

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

At the present time, English is the most widely used language for communication in the world. It has become the universal language (Harmer. 2001). People around the world, in over sixty countries, use it as an official language. Crystal (1997) states that 85% of the world film market is in English, and about 90% of published articles are written in English. Further, it is used in global communications, international business, sciences and technology, and social and cultural affairs. Most academic materials (80-90%) are written in English. Also, around 80% of information on the internet is written in the using English language (McCrum, Cran, & MacNeil. 1992). Moreover, it is expected that English language will be continuously increasing its significance as an international language all through the twentieth century and into the next century (Yano. 2001).

The above facts demonstrate the unquestionable importance of English as one of the most widespread languages in the world. The increasing use of English as an international language affects the Thai education system (Worasuk. 2007).

Contemporary technological and educational information all over the world, which is stored in electronic retrieval system, is in English (Crystal. 1997). Therefore, it is now necessary that Thai students have to have a good command in the basic skills of English, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing in order to succeed professionally in the current modern and civilized world. In addition, English is

crucial for students when learning and communicating with others in the university and in the wider world, and it is fundamental to learning in all subjects. Students must develop their English language abilities in all four skills in order to express themselves creatively and imaginatively and to communicate with others confidently and effectively. Nevertheless, the teaching of English in the country has faced a lot of problems. For instance, although after having studied English for several years, most students still cannot use it efficiently in real-life situations. The present teaching techniques have been substantially altered from the past; that is, the purpose has shifted from focusing on literature toward practical use (Khaourai. 2002). Therefore, four skills are highlighted: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with writing as the most advanced skill among the four.

It is commonly agreed that writing skills are very difficult to acquire. Writing is a complicated skill, and it is very difficult to be a good writer even for a native speaker (Nunan. 1999 : 271). According to Palmer (1965), the practice of writing is not only complex but also time consuming. Furthermore, the other three skills are complementary to writing. Harris (cited in Aungwatanakul. 1993 : 42) suggests that the basic components of writing consist of three parts. They are : 1) content-information as well as opinion/thought expressed ; 2) form-arrangement and smoothness ; and 3) grammar-structure and word selection. In addition, writing has a close link to the thinking process. Writers have to think carefully about what they want to write, for whom they are writing, and what objective the writing has, so that they can correctly and appropriately communicate their thoughts or ideas to the readers. Information must be well gathered and discreetly selected, and the ideas will be converted into the letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs. Also, spelling,

punctuation, grammar, and syntax are the significant rules with which to apply.

Therefore, good writing requires not only correctness in grammar, but also art in the choice of words.

Writing in English by Thai students has become increasingly important in school education. Students are required to complete a variety of writing tasks and assignments, such as, short stories, reports, compositions, and description writing projects. Writing tasks are concerned with reordering words and sentences, sentence completion, and error correction (Kongpetch. 2006).

According to He (2002), students commit errors largely because their language proficiency is not good enough for them to use this language at will. In order to fill the gap between inadequate proficiency and the tough requirements of a language task, students draw on different strategies, such as ignorance and avoidance, mother tongue transference, incomplete rule application, and overgeneralization in their interlanguage forms, all of which cause different types of errors. In foreign language learning, error correction has become one of the most important teaching processes (Fang. 2007). When teachers require students to write a composition or an essay, it is important to point out the errors and mistakes they have committed after the compositions have been checked. By doing this, students can correct themselves and improve their language learning ability.

Corder (1967), the "Father" of error analysis, states that error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the target language (TL) and that TL itself. It is a useful approach theoretically and practically. It enables the teacher to understand students' learning process of the second language so that the result will be

used to correct errors and improve skills of the students (Corder. 1981). It is beneficial not only to help students acquire better skills but also for teachers to improve their teaching styles and materials. This could contribute to a better quality of teaching and higher possibility of success. Moreover, error analysis can be used as a guideline for a curriculum and material planning as well.

As an English teacher, the researcher is well aware of the fact that Thai speaking students at the university level commit a lot of errors in essay writing. These students have been studying English for their whole lives and still, their errors are numerous. Even students of Buriram Rajabhat University (BRU) studying English as a foreign language (EFL), most of them tend to communicate to each other using their native tongue and other dialects, even in English class. So, they tend to make errors and mistakes from interference between their first language- Thai- and their target language- English- particularly in English writing. This phenomenon becomes one of the major obstacles in learning the English language. Hence, the researcher has decided to conduct an error analysis-a good tool for describing and explaining errors made by speakers of other languages (Johanson. 1975) - in order to know the types of these errors and the reasons behind their occurrence.

Thus, the purposes of this study are to find out the types and the causes of errors from compositions written by the third year English major students of Buriram Rajabhat University. Some grammatical problems in the acquisition of English language will be investigated. By analyzing errors committed by the students, the result of this study have led to find out what their dominant errors are and at which stage their English levels stay at when quantitative analysis of the distribution, the occurrences of errors from different aspects are analysed. Another important reason

to do so is to point out the aspects of English they have to improve. Their knowledge of English will be reflected in their compositions. For teaching, the result of this study will be advantageous for teachers who teach English for EFL students, especially at the undergraduate level, as it will reveal insights into the students' English knowledge and learning capability to develop writing skills ; the teachers of English can use the results of this research when considering textbooks and teaching materials appropriate to the learning capacities of the students and ; it would be advantageous for future students because as their teachers have a better understanding of problems in writing skill, they can remedy students' problems more effectively.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

In accordance with the stated problems, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1.2.1 To categorize types of errors in English compositions written by the third year English major students, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University.

1.2.2 To examine the causes of errors in English compositions written by the third year English major students, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

In accordance with the stated purposes, two research questions are raised:

1.3.1 What are the types of errors in English compositions written by the third year English major students, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University?

1.3.2 What are the causes of errors in English compositions written by the third year English major students, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University?

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

1.4.1 The results of this research will reveal insight understanding into the students' English knowledge and learning capabilities in regards to writing skills.

1.4.2 Teachers of English can use the results of this research when considering textbooks and teaching materials appropriate to the learning capacities of the students. According to Corder (1975), the most obvious practical use of the analysis of errors is to the teacher. Errors provide feedback, in other words, they tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of his teaching materials and his teaching techniques and show him what parts of the syllabus have to be improved for teaching.

1.4.3 The results of this research will be advantageous for future students because as their teachers have a better understanding of problems in writing skill, they can remedy students' problems more effectively.

## 1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

1.5.1 The population of this research were 38 third year English major students, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University.

1.5.2 The subjects chosen for this study were 38 third year English major students of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Buriram Rajabhat University who enrolled in the course entitled 'Creative Writing' 1553105 in the first semester of the academic year 2010. They were selected by purposive sampling. The researcher used this technique to choose the subjects because all of them had already attended grammar and writing courses entitled 'Grammar in Context' 1551102 in the first semester of academic year 2007, and 'Paragraph Writing' 1552401, in the first semester of academic year 2008. Therefore, they were supposed to have previous knowledge in writing compositions. So, it was not necessary to teach them about writing again. The students wrote one composition consisting of 140-200 words within 60 minutes on the topic "A Memorable Incident in My Life", in the second semester, academic year 2010.

1.5.3 This study was designed to examine the English language errors in compositions written by the third year English major students who were studying in the second semester, academic year 2010, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University, Buriram province. The types and causes of errors were investigated from their compositions to find out the grammatical problems in the acquisition of English language by using the error analysis based on Dulay et al. (1982) classification of errors techniques and the causes of the errors developed by Richards' (1971 ; cited in Ellis, 1995 : 59) and Norrish's (1983) sources of errors schemes.

1.5.4 This study was intended to study only foreign language learning of a rather strictly defined population, namely, Thai native speaking students learning English as a foreign language in a formal learning environment. Thus, the findings would be generalizable only to similar population under similar foreign language learning situations, unless findings from other and further studies in foreign language learning support the extension of these findings to other foreign language situations.

## **1.6 Definitions of Key Terms**

The terms used in this research that need clarification are as follows:

**1.6.1 Errors** refer to the errors that the students make in their free writings consisting of 140-200 words within 60 minutes on the topic 'A Memorable Incident in My Life'. Those errors are categorized into three main categories based on Dulay et al. (1982) classification of errors in linguistic category as follows:

1.6.1.1 Grammatical errors are the errors in the use of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, conjunction, agreement, determiners, tenses, possessives, punctuations, contraction forms, and capitalization.

1.6.1.2 Syntactic errors are the errors in the use of incomplete sentence structures, parallel structure, compound sentences, word orders, complex sentences, 'there' structure sentence, voices, run on sentences, comparison, and redundancy.

1.6.1.3 Lexical errors are the errors of spelling, literal translation from Thai (L1) to English (L2), and word choice.

**1.6.2 Error Analysis** is examining and categorizing the types of errors based on Dulay et al. (1982) classification of errors in linguistic category, and describing

the causes of the errors that students make in the writings developed by Richard's (1971 ; cited in Ellis, 1995 : 59) and Norrish's (1983) sources of errors as follows :

1.6.2.1 The errors caused by first language interference. Skinner (1957 ; cited in Norrish. 1983 : 22) states that if language is essentially a set of habits, then when we try to learn new habits, the old ones will interfere with the new ones. This is referred to as 'mother tongue interference' or 'first language interference.'

1.6.2.2 The errors caused by overgeneralization errors. This kind of error occurs when the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language. Generally, it involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two target language structures.

1.6.2.3 The errors caused by the ignorance of rule restrictions. This kind of error involves the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply. An example is 'He made me to rest.' The writer makes the kind of mistake by extending the pattern found with the majority of verbs that take infinitive complements. For example, 'He asked/wanted/ invited me to go.' Furthermore, analogy and memorization may be causes of this kind of error.

1.6.2.4 The errors caused by false concepts hypothesized (i.e. the learner fails to comprehend fully). This kind of error occurs when the learner does not fully comprehend a distinction in the target language such as the use of 'was' as a marker of past tense in 'One day it was happened.'

1.6.2.5 The errors caused by incomplete application of rules. This kind of error involves a failure to fully develop a structure. Therefore, learners of L2 English have been observed to use the declarative word order.

1.6.2.6 The errors caused by carelessness. It is often closely related

to lack of motivation. One way of reducing the number of 'careless' errors in written work is to get students to check each other's work. This will involve students in an active search for errors. At the same time, while discussing these errors in class, English can be used for genuine communication.

**1.6.3 English compositions** are the free English writing essays written by English major students within 60 minutes consisting of 140-200 words on the topic 'A Memorable Incident in My Life'.

**1.6.4 English major students** are the students studying in the third year in English program, academic year 2010, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Buriram Rajabhat University.

## **1.7 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter presents the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the research, scope and limitation of the research, and definitions of key terms. In order to achieve the research objectives, the researcher intends to review the related literature and the past research on error analysis in Chapter two.