

# Comparing Writing Errors of English Compositions for Boy and Girl Students in the English Graders of Southern Taiwan

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the comparison of the English writing errors for both boy and girl students in the eighth graders' English writing performance. The researcher collected 26 copies of English writing pieces from 26 boy and girl students in the eighth graders at Affiliated Junior High School of National Kaohsiung Normal University. This study is conducted with both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The major findings of this study are summarized as follows:

1. The results show that the levels of boy and girl students' English writing proficiency are mixed and most boy and girl students are less-experienced writers.

2. All of the errors committed by boy and girl students are mainly fall upon lexical errors and grammatical errors. In addition, subcategorization is made 11 subcategories are listed under the two major error types.
3. Among 26 copies of writing pieces, approximately about 65 % refers to grammatical errors and 26 % refers to lexical errors respectively.
4. Possible factors in the English writing errors may refer to interlingual interference, intralingual interference, induced errors, cultural differences, structural differences, and carelessness.

Keywords: Lexical Errors, Grammatical Errors, Semantic Errors, Rhetorical Errors, Gender

## I. Introduction

As food is important to living and growing up, so is writing important to thinking and learning. Many people may not know what they think until they jot down something on papers. They may also begin to learn something by drafting and publication. Thus, it is important to develop the ability of writing. To achieve the purposes, many EFL and ESL learners work hard on learning English writing. Therefore, English writing has become an important course subject of EFL/ESL learners in non-English speaking countries, and there is no exception in Taiwan.

Weigle (2002) pointed out that the process of text generation, or encoding internal ideas into written texts, might be disrupted by the need for lengthy searches for appropriate lexical and syntactic choices. For EFL students, although EFL students know how to write sentences and paragraphs, they cannot write precisely and concisely. It is not easy for them to identify and to detect writing errors in their English compositions.

Corder (1967) divided writing errors into four types, including (a) lexical errors, (b) grammatical errors, (c) semantic errors, and (d) rhetorical errors. Lexical errors are errors in which wrong spelling and capitalization are made. Grammatical errors are errors in which ungrammatical structures are made, such as S-V disagreement and inappropriate tag questions. Semantic errors refer to errors that do not make logical sense in sentences or paragraphs, or even reveal the inaccurate meaning, such as Chinese English sentences and irrelevant reference. Rhetorical errors refers to the errors in which no precise and concise expressions of the sentences are made, such as parallelism.

Erten and Topkaya (2009) found that a significant difference between male and female students in their tolerance of ambiguity which showed that the females have better tolerance of ambiguity than males. Accordingly, the common gender issue of EFL foreign students is that female students write better than male students.

As English composition has become an essential teaching component in junior and senior high schools in EFL instruction, many researchers have explored the effects of

students' writing errors in their English compositions in Taiwan currently. However, neither studies analyzes errors in English compositions for junior high school students. In addition, it is necessary to compare writing errors of English compositions for boy and girl students in the further study.

The study aims to compare the English writing errors for boy and girl students in the eighth grade of southern Taiwan. Specifically, there is one focus as the follows:

1. To check the rhetorical errors in English compositions for the boy and girl students.

Based on these purposes, one research question of the study is designed as the following:

1. Is there any significant difference in rhetorical errors of English compositions for the boy and girl students?

## II. Literature Review

Petric and Czár (2003) claimed that writing process included pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing. In the pre-writing stage, a writer may collect data to support his or her ideas on a topic. In the while-writing stage, a writer may draft and revise the ideas of his or her writing. In the post-writing stage, a writer may submit his or her paper to someone as expected.

Hedge (1991) claimed that the nature of writing itself was not interesting enough to motivate English learners to practice regularly. When English learners write their English compositions, they may not involve themselves spontaneously in the process of English writing. While writing, English learners also tired of modifying their English sentences based on the preciseness and conciseness. After writing, they may not want to revise or edit it for their teachers, only for readers.

Raimes (1985) found that the unskilled L1 writers edited their written works as often as the unskilled L2 writers. When unskilled L2 writers composed their English compositions, they often wrote with poor academic writing skills, which made them feel frustrated and anxious in the writing process. Moreover, most of them struggled with the interference of their mother tongue, which made them think of the translation between L1 and L2. Therefore, they could not write fluently as unskilled L1 writers, who wrote with qualified sentences among paragraphs.

Nevertheless, Raimes, (1991) suggested teachers apply the process approach to teach composition with the attention to content prior to form. Later on, the popularity of this approach decreased due to its constraints such as time factor, workload related to marking the drafts, teacher's belief, and linguistic accuracies and so on (Pour-Mohammadi, Abidin & Fong, 2012). There is a need to compare their works with the model where the model is introduced in the later part of the process of writing instruction (Chow, 2007).

Steele (2004) proposed four stages in the product approach, including first, students may study model texts and then highlight the features of different genres. Second, students are isolated and they are allowed to practice the highlighted features. Third, students may organize their thoughts and ideas in their English compositions. Fourth, students may choose comparable writing tasks, such as guided writing and free writing.

Moreover, Badger and White (2000) proposed five strengths of the product approach to writing instruction; including:

1. Writing enhances students' writing proficiency,
2. Writing mainly concerns with the knowledge about the structure of language,
3. Writing highlights the syntax as rhetorical drills,
4. Writing development is mainly the result of the imitation input of thoughtful ideas,
5. Writing models considers as teacher-centered for students.

The process approach involves the transformation of the writers' ideas and the readers' reactions (Susser, 1994). On one hand, writers transfer what they have in their minds and write down on the pieces of papers with meaningful sentences. On the other hand, readers make comments for writers to modify their writing.

In addition, Diamond (1999) and Graham (2006b) claimed a variety of strengths in the process approach to writing instruction; including:

1. Writing allows people to communicate with others removed in both distance and time,

2. Writing provides a powerful medium for persuading readers,
3. Writing offers writers to express about one's feelings and experiences,
4. Writing regards as an useful tool for learning, and
5. Writing makes people relaxed in the process of writing something

Devitt, Bawarshi, and Reif (2003) claimed that a genre approach to writing instruction enabled outsiders (a) to a discourse community, (b) to connect what community members know, and (c) to do with what they say, and how they say in their language practices.

Hyon (2002) criticized that the genre approach to writing course might limit vocabulary and comprehension building. When learners lack insufficient vocabulary to write something to convince the readers, they may not write what they think of their minds directly. However, they should pay attention to the genres of comprehension they read.

Chang (1993) claimed that in the sentence completion/sentence combination, students are asked to complete or combine the fragment of phrases or vocabulary, to practice sentence patterns with several sentence structures, or to perform substitutions. To be specific, students are asked to practice English sentences with different sentence patterns under organized sentence structures. In addition, students are also required to write something different from their original English sentence structures.

However, Chang (1993) pinpointed that the sentence completion/sentence combination was mechanic and lacked creativity, so students narrowed down their

memorization of vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures. Because of the restriction in constructing the sentences with simple sentences structures, students narrow down their knowledge on grammatical sentences at the coat of making their English writing less academic.

As for guided writing, it provides some paragraphs for students to compose a beginning paragraph or to write an ending paragraph. Students can get clues from the appointed paragraphs to write the beginning and the ending paragraphs. In the writing process, students can form the basic concept of a whole essay. However, their writing may not present their inner voice. Susser (1994) claimed that guided writing emphasized the importance of linguistic accuracy and error avoidance. The writing teachers may grade the underlying parts of students' compositions, such as verb tense, subject-object agreement, etc. to help students to not make errors in them. Guided writing stresses on vocabulary memorization, grammatical accuracy and model writing (Chang, 1993).

Chang (1993) proposed three drawbacks of guided writing. First, students may lack creativity in their English compositions was. Second, students may write content with poor organization. Last but not least, students may be forced to copy ideas or adopt rote memorization for a writing class or tests, seldom for their interest, desire and purposes. Therefore, they may pay little attention to enhancing their writing skills and doing more practical writing exercises.

Sasaki and Hirose (1996) claimed that free writing could help students to develop good EFL writers. Because of drafting creative ideas on a piece of paper, students have the cognition of organizing different ideas and compose meaningful sentences among paragraphs. However, Leki (1985) claimed that free writing did not require much organization, so students did not worry about word forms, such as grammar, spelling, or the organization of their thoughts. Therefore, free writing may make students to think creatively about what they are going to write through the writing process.

Stead (2005) proposed five benefits of free writing as follows:

1. Free writing is not confined,
2. Free writing allows students to make mistakes without judging accuracy in writing and to develop greater fluency in writing,
3. Free writing is a good form of brainstorming,
4. Free writing promotes new ideas or concepts into the writing,
5. Free writing encourages students to explore and to aware of their personal inner voice without the constraints of certain ideas.

When students write their English compositions, they often make errors in it, such as lexical errors or grammatical errors. Therefore, writing errors contain features. To be specific, Zamel (1985) claimed that L2 teachers tended to pay attention to grammar correctness more than to long passages of English writing. So, the teachers' error correction overemphasizes

grammar use rather than transmission of meaning, overall organization, and content development. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1996) claimed that grammar correctness deprived writers of the drive to improve their proficiency. When students write their English compositions, their writing teachers often ask them to put efforts on correcting concise grammars in their English writing. However, without correcting the errors in students' English writing, writing teachers regard their English writing as non-academic, which make their readers hard to understand the content of their English compositions. Furthermore, students' English writing proficiency would be controlled by the correctness of using appropriate grammars in their English writing.

Writing errors can also be classified into four types, including (a) lexical errors, (b) grammatical errors, (c) semantic errors, and (d) rhetorical errors. Lexical errors refer to spelling, word-compounding, capitalization, and morphology.

Akande, Adedeji, and Okanlawon (2006) found that 225 technical college students did not have high competence in the use of words related to their different areas of specialization as they normally made mistakes resulting from overgeneralization of rules, wrong analogy and wrong spelling.

Grammatical errors include S-V agreement. Qashoa (2006) claimed that English grammatical rules were intricate and the UAE secondary school students were weary of taking grammar classes with rote memorization and drills which they found both boring and

difficult to understand or appreciate. Without mastering most English grammatical rules, the UAE secondary school students could not communicate in English.

Pajares (2003) proposed that despite the fact that boys tend to over-estimate their writing ability, they still have lower writing self-efficacy than girls. Furthermore, In addition, Bandura (1994) found that poor writers tend to perform being reluctant to engage in writing works and making incomplete pieces of writing, while students with higher writing self-efficacy have been found to complete writing tasks at a higher standard.

Nancy (1997) found that girls performed better than boys in verbal language use and writing assessments. Specifically, girls outscored boys in arts, writing, and social service whereas boys outperformed girls in mechanical areas, athletics, and science.

Male students tend to write more narrative pieces of writing, while female students tend to write much more creatively, imaginatively, and reflectively with a stronger focus on emotion and personal affection (Murphy, Patricia and Elwood, Jannette, 1998). Carrasquillo (1994) indicated that females demonstrated higher degrees of motivation to English writing than males did. Therefore, the nature of gender distinction in their affectivity toward language learning might pose positive or negative impacts for EFL learners.

Knox (2006) stated that females and males differ in constructing their possible selves. Females tend to be interdependent in learning, whereas males are prone to be independent-oriented. Also, females are more considerate and talkative than males when interacting with

the others in a learning environment. Hence, the gender-typed learning styles contribute to good communication on language learning.

According to Creighton (2011), she found that most preservice teachers agreed that there were psychological and behavior differences between male and female students. To be specific, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) stated that females are superior to males in verbal and linguistic functions from infancy through adulthood. The gender-based concept might result in unequal treatments for the boy and girl students in English classrooms.

Cheng (2004) found that writing anxiety can have profound effects on EFL learners' writing performance. However, Han (2018) found that a negative association between English writing self-efficacy and English writing anxiety among middle school students. Therefore, self-efficacy could play a central role in situations where anxiety occurs (Bandura, 1993). Additionally, English self-efficacy could serve as a buffering effect against parental pressure expectation that affects English anxiety. Thus, enhancing students' English self-efficacy should be considered as essential to lower students' English anxiety.

### III. Methodology

The subjects for the present study were 26 boy and girl students of the eighth graders in an English class from Affiliated Junior High School of National Kaohsiung Normal University in southern Taiwan. Sixteen of them were boy students and the other ten were girl

students.

To collect and analyze data for this study, two instruments are employed. The instruments are listed as follows:

1. 26 English compositions
2. A writing error checklist

In this study, 26 English compositions were collected from 26 boy and girl students of the eighth graders at Affiliated Junior High School of National Kaohsiung Normal University.

The two topics of their assigned English compositions are An Invitation Card and My Summer Vacation.

The data collected in this study were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Prior to the data analysis, the researcher collected 26 English compositions from 26 boy and girl students in Affiliated Junior High School of National Kaohsiung Normal University.

Moreover, the researcher divided the English writing errors into four types, including (a) lexical errors, (b) grammatical errors, (c) semantic errors, and (d) rhetorical errors. Then, boy and girl students' English writing errors were identified and classified. Finally, they would be analyzed, sampled, and discussed.

#### IV. Results and Discussion

For the lexical errors of English writing for the boy and the girl students, they are

classified into four subtypes, including (a) capitalization errors, (b) spelling errors, (c) morphology errors.

In terms of capitalization errors, both boy and girl students' capitalization errors can be supported by their extracted English writing samples as follows:

Boy-1-1. The picture shown in the postcard was \*love river (Love River). The night views were very beautiful.

Girl-2-5-1. \*after (After) that we visited this island and bought some gifts to my friend, \*Because (because) her birthday was coming.

Based on the extracted writing, Boy-1-1 do not know how to clarify general nouns with proper nouns. However, the girl student care about the capitalization. So, they make a few capitalization errors in their English writing. Therefore, the boy students care less about capitalization than the girl students in English writing.

In terms of spelling errors, both boy and girl students' spelling errors can be supported by their extracted English writing samples as follows:

Boy-1-4. Is it hard to go there? No, take the \*LRT (MRT) there and you can watch a movie or go shopping.

Boy-1-16-1. There are many \*delicacies (delicious) foods.

Girl-2-3-1. On the summer vacation, the weather was so \*hote (hot).

Based on the extracted writing, boy student pay less attention to correct spelling than

the girl students. Furthermore, Fender (2008) identified EFL students' spelling errors two types, including, (a) words and (b) multi-syllabic words. With the extracted writing, Boy-1-4 misspell the vocabulary, they may be distracted from the pronunciation of the vocabulary in English writing. However, the girl student have better awareness of spelling the right words in an English sentence than the boy students. On the other hand, when boy students tend to write with the word that has more syllables, they make spelling errors based on the confusion of noun and adjective. For instance, Boy-1-16-1 is unable to make the differences between nouns and adjectives. Therefore, he make the spelling errors, whereas the girl students do not made this spelling errors in their English writing.

In terms of morphology errors, both boy and girl students' morphology errors can be supported by their extracted English writing samples as follows:

Boy-1-6-1. These are traditional temples that \*are talking about (represent) the stories of the ancient people.

Girl-2-1. So, we go to asked the situation staff \*what the (which way) we need to go.

Based on the extracted writing, it shows that boy student do not pay attention to the logic of English. Coates (1997) attributed the errors of writing to the differences in both male and female students' processing information. For instance, female used more words about psychological and social processes. Male used more words about object properties and impersonal topics. In addition, there is a different logic morphology in English and Chinese

language system. In English, the verbs talk or tell have to be proceeded with an agent subject, such as a man or an adult. Otherwise, the verbs represent or show are used for a non-agent subject, such as temples, rivers, or night markets. But, there is no such a logic morphology in Chinese. So many Chinese boy students in this study do not have the sense about the non-agent subjects in their mother tongue. So, they made a lot of morphological errors compared with the Chinese girl student in this study. Thus, the girl student make less morphological errors in their English writing.

For the grammatical errors of English writing for the boy and girl students, they are classified into five subtypes, including (a) verb errors, (b) adjective and adverb errors, (c) clause errors, (d) conjunction and preposition errors, and (e) determiner errors.

In terms of tense errors, both boy and girl students' tense errors can be supported by their extracted writing.

Boy-1-15. The picture shown in the picture \*is (was) Sizihwan, a beautiful harbor you will never forget.

Girl-2-1. On the summer vacation, the weather \*is (was) so hot.

Based on the extracted writing, it shows that Boy-1-5 neither uses the tense was for is nor the girl students use the past tenses took, went, and found in their English writing. Both boy and girl students do not aware the changeable tenses, which are used in their English writing. Accordingly, these errors in the boy and girl students' English writing may result

from the absence of tense forms, such as was, took, went, and found.

In terms of adjective and adverb errors, both boy and girl students' adjective and adverb errors can be supported by their extracted writing.

Boy-1-16. There are many \*delicacies (delicate) food.

Girl-2-1. We are very grateful to him, soon we find \*a fight (an accurate) way to the waiting line.

Based on the extracted writing, Boy-1-16 neither uses delicate for delicacies nor Girl-2-1 writes an accurate for a fight in their English writing. Both boy and girl students do not aware the adjectives, which are used in their English writing. However, both boy and girl students do not have the basic ideas of how to use adjectives in their English writing appropriately. Accordingly, English teachers should be patient and to help both boy and girl students correct their adjective errors in their English writing.

Boy-1-6. Have you (ever) went to this place? It will be a pity if you haven't been here before.

Girl-2-8. Later on, we visited the Zhengjiang University, I \*most (mostly) remembered the "Food Street". There were a lot of delicious foods on the "Food Street".

Based on the extracted writing, Boy-1-6 neither inserts ever in the English sentence nor Girl-2-8 writes mostly for most in their English writing. It seems that both boy and girl students do not aware the adverbs in their English writing.

In terms of clause errors, both boy and girl students' clause errors can be supported by their extracted writing.

Boy-1-8. Because of the well-served public transportation, you can take the MRT that (... , which) you can go to eat many foods or buy souvenirs.

Girl-2-5. After we visited this island, we \*thought about (think that) we have to buy some gifts for my friend because her birthday was coming.

Based on the extracted writing, Boy-1-8 does not use which you can go to eat many foods or buy souvenirs for that you can go to eat many foods or buy souvenirs in his English writing. In addition, Girl-2-5 does not use think that we have to buy some gifts for my friend because her birthday was coming for think about we have to buy some gifts for my friend because her birthday was coming in her English writing. Both boy and girl students do not aware the clause, which are used in their English writing. However, in the Chinese language system, there are seldom clause errors in Chinese sentences. Accordingly, these errors in the boy and girl students' English writing may result from the absence clauses, such as that and which in their English writing.

In terms of conjunction and preposition errors, both boy and girl students' conjunction and preposition errors can be supported by their extracted writing.

Boy-1-4. Dream Mall is a popular shopping mall in Kaohsiung \*as well as (and) there are many nice restaurants, a movie theater and many kinds of stores.

Girl-2-6. This summer vacation was very interesting, \*as well as (and) I also practiced English with my cousins. I can't wait for the next summer vacation.

Based on the extracted writing, Boy-1-4 neither uses and for as well as in his English writing nor Girl-2-6 uses and for as well as in her English writing, either. Both boy and girl students do not aware the conjunctions in their English writing. However, in the Chinese language system, there are conjunctions used in Chinese sentences. Accordingly, these errors in the boy and girl students' English writing may result from the absence conjunction, such as and in their English writing.

Boy-1-4. Have you ever heard \*about (of) Kaohsiung? Kaohsiung is located in the southern Taiwan and facing the Taiwan Strait.

Girl-2-5. After we visited this island and bought some gift \*to (for) my friend because her birthday was coming.

Based on the extracted writing, Boy-1-4 neither uses of for about in his English writing nor Girl-2-5 uses for in their English writing. Both boy and girl students do not aware the prepositions in their English writing. However, in the Chinese language system, the positions of prepositions are often changeable, which are depended on the positions in the Chinese sentences. Accordingly, these errors appeared in the boy and girl students' English writing may result from the absence prepositions, such as of and for in their English writing.

Abdul Saeed (2015) found that girl students faced most difficulty in the use of place and

direction prepositions. So, girl students chose inappropriate prepositions of place and direction for their English writing. So, misusing the prepositions may result from the girl students do not have enough knowledge about these types of prepositions.

In terms of determiner errors, both boy and girl students' determiner errors can be supported by their extracted writing.

Boy-1-10. The picture shown in the postcard was Shoushen. It's \*a (an) interesting chance for people to spend their weekend there.

Girl-2-2. On the fifth day, I did my math homework and went to the movies by myself. It is \*a (an) excellent animated movie.

Based on the extracted writing, Boy-1-10 neither uses an for a in his English writing nor Girl-2-2 uses an for a in her English writing. However, in the Chinese language system, the determiners are often referred to specific quantifiers in Chinese sentences. According, these errors in the boy and girl students' English writing may result from the absence articles, such as an in their English writing. Lee (2007) claimed the boy students might not have the correct concept of using articles a or an and their errors might result from unnoticed the vowels or consonants in the beginning of every vocabulary.

Boy-1-7. The picture shown in the postcard was Tuntex sky Tower. The Tuntex sky Tower, a 85-stray skyscraper, is the tallest building in \*the southern Taiwan.

Girl-2-4. First day, we went to Thailand by plane. We arrived at night and we live in

(the) school dorm. My friend and I were very excited, because we could sleep together.

Based on the extracted writing, Boy-1-7 neither writes the in their English writing and nor Girl-2-4 inserts the in their English writing. However, in the Chinese language system, the determiners are often referred to specific articles in Chinese sentences. Accordingly, these errors in the boy and girl students' English writing may result from the absence of determiner, such as the in their English writing. So, English teachers should carefully locate one or two of the most frequent determiner errors which are simple to explain and make students aware of them. In addition, English teachers should simply encourage students to use them more often, as they frequently omit determiners from their English writing.

The statistical results indicate that there is one correlation among lexical errors, grammatical errors, semantic errors, and rhetorical errors because one p-value is less than .05. To be specific, there is a significant correlation between gender and rhetorical errors, ( $r(209) = -.74, p = .00 < .05$ ). The study finding supports the results of the first research question in the present study, with the boy students make more rhetorical errors than the girl students in English writing. Likewise, the girl students make their errors in English writing. Wang (1991) stated that rhetorical patterns are preserved as knowledgeable and well-educated in the Chinese community. However, English rhetorical conventions value originality and creativity in English writing. To conclude, both boy and the girl students experienced certain degrees of writing difficulties in their English writing.

## V. Conclusion

After the data analysis, the major findings of the study are concluded as follows. First, from the 26 copies of both boy and girl in the eighth graders' English writing pieces, both the boy and the girl students made 238 English writing errors. However, it remains for an improvement for both teacher instructions and teaching materials.

Second, the writing errors committed by both boy and girl in the eighth graders mainly fall upon two major categories, including (a) lexical errors and (b) grammatical errors. With a view to penetrating into the core essence of both boy and girl in the eighth graders' writing performance and the distribution of the major error types in a lucid fashion, subcategorization is made by enumerating a variety of more specific items embedded under the two major error types. A total of 11 subcategories of the two major error types are listed and explained.

Third, possible causes should be credited with the occurrence of both boy and girl students' writing errors. They are (a) interlingual interference, (b) intralingual interference, (c) false concept, (d) cultural differences, (e) structural differences, and (f) carelessness, respectively. However, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) proposed that formal language learning provides the L2 learners with a benefit. The L2 learners may modify their use of the new language through some of the basic rules, which they acquired. Therefore, when those

language rules are learned correctly, the appropriate rule application may assist language learners to increase some accuracy in some situations.

In spite of the fact that the errors committed by both boy and girl in the eighth graders mainly fall upon the two major categories of error types, Doushaq (1986) indicates that there is a correlation between students' ability in L1 that might affect their L2 proficiency.

However, when both boy and girl in the eighth graders wrote English sentences, they mostly affected by the interference between the Chinese system and English system. With the transition of different language systems, both boy and girl in the eighth graders may be distracted them from writing something concise and logical for their English teachers to grade their writing pieces. Thus, the English teachers may spend time improving on both boy and girl in the eighth graders' English writing.

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