language learning materials based on the learners’ current problems.

Likewise, Norish (1983) defines ‘an error’ as a systematic deviation that happens when a learner has not learnt something and consistently ‘get(s) it wrong’. Ellis (1985) states that, the most significant contribution of Error Analysis lies in its success in elevating the status of errors from undesirability to that of a guide. Also, errors are no longer seen as ‘unwanted forms’, but as evidence of the learner’s active contribution to second language acquisition.

However, (Khan, Riaz , & Khan, 2016) state that error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the error’s learners make in writing. Error analysis is the way to find the student’s errors which are not systematic in any simple way. Error analysis could be employed to study how students construct their own rules on the writing basis. Next, the review of error analysis is elucidated.

To consolidate three studies, while Corder (1974) focuses on given point during the learning process and prognostic because it can inform course organizers to reorient language learning materials based on the learners’ current problems but both Norish and Khan concentrate on error analysis by doing research on how the students construct the rules on their writings. Also. Error analysis is needed to find the student’s errors and fix it correctly.

Hence, findings from studies have shown that many factors based on the learners’ current problems, systematic deviation that happens when a learner has not learnt something and consistently, the student’s errors which are not systematic in simple way.

Next part, it will illustrate the studies which conduct from abroad to shed the light on what type of error the students have made.

2. The previous studies regarding error analysis from abroad

In the light of error analysis, (Yahya, Ishak, Zainal, & Faghat, 2012) investigates the error analysis procedures in two types of writing. They are the narrative and descriptive essays which students of the lower secondary schools are expected to write correctly and accurately. In this study, analyzing the type of errors and the frequency of occurrence would cast insights into reasons underlying the instances in which errors are committed. It is suggested that students must have adequate exposure and practice in the L2 to be able to internalize language rules and reduce the tendency of committing errors in their writings. It suggests that teachers must

therefore contribute effectively to ensure students' ability in using the L2, accurately and fluently in writing.

Next, Jung (2013) examines what type of errors students make more between form-based and meaning-based errors, as well as to investigate in which error categories Korean learners frequently make errors and mistakes. In three studies, 264 essays from 42 subjects who were at a Korean university were collected. The results indicated that form-based errors (91%) were generally reported much more than meaning-based errors (9%) by both the teacher's and students' review. These findings suggest that students will develop the quality as well as the accuracy of their writing when they recognize the most frequent error categories in their L2 writing.

Moreover, Khanom (2014) seeks the various types of errors apparent in higher secondary level students' writings due to which they fail to score satisfactorily in English examination. The aim of this research is to improve the writing skills of Bangladeshi secondary level learners through identification and analysis of the common errors their written corpus contains. Based on the findings, eight teachers of those 100 students were interviewed to seek the answers to the questions as to why learners make such errors. This research ends with some recommendations for effective teaching of the different aspects of writing.

Thus, findings from studies have shown that analyzing the type of errors and the frequency of occurrence would cast insights into reasons underlying the instances in which errors are committed.

Consequently, these studies show the most frequent error categories in L2 writing and the various types of errors.

Next part, it will clarify the studies which conduct in Thailand to shed the light on what type of error the students have made regarding Thai university students.

### **3. The previous studies regarding error analysis in Thailand**

(Preeyanuch, Varasarin, & Brudhiprabha, 2017) investigate grammatical error types and analyze sources of the errors in English writing. The collected data were from 34 English essays written by 34 Thai second year English majors in one university in Thailand. The data were analyzed based on the framework of grammatical error classification to find the error types, frequencies, percentages, and ranks. The findings reveal that the three most frequently found errors were singular/plural errors (30.43%), article errors (21.51%), and preposition errors (5.23%). The study suggests that the students might get more understanding of influential sources of errors made and the teachers and the syllabus designers could use the results as guidance to design and develop more suitable teaching material and techniques

Kongkaew (2018) examines errors of English writing made by Thai EFL authors on the Tourism Authority of Thailand Website and to suggest revisions to each error found. The gathered data consisted of 230 pieces of the information which contained 2,559 sentences. The data were analyzed by applying the framework of Dulay, Burt, & Krashen's surface structure taxonomy (1982). The results revealed that almost half of all the considered sentences (44.78%)

contained errors. Based on the framework, errors of omission were found to be the most frequent, followed by those of mis-formation, addition, and mis-ordering, respectively. Interestingly, the results also showed that the mechanical errors, not in the list of the framework, occurred with the highest frequency (Kongkaew, 2018)

Atthaporn et al. (2019) investigate types of errors in English abstract written by veterinary students in northeast Thailand and analyze frequency and percentage of writing errors in their English abstracts. In total, 26 English abstracts were included in the study. The results demonstrated that based on sentential level, errors included capital letter (88.0%), punctuation (47.0%), subject-verb agreement (46.0%), run-on (21.0%), fragment (19.0%), word order (9.0%), and tense (8.0%). Considering word level, errors included word choice (26.79%), preposition (8.78%), noun (7.16%), and article (2.31%). In summary, the most eminent errors in sentential level were capital letter, punctuation, and subject-verb agreement, meanwhile those in word level included word choice, preposition, and noun. The major reason of their writing errors was an insufficient linguistic knowledge, especially in syntax and semantics (Atthaporn, Sriboonruang, & Prasongsook, 2019)

In addition, findings from studies have shown by framework of grammatical error classification to find the error types, frequencies, percentages, and ranks. Then, based on the framework, errors of omission are found to be the most frequent errors.

According to the literature reviews, they show the significances of the way

towards English writing which are related to how the students make the errors. In terms of this study, this research will investigate the differences from those literature reviews by focusing on the study of academic writing errors of Thai undergraduate students.

## Methodology

*Design:* this study adopts a quantitative research method. Quantitative methods are research techniques that are used to gather information dealing with numbers and anything that is measurable also known as quantitative data (Nunan, 2001).

*Data:* this study attempts to seek the types of errors and the frequency of those errors which are made by the undergraduate students in sophomore's year of faculty of liberal arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon. These students speak in native Thai language with different GPA but from the same major (English for international communication). The students' age range is from 19 to 22 years.

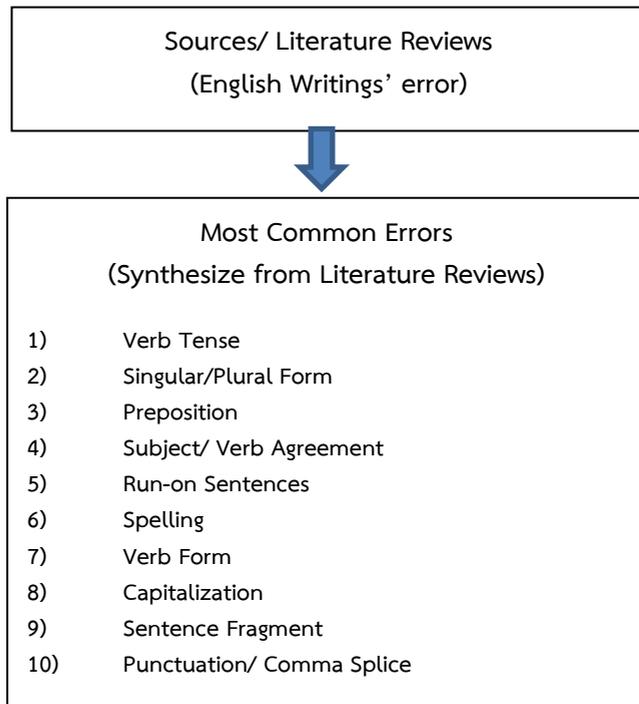
*Population:* the samples of this study are selected from the students in international communication major by selecting data from the students who have taken writing class which is collected from the assignments in class in the topic of "The place I want to go". The sample participates are selected by using a purposive sampling. The purposive sampling enables the researcher to 'handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment of their typically or possession of the characteristics being sought' (Cohen, 2004). In addition, the

written paragraphs are collected in order to analyze the frequency of errors.

Research procedures: all of 34 students are assigned to write one short

paragraph in the topic of ‘the place I want to go’ within the length of 2 hours with a minimum of 200 words.

## Data analysis



The data are collected and analyzed in following types of writing errors and percentage will be employed to illustrate the findings as followed:

- 1) Verb Tense
- 2) Singular/Plural Form
- 3) Preposition
- 4) Subject/ Verb Agreement
- 5) Run-on Sentences
- 6) Spelling
- 7) Verb Form
- 8) Capitalization
- 9) Sentence Fragment
- 10) Punctuation/ Comma Splice

To draw the relation between the errors the students make, these types of error are presented by consolidating the errors which are from the literature reviews and most common errors which show in the results.

## Pedagogical implications

1. To plan the decent lessons or teaching material to improve student's writing skill.
2. To take for granted as a mechanism for developing students writing skill.

## Findings

The results of the analysis of the errors has shown in table 1 to reveal the

types of errors in paragraph writing and the frequency distribution of error type in Thai undergraduate students.

**Table 1**

*Analysis of Thai undergraduate students' writing errors*

<i>Item</i>	<i>Type of Error</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>	<i>Rank</i>
1	Verb Tense	28	14.35	2
2	Singular/Plural Form	20	10.25	4
3	Preposition	15	7.69	8
4	Subject/ verb agreement	29	14.87	1
5	Run-on sentences	26	13.33	3
6	Spelling	18	9.23	6
7	Verb form	17	8.71	7
8	Capitalization	12	7.27	9
9	Sentence fragment	19	9.74	5
10	Punctuation / Comma Splice	11	5.64	10
<i>Total</i>		<i>195</i>	<i>100</i>	

From the results, there are 195 errors and all errors are classified by following errors: Firstly, the study finds 29 subject/ verb agreement errors which is the first rank of error. Then, subject-verb agreement is matching the number of both; singular subjects take singular verb forms, as plural subjects take plural verb forms. Also, subject-verb agreement might be tough because the irregularity of English plural subjects and there are many rules to follow.

Secondly, the study finds 28 verb tenses' error which is the second rank of error. In the light of using many different tenses within academic writing, there are some shifts between tenses. The students sometimes face some difficulties when they

mix verb tenses within a sentence or description.

Thirdly, the study finds 26 run-on sentences which occurs when two independent clauses are joined without any punctuation or conjunctions. The lecturer might fix run-on in many ways. For examples, the easiest way to fix a run-on sentence is to punctuate each independent clause with a period or fix a run-on using one or more commas and one of the following coordinating conjunctions: for and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

Fourthly, the study finds 20 the error of singular/plural form. Distinguishing between countable nouns (unit nouns) and uncountable nouns (mass nouns) is difficult. Thus, this type of error is the source of many mistakes for students.

Fifthly, the study finds 19 sentence fragments. If a sentence is lacking one or more of these three essential components, it is considered to be a sentence fragment. There are many ways to help student fixing them. For instances, add a subject or verb to complete the thought and join the dependent clause with an independent clause to complete the thought.

Sixthly, the study finds 18 error of spellings. Spelling error is when the students often spell a word wrongly. English spelling is irregular and even many native-speaker adults have difficulties with it. The lecturer should suggest the students to do proofread carefully for spelling errors.

Seventhly, the study finds 17 verb forms' error. There are six basic forms of verbs. These forms are as follows: base form, infinitive, past tense, past participle, present participle, gerund. So, the students always make an error regarding verb form in academic writing.

Eighthly, the study finds 15 prepositions' error. A preposition connects nouns and pronouns and serves to provide necessary details that tell the reader when, where, or how something occurred. Prepositions functions as cohesive devices, which enhance the sentence make senses. The students misuse a preposition in academic writing will make incomplete English writing.

Ninthly, the study finds 12 capitalizations' error. Capitalization is the writing of a word with its first letter in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase. Experienced writers are stingy with capital letter. On the contrary, the students do not capitalize will get the negative impact regarding academic writing.

Lastly, the study finds 11 errors of punctuation and comma spllices 'error. Comma splice refers to two independent clauses separated by a comma instead of a period or semicolon. Although, the finding states that punctuation and comma spllices are the least error of the student but the most difficult part of correcting comma spllices is actually identifying the error at the first place, whether the student can determine if the clauses can stand alone or if they can join together.

## Discussions

In order to find the answers which are set in the objective no.1 : this study reveals that the type of errors in paragraph writing is founded in every type of errors in a frequent way as shown in table 1.1 when students has made the errors in English paragraph writing. The finding indicates that the students make the errors from the generalization of rules.

However, in the light of objective no.2: this study reveals that the most frequent error is “subject/ verb agreement” while the least frequent error is “punctuation /comma splice”. The possible clarification for this finding is the effects of Thai language, In Thai language, verb does not change its form with the variable subject and a verb does not need to agree with its subject. Consequently, the students are not aware of changing the verb form in English. Interestingly, the second most frequent errors are ‘verb tense’. In English grammar, tense shift refers to the change from one verb tense to another (usually from past to present, or vice versa) within a sentence or paragraph. On the contrary, Thai learners

(students) sometimes face the obstacles and difficulties when they mix verb tenses within a sentence or description because there is no Thai grammar rules for verb tense. Moreover, the third most frequent errors are run-on sentences. A run-on error is a common writing mistake caused by using inappropriate punctuation at the end of a sentence. Most run-on errors in sentences indicates students putting a comma at the end of a sentence and then writing another closely related sentence. Students imagine that a comma is more appropriate than a full stop and period because their sentences are so closely related. In other words, they sense that a full stop and period is quite abrupt because they have not finished expressing their point of views.

## Conclusions

According to the findings, Thai undergraduate students at faculty of liberal arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon, should fix the errors in writing regarding subject/ verb agreement and verb tense. English writing teacher should be able to find the strategies in classroom to support and improve those errors. For example, the teacher should show the learner how to navigate a non-fiction book, dictionary or textbook for supporting their writing. Also, make sure any writing on the board is clear and set out helpfully, e.g. bullet points, full sentences, letters formed clearly to their students. Besides, provide plenty of visual support for writing, e.g. pictures to describe, storyboard to enhance teaching effectively. Furthermore, writing teacher should not blame the students for

their errors in paragraph writing and should encourage the students to accept their own mistakes and fix them. Students who have trouble understanding the rules for subject verb agreement are often confused about what to fix in their sentences. Errors in subject verb agreement are some of the most frequently made grammar mistakes. Thus, writing teacher should provide and design some materials for classroom activities to support the verb usage in a variety of contexts. To exemplify, teacher may employ the authentic documents which might include newspapers, magazines etc. By learning and practicing from those examples in terms of subject-verb agreement usage in regard to improve their writing skills, the teacher should let the students practice with sentences, practice with longer selections of text by reading through larger portions of news reports from newspaper and selecting the correct verb. Then, students become familiar with the way in which these words are generally used in daily life speech. English teacher should teach and recommend the elements in a sentence consistent, avoiding any unnecessary changes in tense, voice, mood, person, number, and discourse. Such unnecessary changes, or "shifts," may make reading difficult and obscure the sentence's meaning. Also, the English teacher should suggest the students to revise the paragraph to eliminate problematic verb tense shifts.

In brief, this study sheds the light on the importance of analysis of the error. As (Lee, 2004) clarifies that when correcting errors in student writing, teachers should abandon a get-the-job-done attitude. Instead,

they should consider the long-term significance of error correction, how to link it to pre-and post-writing grammar instruction, and how to help students take on greater responsibility for learning. Teachers can, of course, specify the errors

their students and should be aware that errors in academic writing course are unavoidable. The types of errors which are made by students may be varied according to the different of the student's skills.

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