

A Study of Students' Errors in Writing

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Introduction

It has often been pointed out that a number of Japanese college students, in spite of their attempt to learn English as a foreign language for at least six years or more, find it very hard to express their own thoughts in the written form of the language. Unfortunately, the above statement seems to be true in general. A teacher often tends to assume that a college student should have adequate knowledge of English and therefore should be able to produce grammatically correct sentences. However, in reality, the students often make errors when they are asked to write. From our teaching experience, we find that most of our students are often at a loss to know what to write when they are asked to write a composition. In addition, there are so many mistakes in their compositions that it is often difficult for the teacher to interpret the meanings they intend to express. The students make various types of errors and there are possibly several reasons for them. It is the systematic analysis of the errors that enables us to account for the difficulties the students possess, and that helps us find out what corrective teaching techniques are likely to be most effective.

In this paper we would like to analyze the errors our students made in the different types of tests, and consider the implications for the teaching of writing.

I. The subjects and the procedure

In order to analyze errors, two types of tests were conducted.

1. Test 1

1) The subjects

The subjects of this study were 167 students of Tokuyama University.

These students were taking English composition and reading courses for general education when the study was conducted.

2) The procedure

The subjects were divided into two groups. One group of 75 students (group A) were given a series of pictures as shown in Figure 1, and they were asked to write three or four sentences for each picture. Another group of 92 students (group B) were given a story written in Japanese as shown in Figure 2, which tells the same story as in the series of pictures mentioned above, and the students were asked to write a composition according to the given story in Japanese. While writing, students were not permitted to consult dictionaries, grammar books, or any other aids.

与えられた 絵／日本語 を参考にして トムとメアリーのある朝の様子を英語で書きなさい。

Fig. 1

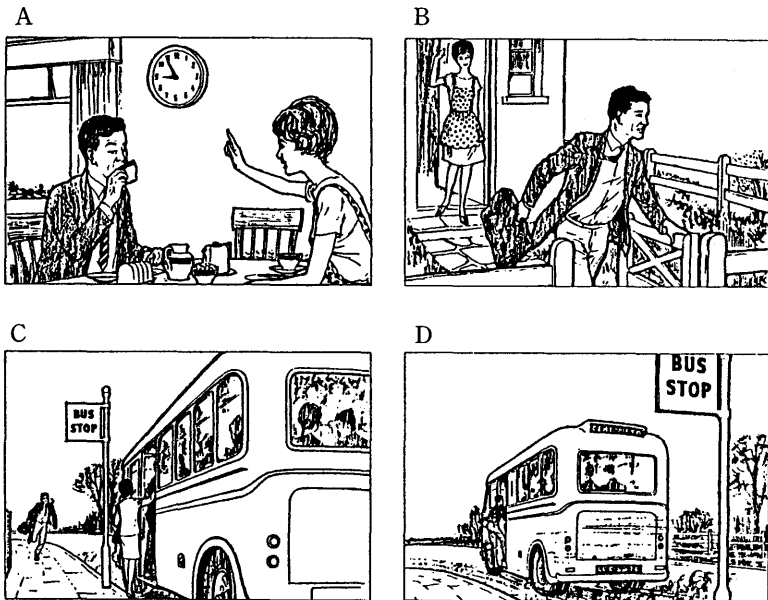


Fig. 2

もう8時55分だった。トムとメアリーはテーブルについて朝食を食べていた。トムはコーヒーを飲んでいるところだった。メアリーは壁の時計を指さして『9時5分前よ、急がなくちゃ会社に遅れるわよ』と言った。そこでトムは手にカバンを持って急いで家を飛び出した。メアリーは戸口に立って、手を振ってトムを見送った。トムはバス停まで大急ぎで走った。バス停にはもうバスが止っていた。何人かの人がバスに乗っているとところだった。バスは動き始めた。でもトムは何とかそのバスに飛乗ることができた。

materials from *Progressive Picture Compositions*
by Donn Byrne

2. Test 2

1) The subjects

Test 2 was carried out with 160 students of Tokuyama University. Although these students were taking the same English courses at the university, they were different from those in Test 1.

2) The procedure

The students were divided into two groups of equal number (group P = 80, group L = 80). All the students of both groups were given the same passage printed in English as shown in Figure 3 to read within the allocated time period, and they were asked to write the correct forms of the given words with the help of either pictures (group P) or mother tongue equivalent (group L) as shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

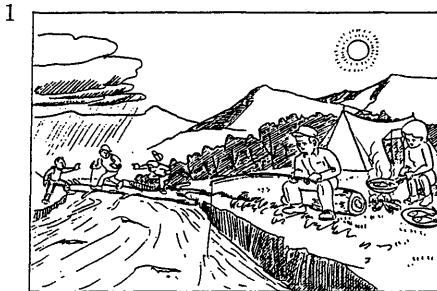
与えられた 絵/日本語 を参考にして つぎの英文の () 内の動詞を適当な形に変えなさい。

Fig. 3

1. Mr. and Mrs. Brown are camping. It 1 (be) early in the morning. The sun 2 (come) up. There 3 (be) some clouds over the mountains. It 4 (rain) there. Now Mrs. Brown 5 (fry) some fish, which Mr. Brown 6 (catch) last night. He is trying to 7 (catch) some fish this morning, too. Some hikers 8 (be) nearby. Already one hiker 9 (cross) the river. Two hikers 10 (cross) the river. One is going to 11

- (fall) into the river. But the river 12 (be) not so deep, and he can 13 (swim).
2. Tom has finished his homework, and now he 14 (work) on a crossword puzzle. He 15 (know) how to solve the puzzle, but he cannot 16 (complete) it because he cannot 17 (spell) a certain word. He 18 (have) a small dictionary, which he 19 (borrow) from his friend yesterday, but the word 20 (be) not in it. There 21 (be) a large dictionary in the cabinet, but he cannot 22 (get) it because it is locked. His roommate, George, 23 (have) the key, and he 24 (go) out an hour ago. Tom 25 (hope) George 26 (return) soon. Then he can 27 (get) the large dictionary, 28 (finish) the crossword puzzle, and 29 (go) to bed.
3. Ray and John 30 (be) good friends. They both 31 (work) at the Western Insurance Co. They 32 (not live) at home. Instead, they 33 (share) a room in town. The room is not very large, but they 34 (like) it because it 35 (be) cheap. It 36 (be) December, and Ray is going home for Christmas. Ray 37 (take) his skis, because he 38 (enjoy) skiing. He 39 (think) skiing is fun, and he 40 (ski) as often as he can. Already Ray 41 (finish) packing his suitcase. It is on the bed. The packing 42 (take) longer than he 43 (think), because he 44 (have) several other things to do. Ray is saying goodbye to John. He 45 (leave) in a few minutes.

Fig. 4



ていて取れません。同室のジョージが鍵を持っているのですが 彼は一時間前にでかけたままです。ジョージが早く帰ってくればとトムは思っています。そうすれば 大きな辞書を手にいれパズルを済ませて 床につくことができるからです。

3. レイとジョンは 仲のよい友達です。二人は ウェスタン保険会社で働いています。彼らは自分の家から通っていないで 会社の近くで部屋を借りて住んでいます。部屋は余り大きくないけれど 安いので気に入っています。十二月になり レイは クリスマスを家で過ごすことになりました。レイはスキーをするのが 大好きなのでスキー道具を家に持って帰ることにしました。スキーはおもしろいと彼は時間のある限りスキーをしている程です。色々と手のかかる仕事があって レイが思ったよりも荷作りに手間取ったもの すでに荷作りを終えてカバンはベッドの上に置いてあります。ジョンに さよなら を言ってもうすぐ出発です。

materials from *English Conversation through*

Pictures 2 by ELEC

II. Analysis of test 1

Major errors observed in the students' compositions

There were several types of recurrent errors that were observed in the students' compositions of both groups. According to the result of the study we conducted, it can be said that our students have much difficulty with the use of verbs, articles and prepositions, for many of the errors committed by the students were centered around these areas.

1. Verb errors

1.1. Wrong form

Of several types of errors in verb forms as shown in Table 1, the use of be + verb form is noticeable. The majority of the students did not make this type of error, but the students with poor competence recurrently committed this error. This wrong verb form is assumed to be concerned with faulty rule learning in the process of acquiring rules of the target language. The following three different cases were observed :

1. Use of *be* (present) + verb stem instead of verb stem
2. Use of *be* (past) + verb stem instead of verb stem + ed
3. Use of *be* (past) + verb stem + ed instead of verb stem + ed

In the cases shown above, the verb *be*, either the present form or the past form, is used. The present form of the verb *be*, for instance, is probably explained as a kind of marker which indicates that the tense is present.

e. g. *He is drink of coffee.^{a)}

And the past form of the verb *be* can be interpreted as a past tense maker.

e. g. *He was got on the bus.

This type of error, according to Richards, is one of "intralingual errors which have to do with faulty rule-learning."¹⁾ Ghadessy also states that this type of error "deals with false hypothesis based on a limited knowledge of the target language."²⁾ It may be considered that the use of the *be* + verb form is attributable to the transfer of the Japanese verb ending. However, Richards indicates that the occurrence of this type of error is not related to the intrusion of the mother tongue, but concerned with a contrastive approach to language teaching.³⁾

The use of regular past tense endings for irregular past tense forms was also frequently observed in the students' compositions.

e. g. *drinked (drank), catched (caught), runed (ran), etc.

These errors result from over-generalizing a rule; that is to say, the learners apply a particular rule which they previously learned to a new situation. They may also be regarded as misapprehension of the rule by the learners in the process of acquiring the target language or what Richards implies "ignorance of rule restrictions."⁴⁾

1) Richards, J. C., 'A Noncontrastive Approach to Error Analysis', in Richards, J. C., ed., *Error Analysis*, London: Longman, 1974, p. 178.

2) Ghadessy, M., 'Implications of Error Analysis for Second/Foreign Language Acquisition', *IRAL*, Vol. XVIII, May 1980, p. 98.

3) Richards, J. C., op. cit., 1974, p. 179.

4) Ibid., p. 175.

a) Conventionally, an asterisk before an item signifies that it is unacceptable.

Table 1: Errors in verb forms

	Number of errors	
	Group A	Group B
1. be+verb stem for verb stem	21	25
He is drink of coffee Bus is start He is run . . . Mary is stand . . .		
2. be (past) + verb stem for verb stem+ed	12	31
She was see him off . . . He was eat breakfast The bus was stop . . . Tom and Mary were eat . . .		
3. be (past) + verb stem+ed for verb stem+ed	16	12
The bus was already stopped Mary was said . . . Mr. Smith was woke up He was got on the bus		
4. Wrong form of verb stem+ed	13	5
drunked, caught, dranked, runed, thinked, leaved, standed		

1.2. Omission of verb *be*

Table 2 shows two types of errors in relation to the use of verb *be*: the omission of *be* in the position of the predicate and the omission of *be* in a progressive sentence.

Table 2: Omission of verb *be*

	Number of errors	
	Group A	Group B
1. Omission of <i>be</i> in the position of the predicate	5	13
Many people in a bus He thought he late for work He tired before work You will late . . .		
2. Omission of <i>be</i> before verb+ing	12	25
He eating breakfast The man drinking morning cafe He running to the bus stop Mary standing . . .		

The omission of verb *be* in the position of the predicate was observed in the compositions of both groups of students ; however, there were more in number in the compositions written by the students of group B.

e. g. *You will late for work.

*He tired before work.

This may imply that the factor causing this error is related to mother tongue interference. This is the case of so called negative transfer which "occurs when the previous performance disrupts the performance on a second task."⁵⁾ Considering this type of error as a case of mother tongue interference, the students might have misinterpreted the English adjective word "tired" or the adverbial word "late" as a verb since both words are used as verbs in Japanese.

Another type of recurrent error observed in the students' compo-

5) Brown, H. D., *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, New Jersey : Prentice-Hall, 1980, p. 85.

sitions in this category was the omission of the verb *be* in a progressive sentence. The occurrence of this type of error is probably due to incomplete application of the rule. In relation to the use of the progressive form, there were some errors caused by the interference of the mother tongue.

e. g. *The clock is breaking. (The clock is broken.)

Although we did not find errors this time, the students also tend to construct progressive sentences using certain English verbs which can not be used in the progressive pattern. This overuse of the progressive pattern results from word for word translation from Japanese into English. Bryant in the study of errors made by Japanese students states that "Japanese extends the notion of progressive aspect into the semantic domain of verbs which indicate not only mental activity (e. g., love, know), but also sensation or perception (e. g., see, hear, show)."⁶⁾

1.3. The use of wrong verbs

A number of students had difficulty with the employment of appropriate verbs. Many of the errors in this category occurred when the students did not know an appropriate verb that is suited for the meaning. From our experience, we often find this type of error (Table 3) in the students' compositions. The factor causing this type of error may be related to heavy dependency on translation work and a limited knowledge of vocabulary.

Table 3: Use of wrong verbs

	Number of errors	
	Group A	Group B
Mother swing a hand	24	25
He go on the bus		
You will miss the company		
Someone was taking a bus		

6) Bryant, W. H., 'Typical Errors in English Made by Japanese ESL Students', *JALT Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, May 1984, p. 6.

1.4. Wrong tense

One of the most common errors made by the students was wrong tense as in Table 4. The causes of errors in tense are not only attributable to mother tongue interference but also related to target language interference. Many of the errors in tense probably derive from lack of a sufficient knowledge of the English verb system, and the students' carelessness, for the students can often correct wrong tense forms when they are pointed out by the teacher. On the contrary, the errors occurred in a coordinate clause can be traceable to the use of tense in Japanese. For example :

Kouen e yuki Yakyu o shita.

We went to the park and played baseball.

The example above indicates that in English two clauses connected by a coordinate conjunction are always equal, but in Japanese it is not always possible to have two equal clauses. This difference between English and Japanese may be one of the reasons for the errors in tense.

Table 4 : Errors in tense

	Number of errors	
	Group A	Group B
When husband is eating breakfast, wife said . . .	103	139
Tom run as fast as he could		
Mary point out the clock on the wall and said . . .		
Mary stood at door and see him off		

1.5. Lack of agreement between subject and verb

The omission of the third person singular marker -s was one kind of error that was frequently observed in the students' compositions. As Table 5 indicates, the students who wrote the composition in accordance with the given story in Japanese (group B) did not make this kind of error because the students were required to describe only actions occurred in the past. The omission of the third person marker may be

attributable to mother tongue interference, for the verb of a sentence does not agree with its subject in person or number or gender in Japanese. However, this error is considered to be one of intralingual errors by many researchers. For example, Richards believes that the factor causing this error is over-generalization that “may be the result of the learner reducing his linguistic burden.”⁷⁾ Duskova also considers this error as an intralingual error and explains as follows :

An explanation of this error may be found in the system of the English verbal personal endings. Since all grammatical persons take the same zero verbal ending except the third person singular in the present tense, which is the only verbal form with a distinctive personal ending (apart from the anomalous *am*) omission of the *-s* in the third-person singular may be accounted for by the heavy pressure of all the other endingless forms. The endingless form is generalized for all persons, just as the form *was* is generalized for all persons and both numbers in the past tense.⁸⁾

The remainder of the errors of subject-verb agreement are also assumed to be intralingual errors due to over-generalization or the learner's misinterpretation of the rule.

Table 5 : Errors in subject-verb agreement

	Number of errors	
	Group A	Group B
1. Omission of the third person singular	48	—
He go to the bus stop The bus arrive He always get up . . .		

7) Richards, J. C., op. cit., 1974, p. 174.

8) Duskova, L., On Sources of Errors in Foreign Language Learning, *IRAL*, Vol. VII, Feb. 1969, p. 20.

2. Errors in the use of articles

That the use of articles seems to be one of the most difficult items for Japanese students is obviously revealed in the high frequency of mistakes. Table 6 shows some examples of the errors observed in the students' compositions. Errors in the use of articles can be classified into the following four types :

1. The omission of articles
2. Unnecessary use of articles
3. The use of a definite article instead of an indefinite article
4. The use of an indefinite article instead of a definite article

Many of the errors in the use of articles are probably attributable to mother tongue interference, for the Japanese language has no part of speech equivalent to English articles. Bryant, in the study of errors made by Japanese students, points out that the omission of articles is "frequently encountered, especially among Asian and Slavic students, many of whom speak languages in which definite and indefinite articles do not exist."⁹⁾ Some students placed articles before uncountable nouns where articles were not required to use, such as a or the before coffee and breakfast, and a before time expressions. The occurrence of such errors is probably due to the students' over-consciousness of article usage. Other errors which found infrequently in the students' compositions were the use of an indefinite article instead of a definite article and vice versa. These errors can be attributable to the students' misconception of the article usages.

9) Bryant, W. H., op. cit., 1984, p. 3.

Table 6: Errors in the use of articles

	Number of errors	
	Group A	Group B
	129	197
He run to bus stop		
He drink a coffee		
He ate the breakfast		
It's a eight-fifty five		
Tom and Mary were eating a breakfast		
Tom was drinking the coffee		

3. Errors in the use of prepositions

A number of our students made quite a few preposition errors. Some examples of preposition errors are shown in table 7, and there were following three types:

1. The omission of prepositions
2. Unnecessary use of prepositions
3. The use of wrong prepositions

Certain number of preposition errors are considered to be due to mother tongue interference, for some Japanese particles have functions similar to English prepositions. In this respect, many of our students were able to use them correctly. For instance, the Japanese postposition "e", which indicates a motion towards, is similar to the English preposition "to", which indicates the direction of a motion. However, one to one correspondence like this between a postposition in Japanese and a preposition in English is often inapplicable. This often results in the use of wrong prepositions. Unnecessary use of prepositions is due not only to mother tongue interference, but also to target language interference. The omission of prepositions (e. g., He got the bus. He arrived the bus stop. Mary pointed the clock.) presumably resulted from the students' unfamiliarity with the English expressions such as get to, arrive at and point at.

Table 7: Errors in the use of prepositions

	Number of errors	
	Group A	Group B
	78	175
He got the bus		
He run out his house		
He arrived the bus stop		
He went to the bus stop at early		
It was at eight fifty-five		
He ran by the bus stop		
Tom was drinking of coffee		
Tom and Mary were eating breakfast on the table		
in the table		
to the table		

4. General view of test 1

Table 8 shows the percentage of errors per total usage on five items.

According to the result, it may be said that the students of group B made slightly higher percentage of errors than the students of group A.

This may imply that writing a composition based on the given information in Japanese required a complicated work: First, the students read each sentence written in Japanese, and then translated it word by word in English. This complicated process might have been the reason that the students of group B made higher percentage of errors than the students of group A.

As for the students of group A, it seems that they paid much attention to the description of the series of pictures, which might have prevented them from checking up each grammatical item. Although the students were able to express progressive actions in the pictures fairly well, they could not describe situations which did not appear in the pictures. In other words, the students lack in the ability to create and express their own ideas in English. This may result, in large part, from little exposure to writing practice which requires the students to apply

what they have learned to various novel situations.

The result of test 1 also indicates that our students do not have sufficient fundamental knowledge of English. The reason for the students' inadequate knowledge of basic English is that too much emphasis is placed on the accumulation of grammatical knowledge, and that practice necessary for developing communicative competence is neglected.

Table 8: Percentage of errors per total usage

	Total usage		Number of errors		%	
	Group A	Group B	Group A	Group B	Group A	Group B
1. be+verb stem be+verb stem+ed	494	630	49	77	9.9	12.2
2. Omission of be before verb+ing	87	169	12	25	13.8	14.8
3. Tense	562	723	103	139	18.3	19.2
4. Articles	360	539	129	197	35.8	36.5
5. Prepositions	454	698	78	175	17.2	25.1

III. Analysis of test 2

Heaton says, "Information concerning the performance of the students as a whole and of individual students is very important for teaching purposes, especially as many test results can show not only the types of errors most frequently made but also the actual reasons for the errors being made."¹⁰⁾

Although we cannot make an ultimate evaluation of our students from the result of test 1, we find that many of our students don't have any satisfactory control of language structure, to say nothing of creativity or originality in writing. In other words, they cannot seem to

10) Heaton, J. B., *Writing English Language Tests*, London: Longman, 1975, p. 175.

have sufficient academic attainment in composition writing. The writing of a composition is, as Heaton writes, "a task involves the student in manipulating words in grammatically correct sentences and linking those sentences to form a piece of continuous writing which successfully communicates the writer's thoughts and ideas on a certain topics."¹¹⁾ It is true that our students have difficulty with most of the exercises dealing with grammatical structures, which are particularly difficult to use in writing, and they often avoid the use of certain grammatical patterns and lexical items in writing compositions.

As for the method of foreign language teaching at school, the traditional one is widely taken up as before, where the students are provided with many translation exercises. Consequently students try to translate every word and phrases separately one by one, and often compose ambiguous or incomprehensible sentences at the end.

After analyzing the result of test 1, we came to a conclusion that test 2 should be centered on measuring the students' control of the basic grammatical patterns that cause difficulty in writing English. So in setting questions, we referred to the types of errors most frequently made in test 1, and took up the use of verbs as a point being discussed. The emphasis of test 2 was, therefore, to measure the extent of student achievement in grammatical forms, that is, to measure how to make use of a verb. At the same time, we tried to investigate the validity of using pictures or mother tongue equivalent as well as printed words of foreign language as a stimulus which would produce the best results.

The test itself is an objective writing-ability test, in which we are testing sensitivity of the student to the grammatical pattern appropriate to the written form of the language. Each individual student in two groups was given the passage containing about thirty sentences with forty-five blanks to test verb tenses. The infinitive form of a required verb was written in bracket after each blank. In addition to that, the students in group P were given specially prepared pictures representing the meaning of the sentences, and those in group L were given mother tongue equivalent of the sentences as a help.

11) Ibid., p. 127.

1. Interpretation of scores

The mean score of the test is the arithmetical average as the table below shows. In the following table and formula, note that the symbol x is used to denote the score, N the number of testees, and m the mean. The symbol f denotes the frequency which a score occurs. The symbol Σ means the sum of.

Table 9: Mean Score

Group P			Group L		
x	f	fx	x	f	fx
41	× 1	41	38	× 1	38
36	× 2	72	36	× 1	36
34	× 1	34	35	× 2	70
33	× 2	66	34	× 4	136
32	× 1	32	32	× 4	128
31	× 4	124	31	× 1	31
30	× 2	60	30	× 1	30
29	× 1	29	29	× 2	58
28	× 2	56	28	× 2	56
27	× 1	27	27	× 3	81
25	× 2	50	26	× 4	104
24	× 4	96	25	× 4	100
23	× 2	46	24	× 4	96
22	× 8	176	23	× 5	115
21	× 3	63	22	× 11	242
20	× 3	60	21	× 3	63
19	× 4	76	20	× 7	140
18	× 6	108	19	× 6	114
17	× 6	102	18	× 7	126
16	× 9	144	17	× 8	136
15	× 2	30	15	× 1	15
14	× 5	70			
13	× 4	52	Total=		1915
12	× 4	48			
11	× 1	11			= Σfx
Total=		1673			
		= Σfx			

$$\begin{array}{lcl}
 m = & \frac{\Sigma fx}{N} & m = \frac{\Sigma fx}{N} \\
 = & \frac{1673}{80} & = \frac{1915}{80} \\
 = & 20.91 & = 23.94
 \end{array}$$

The table below shows a frequency distribution on the test 2.

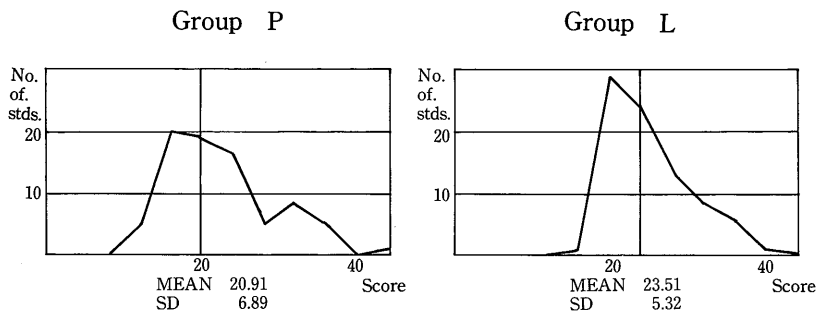
Table 10 : Score Distribution

Score	Frequency*	
	Group P	Group L
41 - 44	1	0
37 - 40	0	1
33 - 36	5	6
29 - 32	8	8
25 - 28	5	13
21 - 24	17	23
17 - 20	19	28
13 - 16	20	1
9 - 12	5	0

*Frequency = the numbers of students obtaining the right answers in each group of 80

The following curves illustrate the distribution of the scores. A standard deviation of 5.32 in group L shows a slightly smaller spread of scores than a standard deviation of 6.89 in group P.

Fig. 6: Score Distribution Curve



2. Item analysis

The facility index is a measure of how easy or difficult an item in the test is. It is obtained by calculating the proportion of the students answering the item correctly. Although an average facility value of 0.5 is generally desirable for many achievement tests, the facility index of a large number of individual items such as these in test 2 varies considerably. Several test items with very low facility index are observed among them (e. g. Q. 2, 10, 26, 31, 32, 38).

Table 11 : Facility Index (1)

Item	Group P	Group L	Item	Group P	Group L
Q. 1	0.71	0.9	Q. 24	0.66	0.49
2	0.14	0.13	25	0.53	0.46
3	0.88	0.85	26	0.11	0.03
4	0.35	0.34	27	0.48	0.7
5	0.39	0.3	28	0.1	0.38
6	0.41	0.29	29	0.16	0.58
7	0.63	0.69	30	0.91	0.89
8	0.79	0.79	31	0.19	0.13
9	0.6	0.63	32	0.2	0.14
10	0.24	0.25	33	0.29	0.36
11	0.55	0.74	34	0.31	0.46
12	0.81	0.9	35	0.78	0.8
13	0.36	0.54	36	0.81	0.73
14	0.41	0.36	37	0.58	0.46
15	0.45	0.41	38	0.15	0.16
16	0.45	0.61	39	0.36	0.56
17	0.41	0.64	40	0.33	0.16
18	0.83	0.83	41	0.88	0.81
19	0.64	0.66	42	0.2	0.29
20	0.5	0.71	43	0.3	0.31
21	0.74	0.76	44	0.14	0.3
22	0.39	0.6	45	0.33	0.61
23	0.68	0.58			

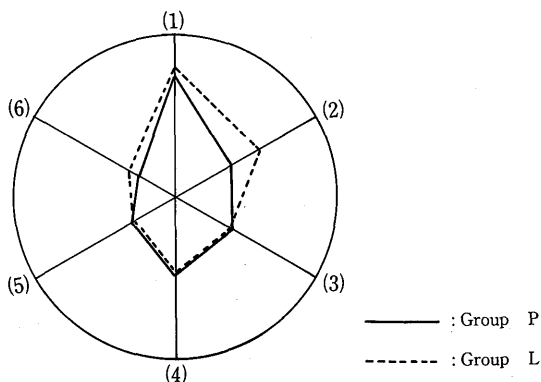
In order to identify certain difficult items in the test, we divided forty-five items into six groups in relation to the forms of a verb : (1) verb *be*, (2) base form, (3) present tense, (4) past tense, (5) progressive and (6) future. The identification of these items can prove just as valuable in its implications for teaching as for testing. The facility index in the following table is expressed as a percentage.

Table 12 : Facility Index (2)

verbs	Group P	Group L
(1) <i>be</i>	76.97%	81.4 %
(2) base form	39.19	60.72
(3) present tense	40.23	38.89
(4) past tense	47.84	47.2
(5) progressive	30.54	27.5
(6) future	21.9	31.9

The following profile shows the students' academic attainment in a plane figure. Each figure in brackets corresponds to those in the Table 12 mentioned above.

Fig. 7 : Grade Profile



Analyzing the Table 12 above, we can assume that the students who took the test managed to make use of verb *be* since nearly 80% of them answered the individual items correctly. Some errors of subject-verb agreement and wrong-tense were observed here and there. Meanwhile, the formation of regular and irregular verbs seems to be a subject of discussion here; most students mixed up the present tense and past tense in various cases within one passage. This may be attributable to mother tongue interference we mentioned before, since the facility value of group L falls slightly below the other group in relation to both tenses. A considerable use of regular past tense endings for irregular past

tense forms was observed in test 2 just like in test 1 ; e. g., *caught (caught), taked (took), thinked (thought), etc. The omission of the third person singular marker -s was also frequently observed, and many students couldn't manage the negative form of the auxiliary verb *do*. Table 13 and 14 below show the details of the items analyzed respectively. Note that frequency is the total number of students who got right in each group of 80 and facility index is expressed as a percentage in the following tables. The symbol P means the group P and L the group L.

Table 13: Item Analysis (present tense)

Item	Correct Answer	Frequency		Facility Index		Some samples of errors
		P	L	P	L	
Q. 15	knows	36	33	45	41.3	know (P) 6 (L) 23, knew (P) 23 (L) 10, known (P) 4 (L) 4
18	has	66	66	82.5	82.5	had (P) 11 (L) 9
23	has	54	46	67.5	57.5	had (P) 14 (L) 7, have (P) 4 (L) 11
25	hopes	42	37	52.5	46.3	hoped (P) 27 (L) 10, hope (P) 4 (L) 10, hoping (P) 1 (L) 15
31	work	15	10	18.8	12.5	worked (P) 22 (L) 4, working (P) 21 (L) 27, are working (P) 7 (L) 16
32	don't live	16	11	20	13.8	are not live (P) 16 (L) 12, are not living (P) 11 (L) 11, not live (P) 1 (L) 8, didn't live (P) 4 (L) 1
33	share	23	29	28.8	36.3	shared (P) 25 (L) 9, shares (P) 9 (L) 10, are sharing (P) 3 (L) 9
34	like	25	37	31.3	46.3	liked (P) 25 (L) 9, likes (P) 16 (L) 21, are like (P) 3 (L) 1
37	takes	42	33			
	(is taking)	3	1	57.5	46.3	taking (P) 13 (L) 7
	(will take)	1	3			
38	enjoys	12	13	15	16.3	enjoyed (P) 37 (L) 14, enjoy (P) 8 (L) 30, enjoies (P) 3 (L) 3
39	thinks	29	49	36.3	56.3	thought (P) 14 (L) 10, think (P) 8 (L) 13
40	skis	26	13	32.5	16.3	skies (P) 17 (L) 9, ski (P) 11 (L) 3, skiing (P) 19 (L) 16

Table 14: Item Analysis (past tense)

Item	Correct Answer	Frequency		Facility Index		Some samples of errors
		P	L	P	L	
Q. 6	caught	33	23	41.3	28.8	caught (P) 19 (L) 10, cought (P) 14 (L) 20, catches (P) 2 (L) 2
9	crossed	44	43	60	62.5	cross (P) 6 (L) 6, crossing (P) 7 (L) 4, had crossed (P) 3 (L) 3, have crossed (P) 3 (L) 2
	(has crossed)	4	7			
19	borrowed	51	53	63.8	66.3	borrow (P) 4 (L) 9, borrowing (P) 7 (L) 2
24	went	53	39	66.3	48.8	goes (P) 12 (L) 4, going (P) 3 (L) 6, has gone (P) 2 (L) 5
41	finished	63	56	87.5	81.3	had finished (P) 2 (L) 1
	(has finished)	7	9			
42	took	16	23	20	28.8	takes (P) 26 (L) 9, take (P) 13 (L) 22, taked (P) 6 (L) 8, is take (P) 4 (L) 3
43	thought	24	25	30	31.3	thinks (P) 26 (L) 15, think (P) 3 (L) 6, thinked (P) 4 (L) 9
44	had	11	24	13.8	30	has (P) 59 (L) 49, have (P) 1 (L) 4

Now we look at another feature of the contrast between present simple and present progressive. "In most teaching grammars the progressive is described as referring to events in progress at the moment of speech and the simple from to habits or general truth. Neither is entirely accurate, though they may serve their pedagogic function," writes Wilkins.¹²⁾ Although we admit there are certainly many difficulties for the learner of English to deal with these forms, we were dissatisfied with such a low facility index as in Table 15 below. The omission of *be* in a progressive sentence was frequently observed.

12) Wilkins, D. A., *Linguistics in language teaching*, London: Edward Arnold, 1972, p. 76.

Table 15: Item Analysis (progressive)

Item	Correct Answer	Frequency		Facility Index		Some samples of errors
		P	L	P	L	
Q. 2	is coming (has come)	8 3	7 3	13.8	12.5	coming (P) 18 (L) 32, came (P) 27 (L) 16, comes (P) 13 (L) 10
4	is raining	28	27	35	33.8	raining (P) 19 (L) 32, rains (P) 9 (L) 7, rainy (P) 5 (L) 3
5	is frying	31	24	38.8	30	frying (P) 30 (L) 29, fring (P) 3 (L) 3, fried (P) 6 (L) 8
10	are crossing	19	20	23.8	25	crossing (P) 21 (L) 23, crosses (P) 11 (L) 8, is crossing (P) 9 (L) 7
14	is working	35	29	41.3	36.3	working (P) 27 (L) 26, works (P) 11 (L) 16

“The meaning *will* is rarely purely temporal”,¹³⁾ and in addition to that several other forms are used as frequently to refer to future time. The students of group P seemed to be at a little disadvantage in grasping the meaning of the future tense as shown in Table 16 below. We assume here that the absence of the Japanese language makes the composition writing less efficient in relation to the future tense, though the availability of the pictures as a whole is very effective in the students' ability to grasp the meaning of the sentences.

Table 16: Item Analysis (future)

Item	Correct Answer	Frequency		Facility Index		Some samples of errors
		P	L	P	L	
Q. 26	will return	9	2	11.3	2.5	returned (P) 30 (L) 15, return (P) 13 (L) 39, returns (P) 17 (L) 13, returning (P) 6 (L) 6
45	will leave (leaves) (is leaving)	5 20 1	7 40 2		61.3	left (P) 26 (L) 6, leave (P) 3 (L) 1, leaving (P) 3 (L) 1, leaved (P) 11 (L) 8

We also divided thirty-two sentences in the passage into four groups in relation to its construction in order to find what percentage of the

13) Ibid., p. 76.

students comprehend the basic English structures together with the items being tested. Students must be able to tell, with conscious differentiation of meaning, what is the most appropriate form of the verb for each sentence. While analyzing the results, we observed wrong tense in complex sentences rather than in simple sentences. We assume the reason for this is that most of the students are used to piecing the words together without thinking relations between the meanings of different sentences. Here we can estimate several levels of attainment in English structures the students have reached from the table below.

Table 17 : Facility Index (3)

Types of sentences	Group P	Group L
(1) simple sentence	51.1%	54.9%
(2) compound sentence	49.76	58.21
(3) complex sentence	30.58	28.37
(4) mixed sentence	51.48	60.67

3. General view of test 2

Our students made errors in all sorts of items in the test 2 with very little exception. This indicates that their ability in English is not on the level they ought to have attained by now. In other words, our students do not have sufficient basic knowledge of English for writing compositions. The obvious fact is, as Wilkins writes, that to communicate at all seriously and adequately through the language a command of both grammar and vocabulary is necessary.¹⁴⁾

We often find that many students try to memorize a lot of grammatical rules and vocabulary without integrating words into a linguistic context, and it is a common sight in high school classes. In other words, many students take a word-by-word approach to reading and writing English through exercises frequently provided for them at school. If they memorize number of words without learning to construct sentences, however, they will gain little for all their trouble. The reason for this is that the mere accumulation of grammatical rules and

14) Ibid., p. 110.

vocabulary will cause the students' inability in manipulating the words in novel situations. If that's the way things are, we may have to give a little reconsideration to the exercises or materials we have used in teaching writing.

Translation is the traditional method of foreign language teaching in Japan. From the results of both tests, however, we assume that mother tongue interference is one of the noticeable causes of errors in verbs. Rivers says, "Few of our students become professional translators, and those who wish to do so would be well advised to pursue specialized courses in the art of translation at a later date. For the rest of our students, continual emphasis on translation inculcates the naive belief that language have a basic one-to-one equivalence which they must identify, with the dictionary as their indispensable tool."¹⁵⁾ Translation exercises, therefore, may not be always efficient as a teaching device in the general writing classes.

Visual aid in general helps the learner to review and improve his understanding of English, and so we used pictures as well as mother tongue equivalent in the hope that our students would be able to understand the situations set up for the tests more clearly. However, we couldn't find much difference in effectiveness between the two aids as we had expected. On the one hand we are disappointed in our hopes ; on the other hand we are apprehensive that we restrain the students' imaginative power by giving information in Japanese in the writing class from the beginning. That is to say, we may prevent the students from expressing their own ideas and opinions in composition writing by giving inadequate materials. In any case, we should reflect thoroughly on the method and materials in teaching writing.

Conclusion

One of the aims of error analysis is to help teachers know more accurately what remedial work would be necessary for our students so

15) Rivers, Wilga M., *Teaching Foreign-Language Skills*, Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 242.

as to help them avoid those errors that students make frequently and those that impede communication. Errors made by a student “provide evidence for the system of the language that he is using at a particular point in the course,”¹⁶⁾ so the teacher, by analyzing the student’s errors, is able to find out common weaknesses and to tell what items in the syllabus need to be emphasized. Error analysis can also help the teacher decide on items to be included in materials for classroom teaching.

A close attention to the student’s errors leads the teacher to become aware of the nature and various causes of the errors, and this enables the teacher to reconsider and improve teaching techniques in order to help the student avoid making errors. Without analyzing the student’s errors, the teacher may waste a considerable amount of time before he/she finds out what type of errors the student is likely to make and what corrective teaching techniques are likely to be most effective.

Error analysis is a basic step to help teachers increase the knowledge of the student’s competence in the use of the target language, and it is necessary for the teacher to make full use of it so as to help our students reduce difficulties.

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16) Corder, S. P., ‘The significance of Learner’s Errors’, *IRAL*, Vol. V / 4, Nov. 1967, p. 167.

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We would like to state here that a part of this paper was presented at the 3rd Annual Convention of JACET Chugoku-Shikoku Chapter in 1986. For your information we also state that Nakamitsu is answerable for the analysis of test 1 and Tanaka for the analysis of test 2.