ERROR ANALYSIS OF SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT ON STUDENTS' ESSAY WRITING

Jonris Tampubolon
Universitas Prima Indonesia, Medan, Indonesia
john89tpb@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study are: 1. To find out types of error that students make in writing English essay, and 2. To analyze how students make the errors. The study was limited on analyzing the errors on essay writing as one of question forms on students" monthly exam in terms of grammar errors dealing with the subject-verb agreement and tenses. One way to address morphological, syntactic, and lexical difficulties to learners is through error analysis, which consists of three stages: 1) identification of errors, 2) classification of errors, and 3) identification of the causes of errors (Ferch, Haastrup, & Phillipson, 1984:22). The data of this study were collected through observation in form of documentation. The data were analyzed by identifying the errors that students made in their writing in terms of subject-verb agreement and tenses, then classifying the sources of errors based on Krashen" theory which classifies them into addition, ordering, misinformation and deletion. The results of this study showed that the students still often make errors on their writing. It can be seen also in the result that the errors in terms of tense is more dominant found in the students" essay writing than the errors in terms of subject-verb agreement. There are 53.2 % percent of errors in terms of tense and the rest 46.8 % are errors in terms of subject-verb agreement. The findings of this study showed that the number of errors made by the students on their writing is in line with the results of the previous studies. The 186 errors in both terms subject-verb agreement and tense out of 473 total clauses has proven those studies.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Subject-Verb Agreement, Tenses, Essay Writing

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a crucial component of language performances. English writing in both educational and professional settings is increasingly important in countries of non-native speakers of English (Leki, 2001:199). Most university students are required to write a variety genres of writing, including business writing, summaries, internship report, and research proposal. Language teachers, authors, and experts often record poor performance of students in writing. Leland (2002; 104), for instance, reported that students are increasingly less certain about basic elements of English grammar and usage and about the peculiarities that arise when

the prose they are writing is creative rather than critical. Difficulties in writing may ultimately result in errors. The errors usually relates to the grammar, punctuation, format of writing and capitalization. And the errors that students make lead them to do some research in order to find the way out to the errors. To investigate the relationship between students' L1 and EFL writing, Ying (1987;71) examined 120 Taiwanese EFL students' compositions and sorted errors on the basis of three criteria of overgeneralization, simplification, and language transfer. A total of 1250 errors were detected in the 120 compositions, among which 78.9% of the errors were a result of language transfer, 13.6% of the errors were overgeneralization of the target language, and 7.5% were forms of simplification. This study is, therefore, conducted to obtain bases to enhance the basic organizational, judgmental, and mechanical writing skills of the students and to enable the writing teachers to plan some curriculum and activities that can help develop the writing ability of the students more effectively. Based on the background of the study above, the problems of the study are formulated as follows: 1. What types of error do students make in writing English essay? 2. How do students make errors in writing English essay? Based on the formulation of the study above, the purposes of this study are: 1. To find out what types of error students make in writing English essay, and 2. To analyze how students make the errors. The study was limited on analyzing the errors on essay writing as one of question forms on students" monthly exam in terms of grammar errors dealing with the subject-verb agreement and tenses. One way to address morphological, syntactic, and lexical difficulties to learners is through error analysis, which consists of three stages: 1) identification of errors, 2) classification of errors, and 3) identification of the causes of errors (Ferch, Haastrup, & Phillipson, 1984:22). The data were analyzed by identifying the errors that students made in their writing in terms of subject-verb agreement and tenses, then classifying the sources of errors based on Krashen" theory on which classifies them into addition, ordering, misinformation and deletion. This theory was used to analyze the data on this research. And this study was to analyze the errors on students of SMP Cinta Budaya grade IX. The findings of this study are expected to be useful for both practically and theoretically. Theoretically, this study can be useful as; 1. The result of this study is expected to be one of the alternatives in field of error analysis. 2. The result of this study is expected to be one of the perspectives in analyzing grammar specifically in term of subject-verb agreement and tenses. And practically this study will be useful for: 1. Teachers, as a reflection and information as well for them to be able anticipate the similar errors made by their students when they are asked to write an essay. 2. Students, to improve their grammar mastery in terms of subject-verb agreement and tenses that help them into a better essay when they are assigned to write. 3. For further research. The result of the analysis of this study is expected to be one of the alternatives in the research of essay writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Definition of Error

It is essential here to make a distinction between mistakes and errors. According to Brown *mistakes* refer to "a failure to utilize a known system correctly" whereas *errors* concern "a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner" (1994a: 205). Two things need to be stated here: Firstly, mistakes do not require special treatment assuming they are recognized. Secondly, *error* here refers to structures only. James (1998:201) reveals a criterion that helps us to do so: A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Errors are "systematic," i.e. likely to happen regularly and not recognized by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or researcher would locate them, the learner would not (Gass & Selinker, 1994:57).

2.2 Types of Error

In the second language acquisition, different typed of errors were defined. There are two major different types from the analysis of learners‟ oral and written performance. First, it is called intralingual/developmental error. According to Richards (1974:88), these errors are produced by the learners which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but overgeneralizations based on partial exposure to the target language. Overgeneralization generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two regular structures, for example, "He can sings", "We are hope", "it is occurs". Second, interlingual/transfer referred the negative interference from the learner‟s first language habits. For example many EFL learners think in their first language and they used direct translation when they speak and write in L2. Therefore, errors, not mistakes, are what researchers are focusing on, and many researchers are interested in categorizing errors and the literature containing various types of errors. For example, Gustilo and Mango (2012:98) classified errors as omission errors, addition errors, misinformation errors, wrong order, spelling errors, system errors, and the like. This classification is similar to those found in Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1981:113), who categorize errors into four types. They are omission (i.e., excluding a linguistic item that is obligatory in a grammatically correct utterance), addition (including a linguistic item that is not required in a grammatically accurate sentence), misformation (mixing up the use of linguistic items), and misordering (placing linguistic items in an inappropriate order).

2.3 The Causes and Sources of Error

According to Richards (1974:199), the causes of errors can be classified as follows: 1. Overgeneralization: the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language (e.g. "He can sings" where English allows "He can sing" and "He sings"). 2. Ignorance of rule restrictions: the learner applies rules to context where they are not applicable (e.g. He made me to go rest" through extension of the pattern "He asked/wanted me to go"). 3. Incomplete application of rules: the learner fails to use a fully developed structure (e.g. "You like to sing?" in place of "Do you like to sing?")

4. False hypothesis: the learners do not fully understand a distinction in the target language (e.g. the use of "was" as a marker of past tense in "One day it was happened").

2.4 Interlanguage in Second Language Acquisition

The term interlanguage was first introduced into the literature by Selinker, in an influential paper published in the International Review of Applied Liguistics in 1972, although it was actually written in 1969 while he was on sabbatic leave at Edinburgh University, working closely with Corder. Since then, various terms have been used synonymously with interlanguage, although there are some subtle differences between them: approximative systems, idiosyncratic dialects, learner language systems. All these descriptions have one thing in common: the fact that second language learning is seen to be moving in the direction of the target language, with the learner constructing successive systems of phonological, grammatical and semantic usage rules.

2.5 Error Analysis

Because this study uses error analysis techniques in students‟ writing, it is essential to discuss the theory of error analysis (EA). Error analysis was first introduced by Lado (1957:90) who have claimed that learners of foreign or second language make errors during their learning process and theses errors could be predicted based on differences between their native language and second language in which they are learning. They proposed that where the features of the target language are similar to those of the learners ` native language, learning will be easy; otherwise, it will be difficult and second language learners are expected to make errors.

Error Analysis is one of the most influential theories of second language acquisition. It is concerned with the analysis of the errors committed by L2 learners by comparing the learners‟ acquired norms with the target language norms and explaining the identified errors (James,

1998:107). For Crystal (1999:108) Error Analysis in language teaching and learning is the study of the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a language, especially a foreign language. According to James (2001:62), EA refers to "the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance".

2.6 The Definition of Writing

Writing is a process of discovering and shaving meaning. Experienced writers rarely gather and understand immediately all the information they need. They collect miscellaneous fact and concept, starting writing, and then let the writing lead them to understanding. They know they will be making significant discoveries as they write. (Rise, 1985:4). There are three skills area involve acquiring a writing system. The first skill area involve acquiring a writing system which may be alphabetic (as in European language) or non alphabetic (as in many Asian countries). The second skill area requires selecting the appropriate grammar and vocabularies to form acceptable sentences and then arranging them in paragraph. The third, writing involves thinking about the purpose of the text to be composing and about its possible effect on the intended readerships. One important aspect of this last feature is the choice of suitable style as stated in by Rise (1985:8). On the following point are discussed kinds of writing that usually students work on. The writing that the writer used on this study was taken from one of the kinds of writing which is explained on the following section. Each of the kinds of writing is elaborated clearly.Writing as one of the language skills in English, also can be divided into some types according the way the writing composed. Below is shown the kinds of writing and their definitions.

1. Free Writing

According to Robinson (1996:22), in free writing, you first think in English and then you write what you think. This opinion is almost the same as Dorothy Sedly. She said "free writing is a technique for finding the ideas in your head that you do not even know are there". It means writing whatever comes to the mind without worrying about whether the ideas are good or the grammar is correct. The technique of free writing is very simple. The students just pick up their pen to start writing, and do not stop writing for ten full minutes. If they do not develop their ideas or in case they got stuck, they just rewrite the ideas that they have just written.

2. Controlled Writing

Controlled writing is the opposite of free writing. Controlled writing is all the writing which a great deal of the content and or form is supplied. In using this kind of writing to teaching writing, the students are focused to get words down on paper and in concentrating on one or two problems at a time; they are thus spared from tackling the full range of complexity that free writing entails. Controlled writing focuses the students" attention on specific features of the written language. It is a good method of reinforcing grammar, vocabulary, and syntax in context (Ann, 1983:95).

3. Guided Writing

Guided writing is an extension of controlled writing; it is less controlled than controlled writing. In using kind of writing to teaching writing, the students are given a first sentence, a last sentence, an outline to fill out, a series of questions to respond to, or information to include into their piece of writing. The students should be able to discuss, make notes, share findings and plan strategies together before they begin to write (Ann, 1983:103). In guided writing, the students will make serious errors if the follow the instructions, which is given by the teachers as stated by Lois Robinson on his book entitle

"guided or controlled writing is writing in which one cannot make a serious error so long as he follows direction".

2.7 The Role of Writing in Learning Language

Writing makes a special contribution to the way people think. When we write, we compose meaning. We put together facts and ideas and make something new, whether in a letter home,

in college essay, or in a report at work. When we write, we create an intricate web of meaning in which sentences have special relationships to each other. Writing is a very valuable part of any language course. But learning to write is not just a natural extension of learning how to speak language. It"s because they learn their first language at home without systematic instruction. Whereas most of the students had to be taught in school how to write that same language.

2.8 The Standard View of Subject-Verb Agreement and Tenses

The grammar of any language is not just a simple matter of rules; in order to achieve correct formal writing, the students must follow some basic principles, such as subject-verb agreement. In English, there are three verbs used both as a main verb and as a helping verb, such as *to be*. Their distribution in regard to present tense is represented in Table 1 (Werner, Church, & Baker, 1996 a:3).

to be: Present Tense		
	Singular Subject and Verb	Plural Subject and Verb
First Person	I am	We are
Second Person	You are	You are
Third Person	He is She is It is	They are

III. RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this research is qualitative descriptive. Descriptive qualitative design is aiming to observe the ability of students of Cinta Budaya Senior High School Medan grade IX. Through this design, the writer also analyzed the students" writing in order to know the types of error and how the students make the errors. The error that the students make in every single sentence are described and analyzed. The subjects of this study were the students of Cinta Budaya senior high school grade IX. There were 25 students as the subjects of this study. The 25 students were chosen from 1 class which taken randomly. Since the writing exam was the same for all students in the class, so the writer collected the data for their writing two times in row. Fifteen essay writings which the topic is about past experience were collected from the first monthly exam which was in July and the other 10 writings which is about daily routines were taken from the second monthly exam which was in August. On the other words, there were 25 pieces of essay writing paper totally. The data of the writing were collected from one of the English teachers who kept the documents. The data of this study were collected through observation in form of documentation. The writer collected the essay writing of the students when they were having their monthly exam by asking the class English teacher who teaches in the school which the writer chooses as the subject of the study. The data collected by the writer were the essay writing of the students and analyzed through following the procedures;

1. Identify the errors that students make
2. Classify the types of the errors
3. Analyze the types and classifications of errors
4. Interpret the findings through conclusions and suggestions

IV. DISCUSSION

The data were analyzed by identifying the errors that students made in their writing in terms of subject-verb agreement and tenses, then classifying the sources of errors based on Krashen" theory which classifies them into addition, ordering, misinformation and deletion. The first fifteen writings are taken from the monthly exam which is about past experience. The

first monthly exam was held in July. While the rest ten writings were taken from the second monthly exam which was about painting classifications. Since the topic was talking about fact, it should be written in present verb form. On the other words, the students should write each sentence in present tense. Below are rewritten the data and the data analysis comes on each datum. Below is one of the data.

I'll never forget the first time I played flying fish at Mikie Holiday. It was about 3 years ago. I was very excited because that was new game at Mikie Holiday that time. I was about 13 years at the time. When we were to line, I didn't feel exhausted. But 15 minutes later, I feel it. My legs hurt, my back hurt, because of standing and pushed by other people, plus, there were so cold at that time. 5 minutes later, that was our turn. It makes me more excited than before and forget all the pain at my body. I run inside the game area and choose the ship. But unluckily, the ship was to high and I can't get upside even my feet was stepping on a chair. It makes me feel so stupid, and my brother keeps laughing at me. I was very embrassed that time. Finally, after we're done, we go get some food and eat.

Data Analysis

Error Occurrence	Correct Form	Error Type	Error Classification
„..I feel it.	„..I felt it.	Tense	Misinformation
My legs hurt…	My legs got hurt…	Subject- verb agreement	Deletion
my back hurt,..	my back got hurt,..	Subject- verb agreement	Deletion
„..there were so cold…	„..it was so cold…	Subject- verb agreement	Misinformation
It makes me…	It made me…	Tense	Misinformation
I run inside…	I ran inside…	Tense	Misinformation
…and choose the…	…and chose the…	Tense	Misinformation
„..I can¨t get…	„..I couldn¨t get…	Tense	Misinformation
„..my feet was stepping…	„..my feet were stepping…	Subject- verb agreement	Misinformation
…my brother keeps…	…my brother kept…	Tense	Misinformation
…after we¨re done,..	…after we had done,..	Tense	Misinformation
„..we go get…	„..we went to get…	Tense	Misinformation
… and eat.	… and ate.	Tense	Misinformation

4.1 Findings

And after analyzing the data, the following percentages are found. Therefore the table below represents the data.

Data	Tense				Subject-Verb Agreement			
	M	O	D	A	M	O	D	A
1	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	7	-	-	-	2	-	1	-
3	9	-	-	-	2	-	2	-
4	6	-	-	-	-	-	3	-
5	2	-	-	-	1	1	1	-

6	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	2
8	3	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
9	6	-	-	-	2	-	2	-
10	2	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
11	5	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
12	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	4	-	1	-	1	-	-	1
14	6	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
15	6	-	-	-	1	-	1	-
16	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
17	1	-	-	-	-	-	5	-
18	8	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
19	1	-	-	-	1	-	2	-
20	-	-	-	-	2	-	3	1
21	1	-	-	-	3	1	4	-
22	2	-	-	-	6	1	-	-
23	-	-	-	-	6	-	3	-
24	-	-	-	-	4	-	4	-
25	3	-	-	-	5	-	1	-
Total	94	-	2	-	45	3	36	6

Table 4.3 The Distribution of Type and Classification Errors

From the table 4.3 above, it can be seen that the error in term of misinformation (M) is the most dominant occurred in both types of errors. There are 94 times occurred in term of tense and 45 times in term of subject-verb agreement. While the error of ordering (O) and addition (A) do not occur in term of tense. The deletion (D) error in term of tense occurred once. In term of subject-verb agreement, there are 45 errors of misinformation (M). The ordering (O) error occurred two times. Then the deletion (D) errors occurred 36 times. Finally, the addition (A) errors occurred six times. In brief, all the error classifications are found in terms of subject-verb agreement. Below is displayed figure 3 to represent the data analysis in terms of subject-verb agreement and tense distributed to misinformation error, ordering error, deletion error and addition error.
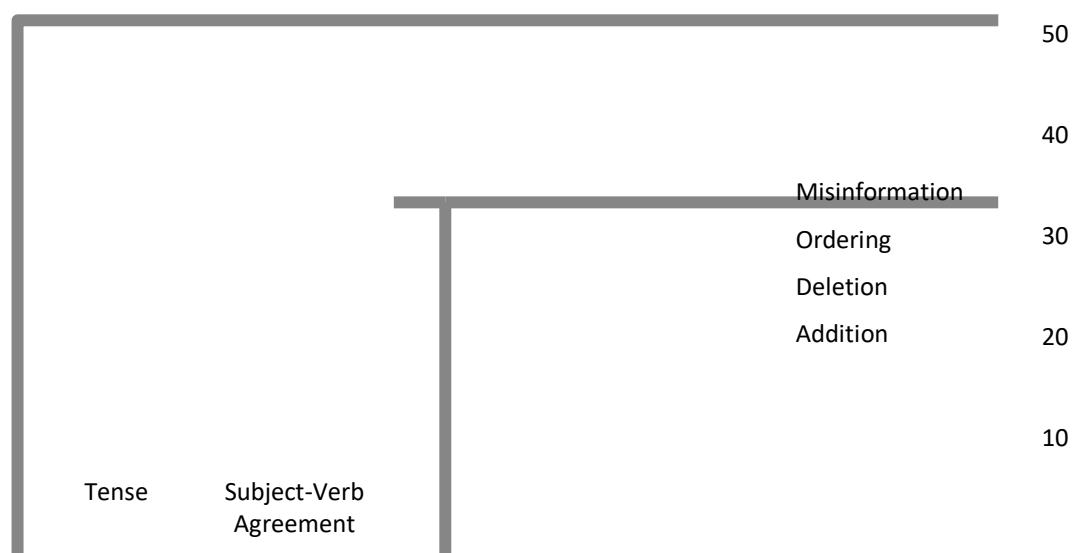
Figure 4 The Distribution of Error Types and Classifications

From figure 4 above, it can be seen that there are 50.54 percent of misinformation errors in term of tense which is the highest among all types of errors. And there are also errors of deletion found in term of tense which are 1.07 percent. While in terms of subjectverb agreement, there are 24.19 percent of misinformation errors. And there are 1.6 percent of ordering errors. There are also deletion errors found in term of subject-verb agreement which are 19.34 percent. And the last, there are 3.22 percent of addition errors on the data analysis. Briefly, the highest number of errors occurred in term of misinformation for the two types of errors which are tense and subject-verb agreement. While the lowest number of errors is in term of ordering which only occurred in subject-verb agreement errors.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study also show that the number of errors made by the students on their writing is in line with the results of the previous studies. The 186 errors in both terms subject-verb agreement and tense out of 473 total clauses has proven those studies. The errors that students made when they were to write compositions actually were not only found in terms of subject-verb agreement and tense but they also made errors on other terms such as spelling, word order, capitalization, article, word choice, the use of pronoun and other errors that usually found on writing. And it obviously proves that writing as one of the skills in English language is still being faced as one of the most difficult language skills to be mastered. It occurs since writing is viewed as a complex process even in the first language. It means, students do not only face difficulties when they are to write an essay in second or foreign language but they also face the same difficulties when they are to write compositions in their own native language.

As Richards (1974:199) and other researches have stated on their findings that there are some causes and sources of errors made by the students when they are to write their compositions such as overgeneralization: the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language, ignorance of rule restrictions: the learner applies rules to context where they are not applicable, incomplete application of rules: the learner fails to use a fully developed structure and false hypothesis: the learners do not fully understand a distinction in the target language.

The causes and sources of errors in writing were not identified on this study. Since this study was limited only on identifying the errors and classifying them into each type and classification.

But it is suggested for the further study to find out the sources causes of errors made by students when they are to write their writing compositions.

V. CONCLUSIONS
5.1 Conclusions

This study was attempted to investigate the errors of applying subject-verb agreement in the written English of 25 students in grade IX at Cinta Budaya Junior High School Medan, North Sumatra. The aim of this study was to apply a study using an Error Analysis technique in order to investigate two main questions. The first is whether these students are facing problems in terms of subject-verb agreement and tense in their writings by identifying the errors they made. The second is to classify the errors that students made on their English essay writings.

As a conclusion, what seems to be important is the fact that this study provides evidence that students are still facing problems in choosing and using the appropriate tense and subjects that agree with the verbs in their writing. In addition, it shows that their lack of knowledge of rules of the target language seems to be the main factor in causing the written production of the errors. This lack of knowledge causes them to use incorrect forms of the morpheme or structure, which leads to the misinformation error type. Furthermore, this rule ignorance leads students to misuse the correct verb forms on their sentences. In brief, the data analysis shows that most of the students were lack of knowledge in understanding grammar rules in terms of subject-verb agreement and tense.

5.2 Suggestions

Since the research findings showed that the errors made by the students in terms of subject-verb agreement and tense their writings are considered in a serious problem, it is needed some suggestions in order to enable the teachers and the students deal with the errors. On the discussion on chapter four, it is being asked the causes and sources of the errors made by the students in their writings. Therefore, it is suggested for further research to find the causes and sources of errors made by the students in their writing. In addition, the results of this study can be as one of reflections to the teachers and any English language educators to be aware in applying a more effective way or strategy in delivering their materials in terms of subject-verb agreement and tense.

Finally, it is also suggested for the further research to analyze the errors of any grammatical rules in other kinds of writing. Since it is clearly stated in the previous chapters on this paper that there are still any errors in terms of grammatical rules such as errors in spelling, capitalization, word choice, use of pronoun, punctuation and any other types of errors.

REFERENCES

Brown, Ann. 1983. *Helping Children to Write.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.

Brown, H. D. (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Crystal, D. (1999). *The penguin dictionary of language* (2nd ed.). Penguin.

Ferch, C., Haastrup, K., & Phillipson, R. (1984). *Learner language and language learning*. England: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Gass, S. and Selinker, L. (1994). Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course. Hilsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (2001). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course* (chapter 3.2). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Gustilo, L., & Magno, C., (2012). Learners" errors and their evaluation: The case of Filipino ESL writers. *Philippine ESL Journal, 8*, 96-113.

Hasyim, S. (2002). Error Analysis in the teaching of English. Retrieved May 27, 2016, from http://puslit2.petra.ac.id/ejournal/index.php/ing/articlePDF Interstitial/15485/15477

James, C. (1998) Errors in Language Learning and Use. London: Longman.

James, C. (2001).*Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics Across Cultures.* University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.

Lane, J., & Lange, E. (1999). *Writing clearly: An editing guide* (2nd Ed.). USA: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

Lee, E. P. (2001). Error Analysis on medical students' writing. Retrieved June 2, 2016, from http://www.stc.arts.chula.ac.th/ITUA/Papers_for_ITUA_ Proceedings/ Eunpyo-new.pdf.

Leki, L. (2001). Material, educational, an ideological challenges of teaching EFL writing at the turn of the century. *International Journal of English Studies, 1*, 197-209.

Leland, C. (2002). *The creative writer's style guide*. Ohio: F+W Publications, Inc.

Richards, J. C. 1974. Error analysis and second language strategies. In New frontiers in second language learning. Eds. J. H. Schumann and N. Stenson. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House

Robinson, Lois. 1996. *Guided Writing and Free Writing.* New York: Harper and Row

Selinker, L. 1974. „Interlanguage". In Richards, J. (Ed.). Error analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition. 31-54. Essex: Longman.

Werner, P. K., Church, M. M., & Baker, L. R. (1996 a). *Interactions II: A communicative grammar* (3rd ed.). Location of Publication: McGraw-Hill.

Werner, P. K., Church, M. M., & Baker, L. R. (1996 b). *Mosaic One: A content-based grammar*. Location of Publication: McGraw-Hill

Ying, S. Y. (1987). Types of errors in English compositions by Chinese students: A research for interlanguage. Unpublished master's thesis, Fu Jen Catholic University, Taipei, Taiwan.