

# **A Study of Grammatical and Lexical Errors in Descriptive Writing of First Year Arts Students at Silpakorn University**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated grammatical and lexical errors, particularly tense, fragment, and collocation errors, found in the descriptive writing of first year Arts students at Silpakorn University. The study examined the errors found in 180 final exam papers of the first semester for the academic year 2015. Tense errors were identified and classified into 13 types. However, the two most common error types found were the use of Past Simple instead of Present Simple (50.75%) and the use of Present Simple instead of Past Simple (22.39%). Based on the data set, there were 32 instances of fragment errors. From those, omission of the verb was the most common type (16 instances, 50.00%), and all of these were the omission of one particular verb, namely “to be”. This was followed closely by dependent-word fragments (13 instances, 40.63%). Finally, for collocations, a total of 65 occurrences of collocation errors were found in the paragraphs of 51 students. In those 65 occurrences, the use of wrong prepositions was the most common type of error with 34 occurrences (52.30%). The second most common type was the omission of the proper preposition with 18 occurrences (27.69%). Based on interviews to find the reasons behind these errors, it was found that wrong pronunciation, lack of consistency and paying too much attention to content were main causes of the tense errors. In addition, first language (L1) interference was the main cause of the fragment

errors and collocation errors were resulted from the overuse of a direct translation method.

***Keywords:*** Collocation Errors; Descriptive Writing; Error Analysis; Fragment Errors; Grammatical Errors

## **Introduction**

Error analysis is a systematic method to investigate the errors made by second and foreign language (L2) learners and it tries to answer these two questions: what was the error? and why was it made? This can lead to gaining a better understanding of the strategies and techniques used in the language acquisition process. It also plays an important role in writing classes because they are the best choice for error analysis. Especially for large classes, teachers can collect a lot of data to analyze. Writing is a production skill where students have time to arrange their output and can clearly show areas of incomplete knowledge. Therefore, error analysis helps English teachers understand the complicated process of language development as well as find the reasons why some learners fail to produce grammatically correct sentences and the ways to improve them. It is undeniable that a good grasp of the English language will be an advantage to job seekers, and a lack of English language skills may lead to failure in securing employment. Because of this, teachers and learners should pay attention to English language development, particularly with respect to writing skills. The reason to support this notion is that having sufficient writing skills is essential for work; from writing a resume or an application letter to writing notes, memos, emails or reports. There have been a number of research papers written to analyze errors found in Thai students' writing for pedagogical benefits. For example, Likitrattanaporn (2002) investigated the grammatical errors made by ninety third year students majoring in Accounting and Marketing at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Srinakarinwirot University. The results revealed that the percentage of general grammatical, morphological, syntactic, and semantic errors were 57%, 11%, 28% and 4% respectively. Jenwitheesuk (2009) studied the syntactic errors made by third year English for International Communication Program students at Rajamangala University of Technology Sriwijaya through six pieces of writing. The results revealed that the four highest frequency areas of writing errors found were determiners, subject-verb agreement, tenses and prepositions. Furthermore, Nonkukhetkhong (2013) investigated grammatical errors made by first year English major students at Udon Thani

Rajabhat University. The errors found were verbs, nouns, possessive case, articles, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, sentence structure, ordering, coordination/subordination, capitalization, spelling, punctuation, word selection, word formation, ambiguous communication and miscommunication.

In addition to the grammatical aspect, vocabulary studies or lexicology has become one of central parts of language studies. Collocation is a study of “the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text.” (Sinclair, 1991) Based on the Cambridge English Dictionary, collocations refer to how words go together or form fixed relationships. They may be strong or weak. Strong collocations are where the link between the two words is quite fixed and restricted. Weak collocations are where a word can collocate with many other words. Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1986) categorized English collocations into two classes: lexical collocations and grammatical collocations. Lexical collocations are made up only of verbs, adjectives, nouns, and adverbs in different possible combinations while grammatical collocations contain words such as verbs, adjectives or nouns combined with a preposition or a grammatical structure. Mallikamas and Pongpairroj (2005) suggested that possessing collocation knowledge enables learners to be more fluent and use the language naturally. Despite the importance of having a good understanding of collocation, it is quite difficult for second language learners to grasp because it is believed that “the realisation of collocation appropriateness is very often a matter of intuition” (Chi et al., 1994, p 157 qtd. in Supanfai. 1). Siyanova & Schmitt (2008) studied the correct use of adjective-noun collocations used by Russian students and native speakers. The results showed that Russian students were capable of using the correct collocations. However, this did not mean that their ability matched that of native speakers. In the context of Thailand, Supanfai (2009) investigated first-year university students’ writings to study the choice of collocates of verb-noun patterns in terms of their acceptability. The findings suggested that the students had enough ability to produce the correct use. However, L1 interference played a significant role in the students’ mistakes. Phoocharoensil (2011) examined Thai EFL learners’ errors in their acquisition of English collocations by studying the essays

written by two groups of participants differing in L2 proficiency. It was found that first language transfer seems to be the most outstanding strategy which they adopted. The L1-based errors deal with preposition addition, preposition omission, incorrect word choice, and collocate redundancy. In addition to L1 transfer, the learners also apply synonymy and overgeneralization, both of which contribute to collocational deviations in the target language.

However, the primary concern of this study is to explore the kinds and causes of grammatical and lexical errors made by a group of first year students at the Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University in their written work. Arts students are generally considered an interesting sample group because their main focus of study is involved with languages, and, as such, there is an expectation that they must have a working knowledge of English and they should graduate with good language abilities. However, from the direct teaching experience, writing meaningful and error-free English sentences is still a problem for them.

In terms of errors, special attention was paid to tenses, fragments and collocations, which have been found in many research papers as main problematic elements for Thai students. The results of previous research have concluded that using wrong verb tenses is caused by L1 interference, as there are grammatical differences between L1 and L2. According to Tawilapakul (2003), most research in second language acquisition carried out in Thailand conclude that language transfer is a major cause of difficulties in the acquisition of English by Thai students. Unlike English, the Thai language does not contain tense forms. Thai has neither verb inflections nor auxiliaries to signal time concepts. Instead, it is the combination of time phrase, time markers, aspect markers, and certain types of verbs that serve as a clue to signal either present, past or future time (Kanchanawan, 1978). For example, Bootchuy (2008) also explored ill-formed sentences from the transfer of Thai into academic English writing. The data were collected from a writing task and final term papers of forty-one first year graduate students studying in an English Master's program at a university in Bangkok. Similarly, Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) investigated first language

interference of Thai language in narration, description and comparison/contrast writing of forty second year English major students. The results revealed that first language interference errors fell into sixteen categories: verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, articles, prepositions, modals/auxiliaries, singular/plural forms, fragment, verb forms, pronouns, run-on sentences, infinitive/gerund, transitions, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure and comparison structure.

This study aims to identify students' tense usage, fragment and collocation problems to elucidate the reasons behind their poor performance and to examine the causes of these errors using direct data elicitation method, namely interviewing students. The findings should be beneficial to both teachers and learners because they can serve as guide to teachers on how to assist learners to become better writers.

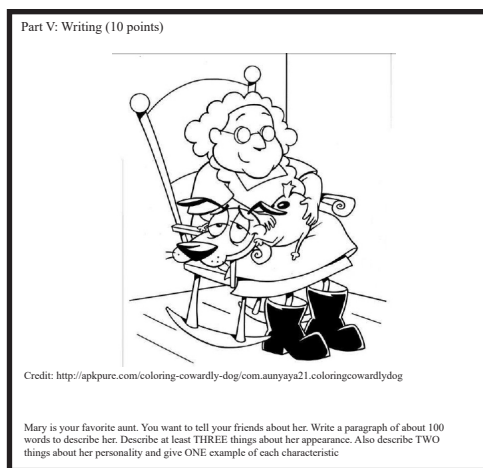
## **Objectives**

The aims of this research are to 1) find grammatical and lexical errors, in particular tense, fragment and collocation errors, found in the descriptive writing of first year Arts students at Silpakorn University and 2) to classify them into error-types and count the frequencies at which these errors occur and find the reasons behind the frequently found errors.

## **Methodology**

The Bachelor of Arts curriculum (2011), Silpakorn University, requires every first year student to study two compulsory courses, namely, 081102 English for Everyday Use in the first semester and 081103 English Skills Development in the second semester. The description of 081102 English for Everyday Use includes "The practice of four language skills and paragraph writing." Therefore, the first year Arts students were assigned to study how to write a descriptive paragraph to satisfy this requirement. This was included in the final exam. In this course, there were twenty-three groups: sixteen groups of Arts Program students and seven groups of Asian

Studies students. To create a corpus for this research, a sample of written work was collected from 180 first year Arts students' final exam papers. These students were from different groups with a variety of language abilities, and they wrote about the same topic and under the same examination conditions. In part V of the exam, they were assigned to write a paragraph of about 100 words to describe a person based on a given picture (see below). They were instructed to describe at least three things about her appearance and two things about her personality and give one example of each characteristic. This corpus can indicate their real language abilities because they had a limited amount of time in which to write, they could not use a dictionary or guidance materials, and it was impossible for them to copy other students' work. Errors were identified and encoded for an anonymity purpose, for example, the letters (A, B, C) stand for groups of students and the numbers (.1, .2, .3) stand for the order of students in each group and the frequencies were counted. Namely, the collected paragraphs were analyzed line by line to detect errors which were subsequently verified by two experts who are native speakers and have long experience in teaching English in Thailand. All collected errors were presented in a table and were verified by each of them to confirm that those were grammatically incorrect in the viewpoints of native speakers. Then the results of those two native speakers were compared. In the case of a disagreement, this problem would be solved by the third native speaker. The errors agreed by those two native speakers were considered to find the common characteristics and then categorized according to error-types. Then the frequency of errors was calculated and presented in percentage. The results would be presented in a tabular form. Finally, randomly, 15 students (5 students who made tense errors, 5 who made fragment errors and 5 who made the collocation errors) were interviewed individually by the researcher to provide further insight into the reasons why these particular errors were made. During the interview, a set of questions below was used as a guideline and impromptu questions were also applied.



### Interview Guide

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years old

Gender: M / F

Years learning English: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Based on your own opinion, can you tell me how your English writing skill is?
  2. What do you know about a descriptive paragraph?
  3. Do you know what tenses can be used in writing a descriptive paragraph?
  4. How do you think when you start writing in English?
  5. Do you translate from Thai when you write in English?
  6. Do you know what a collocation is? Can you give me some examples?
  7. What do you think about what you wrote in the exam? Is it right or wrong?
  8. If “wrong”, ask the student to explain how it is wrong?
- OR

If “right”, the teacher will correct and clarify his/her misunderstanding.

9. Why did you make a mistake?
10. Next time, how will you avoid making the same mistake?



## Findings

The results of this study are presented in the following tables:

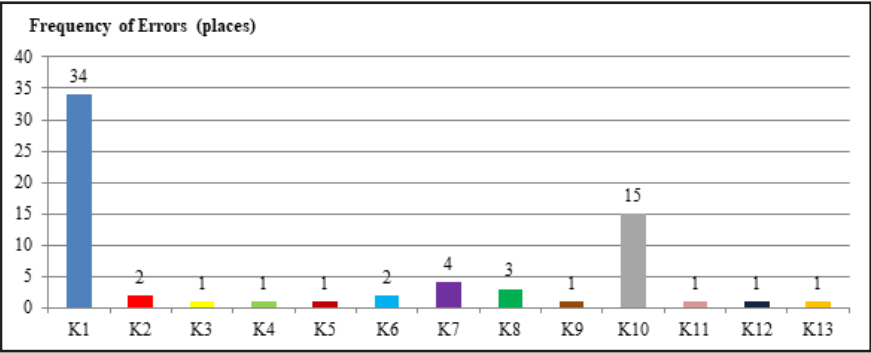
### 1. Tense errors

The results of the classification of tense errors shown in Table 1 reveal that the two most common types of tense errors were the use of Past Simple instead of Present Simple (50.75 %), and the use of Present Simple instead of Past Simple (22.39%).

**Table 1** Frequency and Kinds of Tense Errors Found in the Students' Written Work

No.	Kinds of Tense Errors	Frequency of Errors (places)	Frequency of Errors (%)
1	Using Past Simple instead of Present Simple (K1)	34	50.75
2	Using Present Perfect instead of Present Simple (K2)	2	2.99
3	Using <i>Used to</i> instead of Present Simple (K3)	1	1.49
4	Using Present Continuous instead of Present Simple (K4)	1	1.49
5	Using Past Continuous instead of Present Continuous (K5)	1	1.49
6	Using Present Simple instead of Present Perfect (K6)	2	2.99
7	Using Past Perfect instead of Present Perfect (K7)	4	5.97
8	Using Past Simple instead of Present Perfect (K8)	3	4.48
9	Using Present Perfect Continuous instead of Present Perfect Simple (K9)	1	1.49
10	Using Present Simple instead of Past Simple (K10)	15	22.39
11	Using Present Perfect instead of Past Simple (K11)	1	1.49
12	Using Past Perfect instead of Past Simple (K12)	1	1.49
13	Using Present Simple instead of Past Continuous (K13)	1	1.49
<b>Total</b>		<b>67</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Figure 1** Frequency and Kinds of Tense Errors Found in the Students’ Written Work



From the aforementioned results, the types of tense errors have been categorized and shown with some examples which were taken directly from students’ writing. They are as follows:

**1) The use of Past Simple instead of Present Simple**

This error type was found in 34 places. The features of this error are described as follows:

1.1) In zero conditional sentences to describe things that are generally true

In zero conditional sentences, the tense in both parts of the sentence is Present Simple. “If” can be replaced by “when”, because both express general truths. The meaning will be unchanged. This type of conditionals is used to make statements about the real world, often refers to general truths.

If clause (condition)	Main clause (result)
If + Present Simple	Present Simple
If this thing happens	that thing happens.

Example:

(A.4) When I did something wrong, I have to say sorry.

(A.5) She usually helps her friends whenever they asked for her helping.

(A.6) I think she is a very patient woman because she never gets angry when her husband shouted at her.

(D.2) She always sings a song when she was in the garden.

(D.5) She always makes me laugh when I was stress or unhappy.

(E.3) She always cooks for me and my sister when we went to her house.

1.2) When describing aspects of appearance which are facts

Example:

(A.2.1) She is a short and fat woman. She had gray curly hair.

(A.2.2) She had a pointed nose and her skin is pale.

(B.3) She has a good mood with her pet. She dressed neat dress and never forgot to wear her glasses.

1.3) In relative clauses which describe present habits

Example:

(A.7) Aunt Mary is a very helpful person. She always help everyone who needed her help.

(F.8) She always helps the one who got trouble from the lesson.

1.4) In *when*-clauses which are used with future time clauses

Example:

(A.9) When she saw abandon puppy, she will accept it and feed it.

(E.8) When her nieces and nephews visited her, she will create some exciting activities.

1.5) When describing characteristics which are facts

Example:

(B.5.2) My aunt 'Mary', she is optimistic person and thought of everything in an easy way.

(B.6.1) She is very kind with me and whoever that I invited.

(E.2) Every time I saw her she always smile.

(E.6) She gives me a warm smile and warm hug every time we met.

(F.7.1) She is very fat that why she sat on the chair every day.

1.6) In first conditional sentences to talk about a possible situation and its consequence

The first conditional is used to refer to the present or future where the situation is real. It refers to a possible condition and its probable result. In these sentences, the if clause is in the simple present, and the main clause is in the simple future.

If clause (condition)	Main clause (result)
If + Present Simple If this thing happens	Future Simple that thing will happen.

Example:

(F.1) If she's not around on a rocking chair with her dog, she would be in the kitchen.

(F.4) She won't blame you if you did something wrong.

(F.12.2) If I graduated from university, I will back home.

**2) The use of Present Simple instead of Past Simple**

This error type was found in 15 places. The features of this error are described as follows:

(2.1) For finished actions in the past

Example:

(A.10) This summer, my aunt invites my family to go to have dinner at her home.

(B.10) Once she found a dog that get injure form car crash. She brings it to her house and take care it.

(D.6) She owns a dog and name him "Dicky".

(D.7) For example, she has a dog which she keep it from local police station.

(F.10) For example, this dog, she pick it up from the park.

2.2) In *when*-clauses and main clauses to describe past events or fact

Example:

(B.2) When she was young, she never denied when her family or friends need a help.

(B.4) When she was young her hair is black.

(D.3) Her hair was black when she was younger but it turned to white when she get older.

(D.4) When I saw her first time She always has a smile and speak to me softly.

(F.2) She is good-looking woman when she was a teenage.

(F.12.1) When I was young, she was the one who always take care of me.

2.3) Using with Past Continuous to describe a past action in progress which was interrupted by another action (expressed in past simple)

Example:

(F.5.1) While the stranger was cooking my aunt talk about the drama which on air.

(F.6.2) She always give some food for my lovely friends while were doing homework with me.

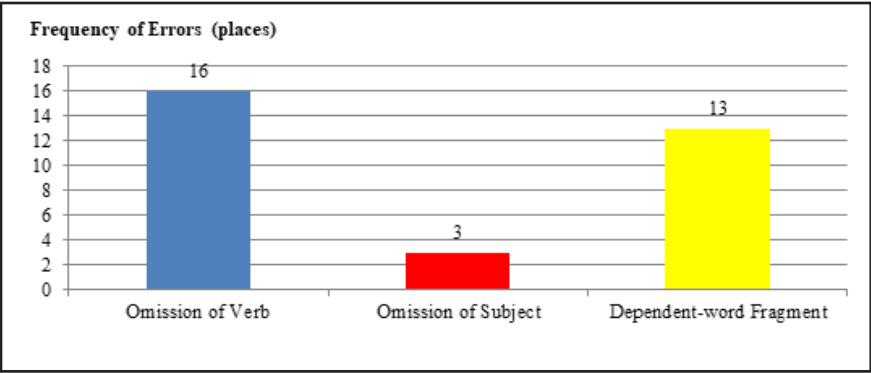
## **2. Fragment errors**

There are 32 occurrences of fragment errors. They can be classified into 3 main kinds. The results of the classification of fragment errors shown in Table 2 reveal that three common types of fragment errors were Omission of Verb (50.00%), Dependent-word Fragment (40.63%) and Omission of Subject (9.37%), respectively.

**Table 2** Frequency and Kinds of Fragment Errors Found in the Students’ Written Work

No.	Kinds of Fragment Errors	Frequency of Errors (places)	Frequency of Errors (%)
1	Omission of Verb	16	50.00
2	Omission of Subject	3	9.37
3	Dependent-word Fragment	13	40.63
Total		32	100

**Figure 2** Frequency and Kinds of Fragment Errors Found in the Students’ Written Work



From the aforementioned results, the kinds of fragment errors have been categorized as follows:

1) Omission of Verb

One of the most common fragment errors to detect is the omission of a verb. That is, the statement has a subject and compliment but lacks the main verb. A closer examination of the errors showed that exactly half of the fragment errors written by the students in this study were omission of verb fragments (16 instances out of 32) and involved the omission of one particular verb i.e. the verb “to be,” as seen in the following examples:

Any omission = (/)

(C.2) She (/) also a talkative person.

(C.3) She (/) never angry me when I do something wrong.

(C.5) That (/) why a plumpy woman like her is doing yoga.

(C.6) That (/) the reason why I love her.

(D.7) She (/) still good-looking for me.

(E.3) She (/) rarely angry.

(E.4) She (/) also friendly with everyone.

(E.6) I (/) very close to her.

## 2) Omission of Subject

There were only 3 instances where the subject of the statement is omitted as seen in the following examples:

(A.4) On her face (/) always has a smile.

(D.3) If (/) don't have anyone, she will talk with her dog.

(D.6) And she always give some foods for my lovely friends while (/) were doing homeworks with me.

## 3) Dependent-word Fragments

This type of error is the second most common error found in this study. Sentences with subordinating conjunctions, such as because, although and relative pronouns, are complex sentences and must have an independent clause to make it a complete sentence. 13 instances of this type of error were found. Here are a few examples:

(A.1) If you ask her to do some cookies. Sure she will do it.

(A.2) By the way because she is old. I normally she her sits on the chair.

(B.2) She isn't talkative but she is never lonely. Because she has a lovely dog, Pluto.

(C.7) When I visited her house. She looked very happy and she was a nice host.

## 3. Collocation errors

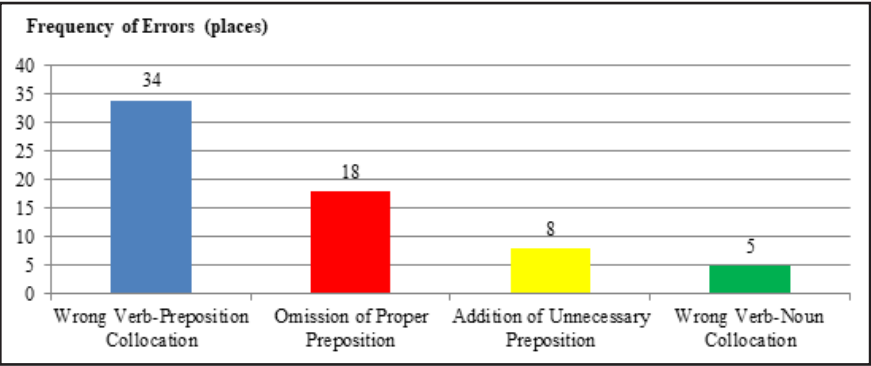
After a sentence by sentence analysis, from 180 students, a total of 65 occurrences of collocation errors were found in the paragraphs of 51 students as shown in the table below.

The results of the classification of collocation errors shown in Table 3 reveal that the four types of collocation errors found were Wrong Verb-Preposition Collocation (52.30%), Omission of Proper Preposition (27.69%), Addition of Unnecessary Preposition (12.31%) and Wrong Verb-Noun Collocation (7.69%), respectively.

**Table 3** Frequency and Kinds of Collocation Errors Found in the Students’ Written Work

No.	Kinds of Collocation Errors	Frequency of Errors (places)	Frequency of Errors (%)
1	Wrong Verb-Preposition Collocation	34	52.30
2	Omission of Proper Preposition	18	27.69
3	Addition of Unnecessary Preposition	8	12.31
4	Wrong Verb-Noun Collocation	5	7.69
Total		65	100.00

**Figure 3** Frequency and Kinds of Collocation Errors Found in the Students’ Written Work



From the aforementioned results, the types of collocation errors have been categorized as follows:

1) Wrong Verb-Preposition Collocation

In English, there is the way in which some words are often used together, or a particular combination of words used in this way, for example,



“agree with someone” is a verb-preposition collocation. This error type which was the misuse of the prepositions was found in 34 places and was shown in the following examples:

No.	Ref.	Errors found	Correction
1	A.1	She helps me <i>*in</i> everything.	She helps me <u>with</u> everything.
2	A.2	She bought a candy and cake <i>*to</i> me.	She bought a candy and cake <u>for</u> me.

#### 2) Omission of Proper Preposition in Verb-Preposition Collocation

This error type which refers to omitting prepositions in writing was found in 18 places and was shown in the following examples:

No.	Ref.	Errors found	Correction
1	B.1	I talk to her <i>*everything</i> .	I talk to her <u>about</u> everything.
2	B.2	She always take care <i>*them</i> .	She always take care <u>of</u> them.
3	B.3	I like to listen <i>*her</i> story.	I like to listen <u>to</u> her story.

#### 3) Addition of Unnecessary Preposition

This error type which means using prepositions when they are not needed was found in 8 places and was shown in the following examples:

No.	Ref.	Errors found	Correction
1	C.1	She walked around <i>*in</i> her house.	She walked around her house.
2	C.2	I will visit her twice a week with my father, my mother and my sister and I joined <i>*with</i> dinner.	I will visit her twice a week with my father, my mother and my sister and I joined dinner.
3	C.3	We go to visit her <i>*in</i> every Sunday.	We go to visit her every Sunday.

#### 4) Wrong Verb-Noun Collocation

This error type relating to using a verb and a noun which do not collocate with each other was found in 5 places and was shown in the following examples:

No.	Ref.	Errors found	Correct versions
1	D.1	She <u>*talks</u> a funny story <u>*with</u> everyone.	She <u>tells</u> a funny story to everyone.
2	D.2	She sometime(s) <u>*takes</u> her food <u>to</u> other people.	She sometimes <u>gives</u> her food to other people.
3	D.3	She always helps the animal that is <u>*fallen</u> in <u>*dangerous</u> .	She always helps an animal that <u>faces danger</u> .

### Discussion

This study aimed to investigate tense, fragment, and collocation errors found in the descriptive writing of first year Arts students at Silpakorn University. The study examined errors in a corpus of 180 final exam papers. Firstly, the tense errors were identified and classified into 13 types. The two most common error types found were the use of Past Simple instead of Present Simple (50.75%) and the use of Present Simple instead of Past Simple (22.39%). Secondly, the fragment errors were identified and classified into 3 types. From the data set, there were 32 instances of fragments. In those 32 instances, omission of the verb was the most common type (16 instances, 50%), and all of these were the omission of one particular verb, namely “to be”. This was followed closely by dependent-word fragments (13 instances, 40.63%). Finally, for the collocation errors, a total of 65 occurrences of collocation errors were found in the paragraphs of 51 students. In those 65 occurrences, the use of wrong prepositions was the most common type of error with 34 occurrences (52.30%). The second most common type was the omission of the proper preposition with 18 occurrences (27.69%). The causes or reasons behind these kinds of errors were mainly based on a series of interviews and were reported as follows.

#### 1. Tense Errors

The results showed that there were two causes of the errors. Firstly, based on the interview, wrong pronunciation led to writing errors, for example, when describing factual appearance, which should be in the form of Present Simple, they pronounced the word “has” as “had”, so they wrote “*She had gray curly hair.*” Secondly, in the case of using Present Simple

instead of Past Simple, lack of consistency and paying too much attention to content are the main causes of the errors found. The students seemed to understand that the events being described happened in the past and must be written in the past tense, so one verb, especially, the first verb in the sentence, was expressed in the past tense. However, the students were not consistent with the usage of the past tense, so the second verb or other verbs in the same sentence were expressed in the present tense. For example, (B.2) *When she was young, she never denied when her family or friends need a help*. Some students admitted that they seemed to concentrate more on the content than on the appropriate language that they should use to convey the message. This error was also due to the time constraints of the examination.

## 2. Fragment Errors

Based on the students' interviews, it revealed that a small group of learners still have problems constructing sentences with the structure "v. to be + adjective". These students tend to apply the equivalent Thai sentence structure to express their ideas as a consequence of first language (L1) interference. In Thai, a subject can be followed by an adjective and there is no need for "v. to be." In addition, some of the adjectives in English (e.g. angry) are described as 'verb' in Thai, so some students may think that 'angry' is a verb and thus does not need any 'verb to be'. This problem should, therefore, be solved in an appropriate way to enhance students' writing accuracy.

### 2.1 Omission of Verb

From the examples given earlier, it can be seen that students omitted the verb in sentences that follow the "v. to be + adjective" structure. The interview data suggested that this was caused by students applying the equivalent Thai sentence structure which is "Subject + adjective" to express this idea as seen in the following example:

**Thai:** เธอสวย

**Literal Translation to English:** She beautiful / attractive.

**Correct Translation:** She is beautiful / attractive.

In addition, the pronunciation of a phrase was a factor. Because Thais are not accustomed to pronouncing words ending with more than one consonant or words ending in the letter “S”, the phrase “that’s why” will be pronounced as “that why” and this, as a result, interferes when writing this phrase.

## 2.2 Omission of Subject

One reason for the omission of the subject is the misunderstanding that the noun following a preposition is the subject as seen in the example below. This comes from the literal translation from Thai to English.

**Thai:** บนหน้าเธอมีรอยยิ้มเสมอ

**Literal Translation:** On her face always has a smile.

**Correct Translation:** She always has a smile on her face.

/ On her face she always has a smile.

This is confirmed by a student who was interviewed. She was able to identify the error in her writing and explained that she translated the statement word for word and, due to time constraints, she did not have enough time to proofread her paragraph.

## 2.3 Dependent-word Fragment

This type of error stems from L1 interference, which is the same as the two types of fragment errors mentioned earlier. In this case, it is the written aspect of the Thai language. The Thai language rarely uses punctuation, and periods or full-stops are not used in ending a complete thought or sentence. The students, therefore, assume that a dependent clause is a sentence and use a period to end the statement.

## 3 Collocation Errors

### 3.1 Wrong Verb-Preposition Collocation

On closer examination, it was revealed that this kind of error was made because the students used the direct translation method when they wrote these sentences. For example, the student thought in Thai “เธอช่วยฉันในทุกๆเรื่อง” Thus, the proper preposition should be “in” and s/he wrote *She helps*

me \*in everything. Likewise, the students also adopted the same method when they produced the sentences, and translated from “เธอซื้อลูกอมและเค้กให้แก่นฉัน” into “*She bought a candy and cake to me.*” This student chose to use “to” because in Thai, it is thought of the word “ให้กับ ให้แก่”, while the acceptable collocational preposition is “for”.

### 3.2 Omission of Proper Preposition

An explanation for this kind of collocation error is similar to the first group. Since it seems that Thai students tend to translate sentences they wanted to produce from their mother tongue into the target language, in this case English. That is the reason why they omitted the necessary preposition in these sentences. For example, *I talk to her everything*, the student wanted to say “ฉันคุยกับเธอทุก ๆ เรื่อง” in Thai, where the indirect object does not need any preposition to precede it, unlike in English, where the preposition “about” is needed.

The same phenomena reoccurred, for instance, “เธอมักจะดูแลพวกมันเสมอ ๆ: *She always take care them.*” and “ฉันชอบฟังเรื่องของเธอ: *I like to listen her story.*” It is not necessary to use a preposition in Thai so the students thought that the same rules apply in English. Thus, they did not add “of” and “to” in these sentences respectively.

### 3.3 Addition of Unnecessary Preposition

This kind of error also came from the interference of the students’ mother tongue and their perception that they can use a word by word translation approach to write a composition. For example, the student wanted to say that *she walked around her house* but she added the preposition ‘in’, as Thais would express this idea as “เธอเดินรอบ ๆ ภายในบ้านของเธอ”. Likewise, in the sentence “*I will visit her twice a week with my father, my mother and my sister and I joined with dinner.*”, the Thai equivalent is “ฉันไปเยี่ยมเธอสัปดาห์ละสองครั้ง คุณพ่อ คุณแม่ น้องสาวและฉันจะร่วมรับประทานอาหารกับเธอ” as the preposition “with” is used in the Thai sentence, the student automatically thought that it is also needed in English.

### 3.4 Wrong Verb-Noun Collocation

All errors in this group are rather difficult to understand, since they are not just wrong in terms of prepositions but also the verb and noun pattern. Some of them may be acceptable but not appropriate in the given context. For example, “*She \*talks a funny story \*with everyone.*”, “*She sometime (s) \*takes her food to other people.*” and “*She always helps the animal that is \*fallen in \*dangerous.*” In fact, they should be “*She tells a funny story to everyone.*”, “*She sometimes gives her food to other people.*” and “*She always helps an animal that faces danger.*” respectively. However, the students who wrote these sentences clearly used a literal translation approach, because if one were Thai, one might think that these sentences can be understood. Unfortunately, native speakers might not be able to guess what the writer is intending to say.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

### Pedagogical Implications

Whether it is their first language or a foreign language, one thing that can be found and is common to all language learners, is that errors are generally made during the acquisition process. It cannot be denied that errors are seen as a natural phenomenon that occur, as learning a first or second language takes place before correct grammar rules are completely internalized (Hourani, 2008). According to Gass and Selinker (1994), errors are “red flags”, which means that they are warning signals that provide evidence of the learner’s knowledge of the L2. Moreover, Corder (1967) cited in Hourani (2008) indicated that errors are significant in three different ways. First to the teachers, in that they tell them how far towards the goal the learners have advanced, and, consequently, what remains for them to learn. Second, they provide evidence to the researchers of how language is learnt or acquired, and what strategies or procedures the learners are employing in their discovery of the language. Thirdly, they are important for the learners themselves, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learners use in order to learn. To improve their writing skills,

learners should not only learn how to write, but they should be able to know their weak points, so error analysis is needed and this study can contribute to teaching writing skills. For example, some teachers may create language focus activities as part of the communicative or task-based approach, or where lexical errors, especially collocations are concerned, more emphasis on exposure to authentic language may be needed, for instance, using authentic texts or language corpora in raising awareness of typical collocations.

### **Limitations of the study**

Firstly, as mentioned above, to create a corpus of the language, a sample of written work was collected from 180 first year Arts students' final exam papers. There were obviously time constraints while writing which would be a factor leading to errors being made in addition to linguistic ability. The format of the examination was also another weakness. As English for Everyday Use is a fundamental subject covering all basic skills of the language, the examination did not focus solely on writing. The students might not have had enough time to complete and proofread the writing part or they may have concentrated more on the other parts of the exam, as only 10 points (out of 120) were allocated for the writing part. Secondly, the data set was rather small compared to other previous studies. Namely, there were twenty-three groups of students registered on the course, but only six groups were chosen to be a sample group in this study.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Regarding the limitations mentioned above, my recommendation is that the sample size should be larger, because, when conducting research, quality sampling may be characterized by the number and selection of subjects. A large sample size is more representative of the population and increases credibility. Furthermore, it is recommended to analyze other types of paragraphs, so as to have a larger variety of examples. Lastly, longitudinal studies, in which researchers conduct several studies of the same participants

over a period of time, is also recommended. The same groups of students may be studied again when they are in their second year, to investigate developments or changes in their writing ability.

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