

EXPLORING PRONOUN USAGE ERRORS IN ENGLISH WRITING: A CASE STUDY OF THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the errors in the use of personal pronouns in English writing by third and fourth- year students from the Faculty of Engineering, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin. The study focuses on 85 students who registered for the English Writing course in the second semester of the 2022 academic year. The objectives of the research are to identify the errors in pronoun usage among the students and provide recommendations for improving their English writing skills based on grammatical principles. The research findings reveal three main types of errors. The most common type of error is "misformation" which refers to cases when students construct incorrect pronoun patterns. This type of error accounts for 66.66% of the total errors and ranks first among all types. The second most prevalent error is "omission," which involves instances in which students skip or omit pronouns. This type of error occurs 25% of the errors and ranks second in frequency. The third type of error is "addition," which occurs when students add unnecessary pronouns. This type of error represents 6.94% of the errors and ranks third. The analysis of pronoun errors in the English writing of Thai students provides valuable insights into common issues in pronoun usage and offers suggestions for enhancing their writing skills.

Keywords: Pronoun, English Writing, Grammar, Error Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective writing involves connecting one's thoughts into coherent sentences, ensuring that readers comprehend and grasp the conveyed message. Proper referencing is also crucial in language usage, as Kujiper et al. (2015) emphasized, highlighting its significant role in language communication. In the context of pronoun usage, errors can arise, particularly for Thai learners of English, due to differences in pronoun systems between the two languages.

English language learners often grapple with the complexity of this activity, translating thoughts from their native language into English. This process can lead to errors including pronoun usage errors, in particular, constitute a substantial portion of language mistakes, accounting for 1 in 5 common errors of Thai learners (Promsupa et al., 2017). Despite years of English language education in Thailand, students, including those at the undergraduate level, still make errors in sentence-level or paragraph-level English writing.

This research investigates pronoun usage errors in the English writing of third and fourth-year students at Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin. By identifying and analyzing these errors, the study aims to:

(1) provide insights into the specific pronoun mistakes made by university students (2) offer recommendations for improving English writing skills through targeted language learning

strategies and (3) contribute to a better understanding of pronoun-related challenges faced by Thai learners of English. By examining these specific aspects, the study seeks to provide valuable insights for both students and educators, ultimately guiding Thai learners toward more accurate and confident English writing.

2. ERROR ANALYSIS

2.1. Definitions of Error Analysis

There are numerous theories and research methods concerning second language acquisition or learning foreign languages, as well as studies of errors in transferring the structure of the native language into the second language. Studying learners' abilities can lead to more successful second language learning processes. Through studying and analyzing errors, one can identify issues in second language learning or the target language of the learners.

Definitions and analyses of errors include:

According to Dulay et al. (1982), error analysis facilitates language learning by helping to understand undesirable forms and pointing students in the direction of desired forms during language instruction.

Corder (1975) uses "error" to refer to what learners produce that deviates from the norms of the target language. Carter (1993) specifies errors as learners' misconceptions about the second language.

Norich (1987) describes errors as systematic deviations when learners have not previously learned a particular content and misunderstand it.

Errors are defined by Richards & Schmidt (2002) as language use that deviates from the language owner's norms, indicating either mistakes or incomplete learning. They categorize errors into two types: interlingua errors, which transfer from the learner's native language, and intralingua errors, which result from excessive application of target language criteria.

The aforementioned definitions and analyses of errors are significant for second language learners as they shed light on the process of second language acquisition.

2.2. Types of Errors in English Writing

Writing is a complex process even in one's native language as it requires various elements such as content, organization of ideas, and language proficiency. Writing in English poses challenges for English language learners due to insufficient grammar knowledge (Cheuchaichon, 2014), a significant issue in achieving proficiency.

Grammatical errors made by English language learners differ from those made by native speakers and often stem from comparing their original language with English, lacking proficiency in that aspect (Brown, 1987). Moreover, learners may fail to recognize these errors, reflecting their inability to discern correctness. Studying errors is crucial as it reveals learners' misunderstandings. In English writing, errors can be broadly categorized as follows:

2.2.1. Interlanguage Errors: These errors stem from the interference of the learner's original language, transferring their prior language knowledge to the target language. This type of error is particularly significant in second- language learners.

2.2.2. Intralingua Errors: These errors can occur regardless of learners' prior language backgrounds. They reflect learners' abilities at each stage and can explain general characteristics of language learning. These errors appear within the structure of English itself and the learners' language learning processes or techniques.

2.3 Error Analysis in Second Language Learning

The concept of error analysis has been extensively explored in theories and research methods related to second language learning and foreign language acquisition. Numerous studies have investigated language learners' mistakes in translating structures from their native language to a target language, emphasizing the impact of error analysis on the success of second language learning. Dulay et al. (1982) advocate that error analysis serves as a constructive approach to language learning, elevating errors from unwanted forms into stepping stones guiding language instruction and learning. Carter (1993) identifies errors as learners' incorrect interpretations of the second language, while Norich (1987) characterizes errors as systematic deviations resulting from learners' lack of exposure to specific language aspects. Richards & Schmidt (2002) interpret errors as language use in a manner inconsistent with the target language's native norms, encompassing both incomplete learning and two distinct error categories: interlingua errors, originating from the transfer of the learner's native language, and intralingua errors, reflecting excessive reliance on self-imposed target language criteria. Numerous researchers have delved into the analysis of errors in various aspects of the English language to investigate the proficiency of English language learners. They have aimed to identify the best methods to enhance English language teaching, both as a second language and a foreign language. This literature review synthesizes key findings from several studies spanning multiple years.

Duskova (1969) analyzed errors in English writing among Czech students, concluding that interference from their first language was a major cause of errors, ranging from sequencing words to structural mistakes. Notably, errors related to the absence of equivalents in the Czech language, such as the misuse of articles, were prevalent.

Buteau (1970) studied errors made by English speakers taking French grammar exams, revealing that many errors stemmed from the influence of English, with difficulties in using appropriate tenses contributing significantly.

Kemthong's (1981) research focused on error analysis among university students, revealing that vocabulary and punctuation errors were the most common, indicating challenges in word choice and sentence structure.

Chang-Whe (1997) conducted an analysis and applied it to Chinese language teaching, highlighting 506 errors across eight categories. This study showcased the difficulties Chinese-speaking students faced in effectively using English, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and addressing their most significant challenges.

Deveau (1998) analyzed errors made by Spanish-speaking students in English writing, categorizing errors into lexical and grammatical, and providing insights into possible causes and sources of errors.

Chownahe (2000) investigated errors in English writing among sixth-grade students, identifying common errors such as translation mistakes and issues with verb tenses, determiners, punctuation, and capitalization.

Khaourai (2002) explored errors in independent and model-based writing among English major students, identifying frequent errors in grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. The study emphasized the impact of first language influence and misguided concepts.

Sattayatham & Honsa (2007) focused on grammatical errors in medical students' writing, demonstrating that issues with word choice, articles, punctuation, and spelling were prevalent.

Nonkukhetkhong (2013) studied grammar errors in first-year English major students, finding issues with verbs, nouns, possessive forms, articles, adjectives, sentence structure, word order, conjunctions, capitalization, spelling, and punctuation.

Soumita Sarkar & Bharti Girish Dave (2022) examined 70 writing assignment scripts of second and third-year students pursuing UG Courses in Engineering, Law, Journalism, and Biotechnology. The study aims to identify and categorize errors in the written texts of ESL students to understand the sources of errors and present potential solutions.

In conclusion, error analysis serves as a valuable tool for understanding the challenges language learners face. It not only highlights the impact of the first language on second language acquisition but also identifies specific areas where learners struggle the most. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is crucial for effective language learning and teaching.

3. METHOD

This research study employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing a descriptive approach to explore the errors encountered in the utilization of personal pronouns by Thai learners of English. The investigation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the types, frequencies, and patterns of errors in the use of personal pronouns by this specific group of learners. The study is conducted with a sample comprising 85 engineering students enrolled at Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin (RMUTR) located in Salaya, Thailand. The study aims to provide insight into the particular difficulties and language requirements faced by students in the engineering field by concentrating on them. Selecting students from a particular university also makes it easier to identify any institutional or contextual factors that might affect the frequency of mistakes made when using personal pronouns.

3.1. Population and Sample

The population of this study was all engineering students who were enrolled in the English writing course at RMUTR, Salaya, during the second semester of the 2022 academic year. A sample of 85 students was selected using a stratified random sampling method. The sample was stratified by year level and major. The sample included 28 third-year students majoring in control engineering, 24 fourth-year students majoring in control engineering, and 33 third-year students majoring in computer engineering.

3.2. Material

3.2.1. Thai Students' Language Data: The data for this study were collected from the students' writing assignments. The students were asked to write one paragraph describing a person and one paragraph describing an object. The writing assignments were collected and transcribed.

3.2.2. Error Patterns; In this study, to categorize the errors made by students in writing, the researcher utilized Dulay's theory (Dulay, Burt, and Kashen, 1982). The theory identifies four primary ways in which learners modify the target language patterns.

3.2.2.1. Omission: According to Corder (1981), omission refers to errors involving the omission of certain elements that should be present. Errors resulting from omission occur when learners omit elements that should appear in a sentence. For example, "I like because she is kind" illustrates a pronoun omission. The correct sentence should be "I like her because she is kind."

3.2.2.2. Addition: Addition involves the inclusion of elements that should not appear in a correct sentence. Errors in addition often occur in the later stages of language learning when learners, having acquired some language rules, make mistakes by carelessly applying them. For example, the sentence "The big, giant, huge elephant" is redundant. The correct sentence is "The big elephant."

3.2.2.3. Misformation: Misformation refers to errors resulting from the use of incorrect word forms or structures, specific to learning errors. For example, the sentence "He rided his motorcycle" uses the incorrect past tense form of the verb "ride." The correct sentence is "He rode his motorcycle."

3.2.2.4. Misordering: Misordering involves misplacement of grammatical units or groups of grammar, such as "He is all the time late." The correct form should be "He is late all the time."

3.3. Data processing

The researcher processed the data from the documents to identify errors made by the students in the use of personal pronouns in descriptive paragraphs. The errors were classified, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Error Patterns

Symbols	Error Patterns	Examples
om	omission	X I like because she is kind. √ I like her because she is kind.
ad	addition	X Somsak he wants to be an engineer. √ He wants to be an engineer. / Somsak wants to be an engineer.
mf	misformation	X Her likes to watch movies. √ She likes to watch movies.
mo	misordering	X I give to them some paper. √ I give some paper to them.

In analyzing students' errors in using pronouns in their paragraph writing, the researcher conducted an analysis to identify occurrences of errors. The researcher documented the types of pronoun errors found in sentences or phrases each time they occurred. This information was then recorded in Table 1, categorizing the types of pronoun errors. Subsequently, a detailed analysis was performed by calculating the frequency of each type of pronoun error as a percentage of the total pronoun errors encountered.

4. RESULT

The results were categorized and presented in Table 2:

Error Patterns	Percentage	Rank
omission	25	2
addition	6.94	3
misformation	66.66	1
misordering	0	4

4.1. Misformation Errors (66.66%)

This category has the highest frequency of errors 66.66%. Misformation errors involve creating incorrect pronoun patterns.

Example 1: "I see that she has long experience in transportation. So, I invite you to attend this meeting." Example 2: "He break lasts for about one hour."

These errors are subdivided into two subtypes:

4.1.1. Inconsistent Pronoun Usage: In Example 1, the pronoun "you" is used instead of "her" in the second sentence.

4.1.2. Incorrect Pronoun Form: In Example 2, "He" is used when a possessive adjective "his" is required. Misformation errors involve creating inaccurate pronoun patterns. The students frequently exhibited inconsistencies in pronoun usage and incorrectly formed pronouns.

4.2. Omission Errors (25%)

This category ranks second, accounting for 25% of errors. Example 3: "After that go to the pastry shop."

Example 4: "I like to buy and eat while watching series."

In Example 3, a pronoun is omitted in the subject position. In Example 4, a pronoun is omitted in the object position. Students tended to omit pronouns in both subject and object positions, leading to incomplete or unclear sentences.

4.3. Addition Errors (6.94%)

This category ranks third with 5 instances, accounting for 6.94% of errors.

Example 5: "Thank you to my parents and my brother for always taking care and supporting me."

In this example, the pronoun "you" is added after the verb "thank" when it is unnecessary. These errors occurred when students added unnecessary pronouns, particularly after verbs, resulting in redundancy.

4.4. Misordering Errors (0%)

This category has no instances of errors, resulting in 0% frequency. It ranks fourth.

The analysis of pronoun usage errors in the writing of Thai students revealed insightful patterns and trends. The study found that the most common error is Misformation, accounting for

66.66% of errors. Notably, misordering errors were not observed, indicating a strong understanding of pronoun placement in sentences by the students.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Effective pronoun usage is essential for clear and coherent communication in English. However, mastering pronouns can be challenging for non-native speakers, and Thai students learning English are no exception. The analysis of pronoun usage errors among Thai students in the context of English writing offers meaningful insights into both the strengths and areas for improvement in their language proficiency. The results revealed distinct patterns across four categories of errors: misformation, omission, addition, and misordering.

5.1. Common Pronoun Challenges:

The frequency of misformation errors indicates that students may have difficulty developing proper pronoun patterns. There is a need to pay close attention to pronoun structures and rules because inconsistent pronoun usage and the use of incorrect forms are concerning.

5.2. Understanding Pronoun Placement

There are no misplacement errors, which suggests that the understanding of pronoun placement within sentences is commendable. This implies that students have a firm understanding of pronoun-related grammatical structures, which lowers errors in sentence structure.

5.3. Areas for Improvement

Omission errors, while not as frequent as misformation, still represent a significant portion. It is important to remind students to focus on whole sentences and make sure that subject and object pronouns are used correctly.

5.4. Redundancy and Addition

The addition errors highlight a tendency among students to add unnecessary pronouns. This could be connected to a need for emphasis or clarity, suggesting that advice on succinct and powerful expression is needed.

The findings emphasize the necessity of targeted teaching strategies that particularly address the challenges Thai students face when utilizing pronouns. These could be focused exercises that stress the development of proper pronoun patterns, stress the value of complete sentences, and offer guidance on how to achieve clarity without adding extraneous details. By tailoring instructional approaches to target the identified challenges, educators can contribute significantly to the enhancement of students' proficiency in using pronouns effectively.

As students progress in their English language journey, continuous reinforcement of correct pronoun usage, coupled with an understanding of the subtleties involved, will enable them to communicate more fluently and precisely in written English. The absence of misordering errors indicates a strong foundation that can be further built upon through targeted interventions and ongoing language development initiatives.

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