

## Analysis of Student Errors in an EAP Writing Class A Critical Action Research Project

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### Abstract

Action research is a collaborative endeavor between the researcher and the researched. The aim is to increase understanding of a given situation, and is primarily concerned with gaining insight into a complex social situation, in this case, the classroom. Critical action research also involves reflection: the teacher is involved in a reflective process throughout the action research project. This paper is a critical action research project undertaken at the University of Manitoba in an English for Academic Purposes writing class. The researcher's objective at the outset of the project was to investigate learner errors in writing academic papers, but as the study progressed the focus of the study changed from an investigation of errors into an investigation of investigating errors: how investigating errors changed the way the author read students' work. This paper presents a view of academic writing for non-native English speakers as intercultural practice, which foregrounds an unequal power relationship between the instructor and student.

Keywords: error analysis, academic writing, English for specific purposes, critical action research

### **I : Critical Action Research - Context and Meaning**

Action research is a collaborative endeavor between the researcher and the researched. The aim is to increase understanding of a given situation, and is primarily concerned with gaining insight into a complex social situation, in this case, the classroom. Critical action research also involves reflection: the teacher is involved in a reflective process throughout the action research project.

This study foregrounds the position that learning to write in a second language is an example of intercultural practice whereby a non-native English speaker enters into a discourse about culture. Therefore, it is crucial to begin this paper with a discussion of culture and how it is being interpreted in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). There are two

interpretations possible. One of these has been referred to as the normative, and the other as the critical. The approach to second language literacy taken in this study is critical, and this critical approach has also been applied to the study itself. I will define these terms more concretely based on what can be seen from the research.

One of the aspects of this critical conception of culture and how it could operate can clearly be seen by Connor's (2002) statement that students are being taught to "write for native English speaker's expectations instead of expressing their own native lingual and cultural identities." If a re-conceptualization of the idea of culture could reverse this, and EAP students could express their own native lingual and cultural identities, learning to write would become a very different activity. It may even require discourse communities to learn to read differently, to be more flexible and open to other ways of constructing meaning, and may open up a new dialogical space that could afford insights into how we communicate between individuals, communities, and countries.

A second aspect of a critical approach to culture is that cultures are localized, bound not by national boundaries, but by permeable, and often invisible boundaries. We see this kind of critical approach to culture taken in many recent studies. Some of these are the study by Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei's (1998) *Do Language Learners Recognize Pragmatic Violations: Pragmatic Versus Grammatical Awareness in Instructed L2 Learning*, which investigated teacher practices as a kind of cultural activity; in Newman et al (2003) *Core academic literacy principles versus culture-specific practices*, in Jackson's (2002) *The China strategy: a tale of two case leaders*, and in Ramanathan and Atkinson's (1999) *Ethnographic Approaches and Methods in L2 Writing Research*, institutions and even classrooms are seen as cultural spaces. It is within this interpretation of culture that this study takes places.

A third dimension of this approach is to view culture as something we do rather than as something others are. Rather than referring to the *Japanese*, for example, as if that is one monolithic entity, for example, the critical approach turns the lens of culture back on oneself and asks what our practices as teachers say about our 'cultural' beliefs (culture here being the culture of the institution or the profession). In other words, making generalizations about other cultures indicates more about our frames of reference and culture than it does about those who are being generalized. We see this dimension of the critical approach taken in Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei' (1998) *Do Language Learners Recognize Pragmatic Violations*; in Woodward-Kron's (2004) *'Discourse communities' and 'writing apprenticeship': an investigation of these concepts in undergraduate Education students' writing*; in and Kuo's (1999) *The Use of Personal Pronouns: Role Relationships in Scientific Journal Articles*; in Ramanathan, et. al's

(2001) *English for Academic Purposes*.

Other salient features of a critical approach are an emphasis on subjective awareness of culture rather than an objective description of others. This can be described as placing an emphasis on issues surrounding identity and identification as well as issues surrounding being an outsider, 'otherness', and ostracization. Rather than expecting the 'other', in this case the non-native English academic writer, to assimilate and discard or ignore their already fully established culturally bound knowledge about writing, there is an affirmation of difference and the encouragement of developing hybridity and the ability to negotiate an intercultural space. Canagarajah (1999) in *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching* recommends this approach when he writes: "Periphery students already inhabit a range of hybrid discourses, so categorizing them as being native to only a single discourse could be a stereotype of well-intentioned but uninformed teachers." (p. 167) In other words, EAP students already have knowledge of another, and perhaps of more than one, kind of discourse. They often already identify with more than just their national 'culture' and its normative values. Canagarajah (1999): "The metaphor we need to employ is one of 'appropriation', or perhaps 'merging' discourses." (p. 168) This merging will undoubtedly take place from both sides. It is from this critical stance that the error analysis in this study takes place.

This is an action research project undertaken at the University of Manitoba. At the time of this study I was the instructor of an academic writing course for international students. As is the case with action research, I am also the researcher. This means that the writers are students in the class which I teach. At the time these essays were collected, the students had completed eight weeks of a twelve-week course. This was the second time that I taught this course at this university. Most of my students, in both this year and the previous year, were Chinese, and I also have experience teaching ESL in Taiwan. From this experience I am under the distinct impression that my students are more concerned with grammatical accuracy than I am, while I am more concerned with my students learning how to express their own original ideas, and synthesizing information gained from research, than they are. I also see learning to write academic essays in English as an inter-cultural practice for these foreign students, and encourage them to apply what they already know about writing and discourse to their English essays and research papers. Trying to understand the conflict between their expectations of learning to write, and my expectations of teaching writing, has led me to question what kind of inter-language my students have developed, and how best and most quickly to go about improving accuracy, as my students would like, while still giving time to work on how to express ideas. These two strains of inquiry come together in this study

of student errors in English academic papers. Ultimately, I am hoping to gain insight into the students' English and expectations of this course to further their ability to write well, and to see if error analysis can in fact improve the quality of their written work.

## II : Purpose and Background

The more specific purpose of this study is to create a taxonomy of student errors, so that I know which errors are occurring most frequently. Also, I intend to identify some kind of criteria for establishing relative error gravity so that I have an idea of which kind of errors I should focus my interventions on. Thirdly, I hope to find some correlation between different kinds of errors to see if they are in fact related to each other.

This study is pedagogical in nature; it aims to provide information to inform my teaching practices on the pedagogic level. It is not primarily concerned with theory. However, part of the purpose of this study is also self-reflection on my role as an English writing instructor, to see if focusing on errors changes the way I read text, and if so, how this different reading affects the way I teach my class. This question will be briefly explored in the discussion section.

In this study I will analyze three essays written by three different students. I will explain the error identification system used and the method used to develop this instrument. I will describe the results of the error analysis with reference to frequency and error correlation. Finally, I will discuss the implications of this study for my teaching and for theories of how to teach academic writing. This will be followed by an exploration of some of the limitations of this study, and finally I will make some suggestions for further study in this area.

I have controlled for three variables in this study: L1, age, and educational background. Therefore, the writers of this study are all from China; the writers are all between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one; all of the writers have graduated from a Chinese high school but have not attended post-secondary education in either Canada or China. All of the writers are in the same English for academic purposes (EAP) class, and received the same instructions prior to writing this essay. The class is made up of twenty-two students, six of whom are women and fifteen of whom are men. I eliminated two of the writers because the writers had already graduated from university and had a different L1.

The course is a high-intermediate academic writing course taught at a Canadian university. This is a pre-university course, meaning it is not for credit. However, the students must pass this course in order to enter the university. There are a total of twenty-two students in the course. The students must also pass a standardized test called the The Canadian Test of

English for Scholars and Trainees (Can-Test) which is divided into four areas; reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The area that is the weakest for most of the students is their writing skill. When talking informally to the markers of the Can-Test essay, it became evident that grammatical competency plays a significant role. As their teacher, I am concerned with giving them the best possible skills to pass this test. Therefore, discovering what kind of errors the students are committing, and what kind of language features are causing the most problem, may be very important for the students. By identifying the features that are causing the most problems it may be possible to focus grammar intervention and instruction. In this way the students' CanTest grades may go up, and their chances of entering the university might then improve.

The essays used in this study are part of the course requirements for the course described previously. This essay was an in-class writing assignment used as an evaluation tool. The essay is modeled after the Can-Test in terms of length of essay (300-400 words), type of topic (argumentative), and length of time given to complete the assignment (50 minutes). This particular writing assignment was the third in a series of four practice in-class essays that the students write during each semester. These essays were written in week eight of a twelve-week program. It should be noted that the students are under a great deal of pressure to do well on the Can-Test, and therefore the students try to write as well as they can on these practice tests.

The topics were: "Should music be taught as part of the high-school curriculum?", "Should immigrant parents teach their heritage language to their children?", and "Does God exist?" All twenty-two students wrote on one of these topics, and all the essays were returned to the students after being graded.

The instructions given prior to writing are significant in that without a doubt these instructions affected their writing, and affected how I interpreted their mistakes. Considerable attention had been given in the three weeks prior to writing this essay regarding three aspects of writing: organization of ideas, sentence structure, and writing style. The students had been encouraged to use organizational patterns such as including an introduction, dividing the body of the essay into three parts of relative gravity, and concluding with a summary of the main points followed by a final thought or recommendation. The students had been encouraged to use complex sentence structures including the use of semi-colons, relative clauses, and conjunctions. The students had also been encouraged to use certain elements of style, such as parallel structure, descriptive adjectives, and to use both long and short sentences. The grading rubric (appendix C) reflects the instructions that were given to the students prior to

the writing test.

All of these features, (organization, sentence structure, and style) were reviewed extensively in class through examples, exercises, practice writing, and other classroom activities. However, little to no instruction was given regarding specific grammatical features of written text except for a discussion of how to use a semi-colon. For example, there had been no instruction in the three weeks prior to this writing assignment regarding subject verb agreement or the use of articles.

### **III : Method**

#### **A : Sampling a selection of the student essays**

One week after returning the essays to the students the instructor asked the class for permission to use five of their essays for the purposes of this research. The instructor did not ask any individual students for their essay. The essays were selected by asking for volunteers to return their essays to the instructor for the purposes of this study. Five essays were returned to the instructor. Of these five, three were selected at random for the purposes of this study. The essays were photocopied and returned the following day.

There is an issue here of whether the students felt that they must allow the instructor to use the essays, and whether they would gain anything by allowing this. It was explained clearly to the students that they were not required to return their essays for this study, and that they would receive no benefit from doing so. There is a good rapport between myself and the students, and I am confident that the students did not feel pressured or bribed.

#### **B : Identification of student errors**

The identification of the errors began by separating the essays into sentences. Each sentence was then analyzed individually. Errors were categorized first by whether the error was 1): an obvious mistake, 2): an error which causes irritation but does not interfere with comprehension, or 3): an error which significantly interferes with comprehension. I will now describe the rationale for making these distinctions.

This classification instrument was developed specifically for this study, and evolved as the analysis took place. It was significantly influenced by the description of error analysis research in Ellis (1994). First, following the research methodology of Corder (1967) as cited by Ellis, a distinction was made between 'error' and 'mistake'. Corder made the distinction using the following definitions:

An error takes place when the deviation arises as a result of lack of knowledge. It

represents a lack of competence. A mistake occurs when learners fail to perform their competence. . . . Mistakes, then, are performance phenomena. (p. 51)

This distinction usually relies on the self-reporting of the speaker, however, in this case that was impossible. Only those errors which are absolutely mistakes, where there was absolutely no doubt about their cause, are listed as mistakes. These include only three language features, spelling mistakes, capitalization mistakes, and idiom accuracy problems. One reason for separating these mistakes from the other errors is that I did not want to ignore spelling completely, as is usually done with error analysis, because some of the writers in this class exhibit very poor spelling skills, while others spell quite well. I was interested in seeing if there was a correlation between poor spelling and grammatical errors.

The errors, as opposed to mistakes, were then classified into two groups: those that cause irritation and those that greatly interfere with comprehension. This distinction is based on a study by Khalil (1985) in which Khalil differentiated between errors that were intelligible, acceptable, and irritating. Ellis (1994) also cites a study by Hughes and Lascaratou (1982) which found that NS were more concerned with issues surrounding comprehension, while NNS were more concerned with “ideas of what constitutes the ‘basic’ rules of the target language.” (p. 67)

After reviewing the data numerous times I decided that four types of errors appear to have the greatest effect on comprehension. I was the instrument used for evaluating this. The most salient of these is lexical errors. According to research by Burt (1975), Tomiyama (1980), and Khalil (1985), “NS judges tend to judge lexical errors as more serious than grammatical errors.” The second type of error which greatly interfered with comprehension was word order problems. Word order is mentioned in a study by Burt (1975), as having a profound impact on comprehension. I found that these errors were more serious than those in the ‘irritational’ category. The third type was errors which were the result of incorrect sentence formation. The fact that I found these errors to interfere with comprehension may be partly the result of the fact that I have been emphasizing sentence formation in class during the three weeks prior to conducting this study. This may have influenced the focus of my attention and my impression that these have a more significant effect on comprehension. The final error in this category is a type of error which I refer to as ‘unidentifiable errors’. These concepts are borrowed from Corder (1981) and were used as a guideline for determining if a sentence had unidentifiable errors. These are sentences or clauses about which a “plausible interpretation” cannot be made, and defy the attempt to “make a well-formed reconstruction of

the sentence in the target language.” (p. 52). In the study conducted by Burt (1975), errors were classified as ‘global’ or ‘local’. The definition of what constitutes a global error is as follows: “errors that affect overall sentence organization. Examples are wrong word order, missing or wrongly placed sentence connectors, and syntactic overgeneralization.” (p. 66) This definition lends support to the grouping of these errors into a separate category because, with the exception of the lexical errors, they all affect overall sentence organization.

The largest group of errors is errors which irritate, but do not significantly interfere with comprehension. These ‘irritational’ errors have been classified according to simple linguistic categories. This is the most common form of error analysis, and suits the purposes of this study. According to Ellis:

Perhaps the simplest type of descriptive taxonomy is one based on linguistic categories. This type is closely associated with a traditional EA (error analysis) undertaken for pedagogic purposes, as the linguistic categories can be chosen to correspond closely to those found in structural syllabuses and language text books. (p. 54)

It should be noted, however, that this ‘descriptive taxonomy’ is used to identify only those errors which did not fall into either of the previous two categories. This list was generated by first investigating the text, referring to Azar (1999) *Understanding and Using English Grammar*, and then listing the types of errors found. To help identify the kind of error, the sentence was reconstructed and the two sentences compared. This follows Ellis (1994): “The description of learner errors involves a comparison of the learners’ idiosyncratic utterances with a reconstruction of those utterances in the target language.” The specific language feature (regardless of the corresponding rules around that language feature) which differentiates original and the reconstructed sentence is used to classify the error. Some errors were unusual and required their own category. These errors are referred to ‘nonce’ errors; errors which only occur once. Error types that do not occur in the writing samples are not included in this list. (appendix D)

#### **IV : Results**

First, let’s review the purpose of this study: The purpose of this study is to create a taxonomy of errors, in order to: determine which errors are occurring most frequently, identify some kind of criteria for establishing relative error gravity so that I would have an idea of which kind of errors I should focus my interventions on, see if there is any obvious correlation



between various kinds of errors. So what are the results? (appendix C.)

First, the taxonomy of errors which irritate but do not significantly interfere with comprehension: these account for 64% of the total number of errors produced. There were a significant number of errors in the following categories, in descending order from most common to least common: article use (19), verb form (14), preposition use (13), pronoun use (12), subject / verb agreement (10), gerund / infinitive use (9), comma use (6), and pluralization (5). This would seem to indicate that these features need some pedagogic intervention. There were an insignificant number of errors found in the following categories: conjunction use (3), and modal use (2).

As a percentage of total irritation errors, the breakdown is as follows: article use (20%), verb form (14%), preposition use (13%), pronoun use (12%), subject / verb agreement (10%), gerund / infinitive use (9%), comma use (6%), and pluralization (5%).

The following are nonce errors: uncountable nouns, tag question formation, adjective use, and question mark use. This may indicate that the writers have acquired these language features, and therefore intervention is unnecessary. However, it may also indicate that these features are being avoided because they have not been acquired to a sufficient degree to allow for use. In this case more intervention regarding these features is called for. Further analysis of the writing text is needed to determine whether avoidance or accurate use is the reason for few errors in these categories.

The second purpose was to create some kind of criteria for determining relative gravity of the errors. This criterion was developed during the creation of the analysis taxonomy. As has already been discussed in the analysis section, I was the instrument for determining which types of errors to include as significantly interfering with comprehension. The inclusion of these types of errors represents the results of this analysis. Lexical, or vocabulary, based errors were obviously significant for comprehension. Word order was less obvious. Sentence formation and unidentifiable errors were the most salient features in this category. Verb form errors were initially included in this category, but after reconsidering verb form errors with comprehension in mind, I concluded that these errors were not nearly as grave an issue for comprehension that the others in this category. This may represent my bias as the teacher of this course.

In total, comprehension errors represent 36% of the total number of errors produced. The breakdown of these errors is as follows: lexical errors (22), sentence formation errors (19), unidentifiable errors (9), and word order (4). As a percentage of total comprehension errors, the proportions are as follows: lexical errors (41%), sentence formation errors (35%),

unidentifiable errors (17%), and word order (7 %).

The final purpose was to see if there were any obvious correlations between various error types. No obvious correlations exist. A number of statistical tests were done on the essays, but no significant correlations were found. Errors appear to be fairly even dispersed and each writer shows a different set of errors. This indicates that the development of an inter-language of academic English appears to be a fairly individualistic phenomena. This also indicates that the selection of a specific set of errors to address in class cannot be done on the basis of a taxonomy of related errors as they don't seem to be related. Individualized and customized attention would appear to be a more effective teaching strategy.

Essay A has eleven article-use errors, essay C has eight, while essay B has only one. Essay B has seven verb-form errors, essay C has five, while Essay A has only two. Essay C has seven pronoun-use errors while essay B has only three, and essay A has only two. This indicates that the types of errors the students are producing differ depending on the individual learner. It can be concluded that the inter-language the learners' are creating varies widely, in terms of grammatical features.

One of the reasons for including spelling mistakes in this analysis is to discover if a high rate of spelling mistakes correlates with a high rate of grammatical errors. Essay B has thirty four spelling errors, while essay A has only three and essay C has eight. Nevertheless, essay B shows no significant difference in the number of other grammatical errors (Essay A: 48, Essay B: 47, Essay C: 56). This indicates no significant correlation between spelling mistakes and error production.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the total number of irritation errors is almost the same for all three essays (essay A: 30, essay B: 30, essay C: 37). At the same time, the total number of comprehension errors is also almost the same (essay A: 18, essay B: 17, essay C: 19). This is somewhat surprising in light of the fact that the kinds of irritation errors exhibit a high degree of variability. The high level of correlation between the larger categories, with high degree of variability within the category, indicates that the method of analysis used here (i.e. dividing the errors between irritation and comprehension along the lines described above) is a valid method.

## V : Discussion

Error analysis is based on the assumption that grammatical errors are a significant, perhaps the most significant, aspect of writing. This assumption raises a number of questions. First,

The errors for all three student essays are summarized here:

Type of error	Essay A	Essay B	Essay C
<i>probably mistakes, not errors</i>			
1. idiom not written correctly	0	0	1
2. word not spelt correctly	3	24	8
3. capitalization	3	5	0
<i>errors which irritate, but do not significantly interfere with comprehension</i>			
4. verb form	2	7	5
5. subject / verb agreement	5	4	1
6. article use	11	1	8
7. preposition use	6	3	4
8. pluralization	0	2	3
9. gerund / infinitive	1	5	3
10. pronoun use	2	3	7
11. uncountable nouns (any problem caused by this)	0	0	1
12. comma use (not sentence structure)	1	2	3
13. modal use	0	2	0
14. tag question formation	0	0	1
15. conjunction use	2	0	1
16. adjective use (including demonstratives)	1	0	0
17. question mark use	0	1	0
<i>errors which significantly interfere with comprehension</i>			
18. vocabulary (word choice)	6	8	8
19. word order (if different from sentence structure and vocabulary)	1	7	3
20. sentence formation	8	7	4
21. unidentifiable errors	3	2	4

'accurate' grammar may not in fact be the key to successful writing. Second, the concept of 'accuracy' may not be completely valid in light of the fact that readers may have different ideas about what constitutes correct grammar. Third, a focus on grammatical accuracy may detract me from other, more significant aspects of learners' writing. And, in response to the issues raised in the purpose section, the emphasis on grammatical accuracy may change my teaching pedagogy in such a way that I begin to emphasize grammatical accuracy over other writing issues.

The fear I have about emphasizing grammatical 'correctness' over the creation of meaning is that it may be doing the students a disservice, one that may have serious ethical implications for how we view the 'other'. The focus on error analysis, which assumes the existence of an objective, prescriptive grammar, makes it difficult for me to validate the students' subjective and creative inter-language. In other words, by asking the students to 'correct' their

grammar 'mistakes', based on the information gleaned from this study, I feel that I am putting myself in a power position relative to these students that I am not comfortable with. The 'otherness' which these students represent is not recognized if I shut down their attempts at communication and refuse to validate their attempts at creative inter-language communication by redirecting their attention away from what they are saying and towards the accuracy of their sentences. This restricts possible creative and playful interpretations of the textual space which both I and my students occupy. By seeing their text as a collection of possible grammar errors I diminish my ability to conceptualize the students' as independent mature thinkers who have something to say. They may live up to this diminished conceptualization, in which case I have silenced their voices.

Although this research is essentially analytical and primarily quantitative, I am interested in the more qualitative aspects of doing this research that have emerged during the course of this study. Action research is supposed to have an impact on how we teach, and in this case the impact was somewhat unexpected. Rather than finding which errors are most in need of intervention I have found that the focus on intervention regarding errors has changed my perceptions of student writing in a negative way.

Undoubtedly, research can have a big impact on teaching practice, but the effect of doing the study both on the researcher and the researched, is also an important avenue of inquiry. I cannot comment directly on the impact this has had on the students in my class, but I can comment on how this research has impacted the researcher. There are a number of ways in which conducting this small research project has already had an effect on my classroom instruction.

1. The obvious effect: doing this research has made me aware of the kinds of errors my students are making. This is helpful for me in terms of knowing which errors to focus on when I teach.
2. I have also become aware that what appears at first glance to be a grammatical error may not in fact be related to grammar but may be a case of not knowing how to express an idea clearly.
3. I have changed my teaching pedagogy from following the specific grammar lessons in the writing textbook to focusing on actual errors that students are making. The students have given me a lot of positive feedback for this activity and seem glad to not have to deal with the complex grammar assignments in the textbook and can instead focus on their own ideas.
4. I have found that my earlier desire to avoid grammatical explanations and exercises is

probably a good thing and is supported by this research. This is clearly ambiguous. A study about grammatical errors should not end up with the recommendation to spend less time on general grammar explanations. Resolving this ambiguity and finding a way to incorporate this belief into my teaching pedagogy may be a highly productive experience.

## VI : Limitations

Conducting this study, small as it was, has made me much more skeptical of addressing grammar errors in the classroom. First, this study was limited in terms of what it can discover about the writers' inter-language development. Aside from spelling and capitalization mistakes, it is difficult to determine whether the student is unaware of a grammatical structure and therefore commits a real error, or whether the student is aware of the structure and is making a mistake because the writer does not know how to use the function correctly. This kind of error may in fact indicate a performative problem, not a lack of grammatical knowledge. Secondly, this study cannot discover how well, or how poorly, the writer understands language features which are not evident in the essay. For example, if the writer does not use relative clauses at all, it is impossible to know if this is because they do not know of them, they do not know how to use them, or if they are strategically avoiding them because they are afraid of making an error. Error analysis is limited to exploring the salient features of the grammar structures used. One can only make guesses at what is not there.

Error analysis is restricted to looking at what was said *incorrectly*, rather than what was said *poorly*. This is the problem of 'quality', rather than 'accuracy'. There were many times during this analysis when I wanted to classify features that were not effective. These qualitative aspects of the essays were related to style, organization, structure, ineffective but grammatical word choice, and other subjectively difficult to define features. However, if the sentence is grammatically correct (albeit ineffective) poorly written features of the sentence are not included as errors.

Related to the previous point, error analysis does not go beyond the sentence level. It does not deal with features of a paragraph or essay structure. Rhetorical analysis would reveal features of the writing in a much more global way than what can be found by looking at sentence level errors only.

A further draw-back to error analysis is that it focuses on the product of the writer and not on the process. The danger here is that in an attempt to 'fix' these kinds of errors the teacher

will be encouraged to focus on the product that the writers are producing, and ignore working on the process that contributes to creating effective and engaging written text.

The number of essays analyzed in this study was quite small. The fact that only three essays out of a class of 20 students were analyzed means that the results cannot be extended to a larger population. However, the sample of three out of twenty in the class means that the sample is probably indicative of general patterns in this class, under these conditions. Also, the specific situation may not be replicable.

Another limitation of error analysis in general is that it does not attempt to find what the learner is doing correctly. This study focused solely on errors rather than 'correct' language production. Due to the nature of this assignment, this study has been limited to looking at errors rather than at the totality of the writers' language production, which would be a much more daunting task.

There has been no attempt to determine the source of the errors (aside from spelling and capitalization which are obviously performative in nature, and qualify as mistakes and not errors). As Taylor (1986) state: "the error source may be psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, epistemic, or may reside in the discourse structure." This study makes no attempt at identifying the error source. Ultimately, this may be of far greater interest than a simple error taxonomy.

## **VII : Conclusions**

This error analysis study has provided me with insight into the errors the writers' in this class are making. This information may be useful for classroom instruction, if incorporated into a larger curriculum that includes affirmation of the creative and dynamic aspects of learners' inter-language. Conducting this study has also confirmed my belief that what constitutes good writing is fundamentally a subjective phenomena. Error analysis does not offer much insight into this subjective world. Rather, it assumes that what constitutes the major obstacle to effective writing is the production of errors. Error analysis, although useful for describing the learners' ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, cannot explain why errors are occurring or how to fix them. Error analysis cannot explain why a grammatically perfect but ineffective piece of writing is of poor quality. If one starts with the assumption that writing is a way of creating meaning, not demonstrating grammatical knowledge, then meaning must emerge from the totality of the writing, not from just one aspect. Grammar appears to be only one such aspect. Creating meaning is the key to good

writing, not creating grammatically accurate sentences.

Encouraging the writer to think of him/herself as a writer is one of the goals of any writing course. Error analysis assumes that the reader's knowledge of prescriptive grammar is 'correct' while the writer's evolving inter-language is 'incorrect'. Positioning the writer in this way *vis a vis* the reader cannot but have a negative impact on the development of the identity of the writer as an effective communicator with a valid voice. The role that error analysis can play in helping the writer to develop a creative and personal control over the grammar, which acknowledges the validity of the writer's inter-language, and which encourages the creation of meaning over grammatical correctness, remains unclear.

Error treatment has traditionally been part of an uncritical approach to culture and identity. The challenge that has surfaced as this critical action research transpired was how to treat errors within a framework of a critical approach to culture. A framework for this will qualitatively change the discourse surrounding accuracy, errors, and how one gains entrance into a foreign and unfamiliar discourse community. In the traditional error identification/correction paradigm we could see the institutional culture as a fixed, distinct entity into which non-native English speakers were initiated, inducted, and eventually assimilated. As a critical approach to culture takes over, cultural boundaries become permeable rather than fixed, which means that the culture of the discourse community will also be permeated and changed. As these discourse communities cope with the growth of periphery students as part of the student body it is crucial how these communities themselves negotiate with periphery students. One normally assumes that this change is centered in the student, but one implication of a critical culture concept is that the institutional culture is also in the process of evolving, adapting, and changing to either accommodate or shut themselves off from this influence.

As I reflect on my own teaching and how it will change after this study, I am convinced that changing consciousness about the term 'culture' is causing a tidal shift in our approach to teaching EAP courses and error treatment as part of that practice. By applying the post-modern defined 'culture' to our classroom practice, students become empowered to play an active role in their own acquisition of a foreign discourse, and induction into that community. Culture, in this post-modern sense as an agency of change, can bring about what Atkinson (2003) refers to as "unveiling the fissures, inequalities, disagreements, and cross-cutting influences that exist in and around all cultural scenes." (p. 627) Viewing the institution as 'culture' and the classroom as a culture within culture, one that needs to be negotiated by the student and instructor, offers participants the opportunity to deconstruct the scene, to find their authentic place and voice.

## Appendix A: Essays in complete form

### Student A

#### Title: Important or not

As you know, music is a part of our life now. Should we make every high-school student know how to play at least on musical instrument? I will say: NO. Music is popular, but not everybody like it. If we require all of them to study how to play, some students will have less interest in their main subjects. The musical instrument are kind of expensive, Some parent will not like to spend those money. I think there are a lot of problems.

Firstly, I don't think every high-school students like music that much. Although the music is playing a important part of out entertainment life, but somebody don't like it. Like me, I don't like music, if you ask me to learn how to play musical instrument, that will drive me crazy. I can't sit down at one place for few hours with studying things that makes me sleepy. There is no reason to force students learn things they dislike.

Secondly, if playing musical instrument is required to study in high-school, it is also a bad thing to students are crazy for music. They are nature of music, if you make them study music as a important course, they will lose interest in all the other main subjects, Math, science, history . . . . . those things bored them a lot at long time ago. If they get a chance to study music, I think they will pay all their attention to it. They will no longer study other boring subjects anymore.

Thirdly, a musical instrument is expensive. I don't think it is necessary to spend this kind of money. All the kids are capricious, they may think the musical instrument is a toy. If they are tired of it, they might ask for a new one. It is a common phenomena which is happened by most teenageres Don't try to turn your kids become unstoppable?

According these three points, I think this is not a right time to let all the high-school students study about musical instrument. In my opinion, there are too many troubles. Some students don't like it, some parents don't like to spend money on it, it will bring down student's culture study skill. We should think about these things before we change our education system.

### Student B

#### (untitled)

The issue of wheather immigrants should try to teach their language to their children is usually be talked about. Alouthg some people think that is not that important, I strongly support that immigrants should teach their own language to their children. Moreover, not only try to teach them but also should let them learn it as a mother language. It is important because their language contact whith their culture; learn more language can make them more successful; and many languages are losing.

Frist of all, The chief reason of my view is that lose language means los their culture. For example, if you don't know you own language How can you understant a beautiful old porm from your own culture, How can you find out the dital feelings of your group of people. Alouthg some people form other culture who turdy what to learn something about a civelazation, they will try to learn this language. Civelazation be write down by language, be sing by language. They can test each other.

Next, learn more languages can make people more successful. It be weidly know already. All most everyone try to learn a second language. It can make people camonicat with more people, get more chances. For



immigration family, they have at least two languages already. Is there any reason to lose it?

At the end, another reason is many languages are losing. For a large language it may not matter that their people immigrate to a new country and don't speak their mother tongue any more. However, for some small language, it should be a big loss. Some people might think there are less languages in the world is not bad, but it means some cultures are lost with that. Is it good to see the world all in one color? Every civilization, every language has its own value.

All in all, immigrants should try to let their children learn their language, and as well as they can. It is good because they will know more about their culture; they may become more successful, and it is good to keep the languages. It is important, time will show us that.

## Student C

(untitled)

In our society, we always can hear the argument about whether the high-school should arrange music into the curriculum; require students to learn musical instrument. Nevertheless, I believe that music is a good thing in our life. So it should be learned in the high school. In this essay, I will tell three points about why music should be required in the high-school. One is that music is a part of our brain; one is that music can help our study and work; another is that music is our culture, our civilization, and our heritage.

First, in terms of scientific deep study, music is a part of inherent function of our brain. When we were still in our mother's body, the music which is played close to mother's stomach can influence babies' growth. In some cases of scientific research, the same music can give the same feeling to different people who haven't listened to the music at all. Obviously, as our basic function of our bodies, we need to develop it, and improve it.

That is no doubt about that appropriate music can relax our brain, can make us calm down when we are frustrated, can help us get some done on difficult cases. In the high-school, students work hard. They need good help. Music has this good function to make them study well. A lot of kinds of music are found that they can help people thinking, working when they learn them.

As summary, we have seen three advantages on the music studying in high-school. So they have been the answers about the requirement that we should put music into the curriculum in high school or not. The students don't know music in the school, is it ridiculous? So we should choose music curriculum in high-school.

## Appendix B: Error Identification

### Student A: Error Identification

The error analysis will follow a simple format. Each sentence is written exactly as it appears in the student's essay in italics. Beneath the sentence is a list of the errors that appear in that sentence, numbered continuously. Paragraph indentations are shown with indentations of the sentence; indented sentences are the first sentences of new paragraphs.

*As you know, music is a part of our life now.*

(No grammar errors.)

*Should we make every high-school student know how to play at least on musical instrument?*

1) spelling: [on]

*I will say: NO.*

2)tense: [will]

3)capitalization: [NO]

*Music is popular, but not everybody like it.*

4)subject / verb agreement: [everybody like]

*If we require all of them to study how to play, some students will have less interest in their main subjects.*

(No grammar errors.)

*The musical instrument are kind of expensive, Some parent will not like to spend those money.*

5)article: [The musical]

6)subject / verb agreement: [musical instrument]

7)run-on sentence

8)capitalization: [expensive, Some]

9)demonstrative adjective: [those money]

*I think there are a lot of problems.*

(No grammar problems.)

*Firstly, I don't think every high-school students like music that much.*

10)subject / verb agreement: [every . . like]

*Although the music is playing a important part of out entertainment life, but somebody don't like it.*

11)article: [the] to [0]

12)tense: [is playing] to [plays]

13)article: [a] to [an]

14)preposition: [of] to [in]

15)spelling: [out] to [our]

16)word usage: [entertainment life] to [life, in terms of entertainment]

17)conjunction: [but] to [0]

18)word usage: [somebody] to [some people]

*Like me, I don't like music, if you ask me to learn how to play musical instrument, that will drive me crazy.*

19)run-on sentence:

20)word usage/style: [Like me] to [Like me, for example.]

21)article: [play musical instrument] to [play a musical instrument]

22)relative pronoun: [that] to [it]

*I can't sit down at one place for few hours with studying things that makes me sleepy.*

article: [for few hours]

23)conjunction: [hours with studying]

24)subject verb agreement: [things that makes]

*There is no reason to force students learn things they dislike.*

25)preposition: [students learn]

*Secondly, if playing musical instrument is required to study in high-school, it is also a bad thing to students are crazy for music.*

26)article: [playing (a) musical]

27)word order: [to study] is unnecessary

28)preposition: [bad thing to (for) students]

29)relative pronoun: [students (who) are crazy]

30)preposition: [crazy for (about) music.]

*They are nature of music, if you make them study music as a important course, they will lose interest in all the other main subjects, Math, science, history . . . . . those things bored them a lot at long time ago.*

31)unclear meaning: [They are nature of music]

32)run-on sentence

33)article: [as a(n) important course]

34)punctuation: [subjects, Math]

35)capitalization: [Math]

36)run-on sentence

*If they get a chance to study music, I think they will pay all their attention to it.*

37)word usage: [will pay all]

*They will no longer study other boring subjects anymore.*

38)article: [study other]

*Thirdly, a musical instrument is expensive.*

(No grammar errors.)

*I don't think it is necessary to spend this kind of money.*

(No grammar errors.)

*All the kids are capricious, they may think the musical instrument is a toy.*

39)article: [the kids]

40)word usage: [capricious]

41)run-on sentence

*If they are tired of it, they might ask for a new one.*

(No grammar errors.)

*It is a common phenomena which is happened by most teenageres Don't try to turn your kids become unstoppable?*

42)run-on sentence

43)relative pronoun: [which]

44)tense: [which is happened]

45)preposition: [by]

46)spelling: [teenagers]

47)run-on sentence

48)meaning unclear / grammar problem unclear [Don't try to turn your kids unstoppable?]

*According these three points, I think this is not a right time to let all the high-school students study about musical instrument.*

49)preposition: [According these]

50)article: [a right time]

51)adverb: [about]

52)subject verb agreement: [musical instrument]

*In my opinion, there are too many troubles.*

53)word usage: [troubles] change to [difficulties]

*Some students don't like it, some parents don't like to spend money on it, it will bring down student's culture study skill.*

54)run-on sentence

55)meaning unclear / grammar problem unclear: [student's culture study skill]

*We should think about these things before we change our education system.*

(No grammar errors.)

## Student B

(untitled)

*The issue of wheather immigrants should try to teach their language to their children is usually be talked about.*

1. spelling: [wheather]

2. word usage: [usually] chagne to [often]

3. tense: [be talked]

*Alouthg some people think that is not that important, I strongly support that immigrants should teach their own language to their children.*

4. spelling: [alouthg]

5. relative pronoun: [that]

6. word usage: [support (the position?) that]

*Moreover, not only try to teach them but also should let them learn it as a mother language.*

7. sentence fragment: no subject

8. object unclear: teach them what? What is [it?]

*It is important because their language contact whith their culture; learn more language can make them more successful; and many languages are losing.*

9. preposition: [because (of)]

10. spelling: [whith]

11. gerund/infinitive: [learn]

12.subject /verb agreement: [more language]

13.tense: [are losing]

*Frist of all, The chief reason of my view is that lose language means los their culture.*

14.spelling: [frist]

15.capitolization: [The]

16.preposition: [of (for)]

17.tense: [lose]

18.spelling: [los]

19.subject or article is missing: [lose (their) language]

*For example, if you don't know you own language How can you understant a beautiful old porm from your own culture, How can you find out the dital feelings of your group of people.*

20.possessive pronoun: [you]

21.capitalization: [How]

22.spelling: [understant]

23.spelling: [beautful]

24.spelling: [porm]

25.run-on sentence

26.capitalization: [How]

27.unclear word: [dital]

28.preposition: [of (for) your group]

*Alouthg some people form other culture who turdy what to learn something about a civelazation, they will try to learn this language.*

29.spelling: [alouthg]

30.spelling: [form]

31.subject verb agreement: [from other culture(s)]

32.spelling: [turdy]

33.run-on sentence

34.spelling: [civelation]

35.meaning unclear / grammar problem unclear

*Civelazation be write down by language, be sing by language.*

36.spelling: [civelazation]

37.copula: [be (a)]

38.tense: [write (written)]

39.run-on sentence

40.copula: [be (a)]

41.tense: [be sing (is sung)]

*They can test each other:*

No grammar errors.

*Next, learn more languages can make people more successful.*

42. gerund / infinitive: [learn (learning)]

*It be weirdly know already.*

43. spelling: weirdly

44. copula: [be (is)]

*All most everyone try to learn a second language.*

45. spelling: [All most]

46. subject / verb agreement: [everyone try to]

*It can make people camonicat with more people, get more chances.*

47. word choice: [make (help)]

48. spelling: [camonicat]

49. conjunction missing: [people, (and) get]

*For immigrantion family, their have at least tow languages already.*

50. article: [For immigrantion family]

51. spelling: [immigrantion]

52. word form: [immigrantion (immigrant)]

53. possessive pronoun: [their (they)]

54. spelling: [tow]

*Is there any reason to lose it?*

(No grammar mistakes.)

*At the end, another reason is many languages are losing.*

55. word choice: [At the end, (Finally)]

56. relative pronoun: [is (that) many]

57. tense: [are losing (being lost)]

*For a large language It may doesn't matter that their people immigrant to a new country and don't speak their morthertane any more.*

58. capitalization: [It]

59. word choice: [may (might)]

60. spelling: [dosn't]

61. modal tense: [may doesn't (might not)]

62. word form: [immigrant (immigrate)]

63. spelling: [morthert]

64. spelling: [tone (tounge)]

*However, for some small language, it should be a big lose.*

65. subject / verb agreement: [some small language]

66. modal: [should]

67. word form: (loss)]

*Some people maight think there are less language in the world is not bad, but it means some culture lose with that.*

- 68.spelling: [maight]
- 69.subject / verb agreement: [there are less language]
- 70.sentence structure: [in the world is not bad]
- 71.word form: [lose]
- 72.tense: [lose (is being lost)]
- 73.adverb: [along]

*Is it good too see the world all in one cuoloer.*

- 74.spelling: [cuoloer]
- 75.punctuation: no question mark

*Every civilazation, every language has its own value.*

- 76.spelling: [civilazation]
- 77.punctuation: [every language(.)]

*All in all, immigrants should try to let their children learn their language, and as well as they can.*

(No grammar mistakes)

*It is good because they will know more about their culture; they may became more successful, and it is good for keep the languages.*

- 78.word form: [became]
- 79.punctuation: parallel structure, needs a second semi-colon.
- 80.infinitive / gerund: [keep(ing)]
- 81.missing word: [languages (alive)]

*It is important, time will should us that.*

- 82.run-on sentence: requires a semi-colon or a period.
- 83.word choice: [should (show)]

Student C

(untitled)

*In our society, we always can hear the argument about whether the high-school should arrange music into the curriculum; require students to learn musical instrument.*

- 1.article: [the high-school]
- 2.plural: [high-school]
- 3.word choice: [arrange]
- 4.sentence structure: use of semi-colon

*Nevertheless, I believe that music is a good think in our life.*

- 5.spelling: [neverthless]
- 6.spelling: [think]

*So it should be learn in the high school.*

- 7.punctuation: [So(,) it]
- 8.tense: [learn]

*In this essay, I will tell three points about why music should be required in the high-school.*

- 9. word choice: [tell]
- 10.article addition: [the]
- 11.plural: [high-school]

*One is that music is a part of our brain; one is that music can help our study and work; another is that music is our culture, our civilization, and our heritage.*

- 12.gerund or infinitive: [study]
- 13.gerund or infinitive: [work]

*First, in term of scientific deep study, music is a part of inherent function of our brain.*

- 14. word choice: [term]
- 15. word order: [scientific deep study]
- 16.article omission: [part of inherent]
- 17.plural s: [brain]

*When we were still in our mother's body, the music which is played close to mother's stomach can influence babies growth.*

- 18.tense: [which is played]
- 19.article omission: [to mother's]
- 20.article omission: [influence babies]
- 21.spelling: [badies]

*In some cases of scientific reserch, the same music can give the same feeling to different people who hasn't listen to the music at all.*

- 22.spelling: [research]
- 23.tense: [hasn't listened]
- 24.article addition: [the music]

*Obviously, as our basic function of our bodies, we need to develope it, and improve it. meaning unclear, grammar error is unclear: [as our basic function of our bodies]*

- 25.spelling: [develope]
- 26.pronoun addition: [develope it]
- 27.pronoun use makes meaning unclear: [it] and [it]

*That isn't doubt about that approprite music can relax our brain, can make us calm dome when we are fritherend, can help us get some due on difficult cases.*

- 28.idiom: [that isn't doubt] probably was based on [There isn't any doubt]
- 29.spelling: [approprite]
- 30.meaning is unclear, grammatical problem is unclear: [get some due on difficult cases]



*In the high-school, students work hard.*

- 31. article addition: [the high-school]
- 32. punctuation: [school, student]

*They need good help.*

no grammar problems, but the meaning is unclear, nevertheless

*Music has this good function to make them study well.*

- 33. sentence structure: semi-colon or a comma and relative pronoun are needed

*A lot of kinds of music are found that they can help people thinking, working when they learn them.*

- 34. pronoun addition: [they can] they is unnecessary
- 35. gerund / infinitive: [thinking]
- 36. pronoun's are unclear: [they] and [them]

*Last, most music are past from old age.*

- 37. tense: [are] should be (is)
- 38. word usage: [past from] should be (past down from)

*They have a lot of meaning and deep spirit.*

- 39. pronoun overuse: [They] should be (This music)
- 40. uncountable noun: [have] should be (has) due to music being uncountable

*Those composers put their thought into the music.*

- 41. plural 's': [thought]

*From that, we can learn the knowledge.*

- 42. article overuse: [the knowledge]

*They are our culture, our civilization, and our heritage too.*

- 43. pronoun overuse: [They are] should be (Music is)
- 44. uncountable noun: [They are] refers to music. If pronoun is used, it should be (It is)

*As a kind of study, music should be put in our high-school.*

No grammar problems.

*As summary, we have seen three advantages on the music studying in high-school.*

- 45. preposition: [As] should be (In)
- 46. spelling: [summry]
- 47. preposition: [on] should be (of)
- 48. word order: [on the music studying] should be (of studying music)

*So they have been the answers about the requirement that we should put music into the curriculum in high school or not.*

- 49. punctuation: [So]

- 50.tense: [they have been] should be (these are)
- 51.word choice: [answers] should be (reasons)
- 52.word choice: [about] should be (regarding)
- 53.modal overuse: [should] is unnecessary
- 54.sentence structure: [or not]

*The students don't know music in the school, is it ridiculous?*

- 55.sentence structure: [school, is] should be (school; isn't) or (school. Isn't)
- 56.negative tag question: [is it ridiculous] should be (isn't it ridiculous?)

*So we should choose music curriculum in high-school.*

- 57.punctuation: [So] should be (So, )
- 58.meaning unclear, grammar problem unclear: [choose music curriculum]
- 59.plural 's': [high-school] should be (high schools)

## Appendix D: Grading Criteria

### *Essay Grading Checklist*

#### Structure

Introduction:

- 1. Is there a topic sentence?
- 2. Is there a thesis sentence?
- 3. Is there a summary of your main points?

Body:

- 1. Are there three different points?
- 3. Is there any sign of cohesion between the points?
- 4. Do the points support the thesis sentence?

Conclusion:

- 1. Is the thesis repeated?
- 2. Is there a summary of your main points?
- 3. Does the final sentence tie-in with the introduction?

#### Mechanics

Grammar:

- 1. Are there no run-on sentences?  
(Are the periods at the right places?)
- 2. Are there properly used conjunctions?  
(Do not use conjunctions to start sentences, if only one clause in the sentence.)

3. Are there properly constructed relative clauses?  
(Use what, which, and that correctly.)

4. Are all sentences complete thoughts?  
(No sentence fragments.)

### Style

1. Is parallel structure and repetition used?
2. Are descriptive adjectives and adverbs used?
3. Is the essay interesting?

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アカデミック ライティング クラスにおける誤りの分析

クリティカル アクション リサーチ プロジェクト

ケンレイ フリーゼン

### 要 旨

アクションリサーチは研究者と被験者による共同の取り組みである。その目的は与えられた状況に対する理解を深め、複雑な社会的場面、この場合は教室に対する洞察を深めることである。同時に、クリティカル アクションリサーチは教師自身の反省を促すものでもある。本論文はマニトバ大学アカデミック ライティング クラスにおけるクリティカル アクション リサーチ である。

リサーチのそもそもの目的は学習者の誤りを検証することであったが、研究が進むにつれ、それは誤りそのものの検証から、その検証法の効果の検証へと変容した。つまり、学習者の論文を読解する際、筆者がどのようにその読み方を変化させたかということについてである。本論文は英語を母国語としない学習者のアカデミック ライティングについての視点を呈している。

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