An Error Analysis of College Composition (1)

— An Overview of Types and Distribution of Errors —

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Abstract:

With the prospect of eliciting native speaker response to Japanese college composition errors and then providing an efficient, error-free composition manual for the students in the near future, the ground work research was done to get an overview of all types of composition errors. Twenty-three essays were sampled and 2,201 errors were classified into some of the 60 categories under the headings of Part of Speech, Unit, and Mechanics (Section 1), Error Form (Sec. 2), Grammar (Sec. 3), Semantics (Sec. 4), and Other Features (Sec. 5). According to the statistical results, Mechanical errors were 12 per cent of the total and the rest were Grammatical and Semantic errors. Among the parts of speech, Verb, Adjective and Noun showed the highest error ratios. In Error Forms, Selection and Omission were more frequent than Word Form and Addition. Grammatical Errors were only 13 per cent more than Semantic Errors. Number, Determinatives, Tense, Verb Pattern, Word Order, Agreement, and Reference were main error features in grammar. In Semantics, Word Choice was outstanding and Insufficient Wording and Poor Expression were significant, though low in percentage. L1 interference was seen in most parts of speech. Based on those statistics and using an adequate number of examples, specific error features were discussed. It is hoped that this phase of the research, which is descriptive and quantitative, will facilitate the further steps of the present research project.

1. Purpose of the Research

Error analysis is said to have two functions, a theoretical one and a practical one. The theoretical aspect involves investigation of the language learning process and the

practical aspect is a pedagogical function to achieve a better remedial course for learn-ers and teachers as well [1].

The present research is based on the second function, because the ten-year-old *Kuzu-ryu Memoirs* (*KM*) project in our school, the publication of a collection of students' essays [2], has been demanding a practical "Error-Free Manual" for both students and teachers — so many errors of similar kinds have been repeated and had to be corrected. What types of errors should be emphasized, however, is related with error gravity in terms of communication, which leads to the question of native speaker response to er-rors. To pursue such error evaluation presupposes a full grasp of the status quo of students' composition errors in general.

In this respect, the present research aims to collect an adequate number of writing errors to represent the general trend of errors in the whole body of *KM* essays and to analyze them in terms of as many categories as possible that are relevant to the prac-tical teaching of writing. The results are expected to be materialized in the follow-ing steps of our research and everyday teaching as well.

2. Preceding Research and Research Design

Since the present research confines itself to an overall quantitative analysis of er-rors in free compositions, preceding literature may well be surveyed in the same light. Dušková (1969) quantitatively analyzed 1,007 errors in the English compositions writ-ten by 50 Czechoslovak graduate students in terms of morphology, syntax, and lexis, and also tried an inter/intralingual analysis of cause. Buteau (1970) is a study of er-rors in French, Grauberg (1971) in German, Wyatt (1973) in EFL, Ghadessy (1976) in English with Iranian college students, and Azevedo (1980) in Spanish. These studies can, of course, be of some value as referential predecessors, but the linguistic and educa-tional situations are somewhat different from the Japanese EFL situation at college.

Sasaki (1979) conducted an analysis of errors in free compositions written by Japa-nese college students, but he focused only on the verb and verb pattern. Hirano (1981) was a more comprehensive study in which she used three levels of subjects, junior high school, senior high school, and junior college students, and analyzed the errors in terms of morphology, syntax, and vocabulary, classifying them into 15 categories. Her focus was rather on syntax, which, of course, is very important, but her study did not cover semantic errors well, which sometimes affect communication more seriously than syn-tactic errors.

An Error Analysis of College Composition (1)

With the above-mentioned purpose, our research was designed basically to be an over-all quantitative analysis of all kinds of errors in the 23 free compositions written by Japanese college students in terms of part of speech, mechanics, error form, grammar, semantics, and extra features. In viewing errors across these categories, there will also be a somewhat qualitative analysis of main error features provided with relevant examples.

3. Research Procedures

3.1. *Sampling of Essays*

Out of about 1,000 essays from the *KM* series, twenty-three were finally selected as sample essays — ten from the latest essays for the upcoming tenth volume which were assessed to be 'rich' in errors and thirteen from a few previous volumes of *KM* which were also thought to represent the *KM* essays. Since most essays contained nearly 100 errors, we hoped that 23 essays would yield at least 2,000 error samples.

3.2. *Definition of Errors*

From mechanics to semantics, every item that deviated from the correct form or use of words and punctuation, blocked a clear understanding, or caused a strong irritation was defined as an error by the authors. The distinction between 'performance error' and 'competence error' [3] was not taken into account in this research because of our ultimate aim to see native speaker response to unedited student essays.

After reading and analyzing all the materials individually at least once, the authors scanned all errors together to agree on the definition and categorization.

3.3. *Categorization of Errors*

In order to view composition errors from as many sides as possible, five sections, as shown below, were prepared and in each section each error was classified into one of the categories under that section, even using the Non-Relevant category when the error did not fit in any other category.

3.3.1. *Section 1*

Part of Speech: Every word error was classified as one of the following:

- Noun (N)   - Verb (V)   - Article (AR)
- Pronoun (PN)   - Preposition (P)   - Auxiliary Verb (AX)
- Adjective (AJ)   - Conjunction (CJ)
- Adverb (AV)   - Interjection (IJ)

Article (AR) and Auxiliary Verb (AX) were added as subcategories because they

are often treated as such in the classroom.

Unit: When an error occurred with more than one word, it was classified as

· Phrase   · (Dependent) Clause   or   · Sentence

Mechanics[4] : Errors in · Spelling   · Capitalization   and   · Punctuation were clas-
sified independently of Part of Speech or Unit.

3.3.2. *Section 2* Error Form:

Though 'superficial' as Corder himself calls them [5], the following categories were
adopted for convenience's sake in cross-examining other features with parts of speech.
The last item, Word Form, was added to Corder's idea.

· Addition: Some element is present which should not be there.

· Omission: Some element is omitted which should be present.

· Selection: A quite different word is chosen instead of the right one.

· Ordering: The elements presented are correct but wrongly sequenced.

· Word Form: The word itself is originally right but its form is wrong as in the
               case of plural form or conjugation.

3.3.3. *Section 3* Grammar:

Main items in morphology and syntax were picked up as the need arose. Error exam-
ples with an asterisk (*) as an indicator are supplied for each category ; errors are
underlined and the corrections are shown in the brackets.

· Misuse of Part of Speech: *May Sick 〔Sickness〕

· Number: *one of the aim 〔aims〕

         This category includes Countability: *our works 〔work〕

· Agreement: *there were 〔was〕 nothing; *each days 〔day〕

· Reference: *If we paint an apple and it 〔the painting〕 seems....

· Relatives: *a scene that 〔in which〕 the farmers cut the plants

· Comparison: *rich people can live easily 〔more easily〕 than poor people

· Determinatives: *there is the only one 〔only one〕 doctor

· Negation: *no moisture ingestion is not good 〔good〕 for....

· Verb Pattern: *some people are permitted eating 〔to eat〕 pork

· Tense: *in 1989 the number increase 〔increased〕

· Voice: *many things which can't explain 〔be explained〕 by modern science

· Verbal: *the pressure that I must study 〔to study〕 hard

· Modals: *they are lucky that they see 〔can see〕 the active...

· Subjunctive: *if it were not..., I don't 〔wouldn't〕 keep...

· Word Order: *1986, April 25 〔On April 25, 1986〕

· Question Pattern: *what for had we existed? 〔what〕…. 〔for〕?

· Idiom: *fell the victim 〔victim〕to…

· Collocation: *They are on terms 〔on such good terms〕that they can…

· Run-on Sentence: *Many years went by, mankind 〔but mankind〕continued war.

· Fragmentary Sentence: *I am convinced that…. Because 〔, because〕now there are….

3. 3. 4. *Section 4* Semantics:

As in Grammar, categories of semantic errors were added on as the need arose. Distinction of categories may not always be clear-cut, but brief explanation with an example is shown to give a basic characterization of each category.

· Word Choice: In terms of meaning, not of form, the wrong word is chosen in place of the right one.

　　*that is not anxiety 〔a problem〕at all

· Redundancy: On the level of phrase, clause, or sentence, the expression is redundant.

　　*a lot of quantity of 〔a lot of 〕alcoholic drink

· Choppiness: Sentences are so choppy as to affect a coherent flow of the context.

　　*We are living in a society with other people. So I think it is rude to do non-commital work. 〔Since we are living…people, I think it is….〕

· Insufficient Wording: In terms of grammar and surface meaning, the wording itself is not wrong, but the meaning is contextually not clear enough for instant understanding, because some additional pertinent words are lacking.

　　*the hospital structure 〔duty system of the hospital doctors〕

· Vagueness: Compared to Insufficient Wording, the intention of the writer is harder to surmise.

　　*The intellect comes into be unnatural 〔to be used unnaturally〕

· Poor Expression: The meaning is mostly understandable, but the expression is poor and clumsy, perhaps because of the ignorance of a better phrasing or sentence pattern.

　　*Alcoholic drinks generally allow to come near the mental distance of man and man 〔people to feel closer to each other 〕.

· Illogicality: In the context, the expression is logically wrong, and sometimes contradictory.

　　*We can't be happy to get wealth 〔simply by getteng wealth〕.

· Confusion: The worst case. The expression and perhaps the writer's thought itself are

confused. This brings about a total communication block.

　　＊So it is hard to save the money as it merely rest 〔(?)〕

· Cohesion [6] : Some linguistic elements such as transition, reference, substitution, are missing or wrong in terms of cohesion or the linguistic ties that bind a text together.

　　＊What am I? The 〔For a fact, this〕group of cells writes and thinks.

· Unity: The unity of a text in terms of meaning is affected by inserting extra or alien elements.

　　　　＊Other fuel, for example, coal, gas are decreasing. The atomic power energy is efficient. The atomic power plant produces terrible energy in a moment. The politician believe that this way is profitable of the comparison of merit and demerit. 〔(This sentence should be moved somewhere else.)〕(See Appendix, *ll.* 19－20)

· Paragraphing: Sometimes paragraphs are 'run on.' They should be separated.

　　　　＊President Kennedy have warned the risks of atomic power.... I think that we must stop to establish the atomic power plants.... We should decrease the number of the atomic power plants. But we must use energy to work of our daily life. We should utilize.... 〔(Start a new paragraph.)〕(See Appendix, *l.* 32)

3.3.5. *Section 5* **Extra Features**:

To the above categories were added the following features which were picked up rather arbitrarily as analysis went on, but expected to serve as good teaching materials in the class.

· Interference: Japanese interference is inevitable and frequent.

　　　　＊I was just before I passed away 〔nearly dead〕.
　　　　　　　　{死ぬ寸前だった}

· Overgeneralization: Only when overgeneralization is obvious as an intralingual error is it registered as such.

　　　　＊death of 〔caused by〕disease　Cf. die of disease

· Time Phrase: Expressions concerning time are sometimes misused.

　　　　＊Recently 〔These days〕we watch....

· Causal Phrase: Reason and cause are sometimes found to be hard to express.

　　　　＊I must confess I kept on showing him my diary. 〔, only because〕 I was afraid that if I did not, he would get angry with me.

· Think Verb: Among commonly used verbs in essays, the misuse of Think Verbs is rather remarkable.

＊think 〔think about〕 difficult things

・Say Verb: Say Verbs are another example of such misused common verbs.

＊that can be said 〔called〕 "The kernel of the world"

・See Verb: These verbs expressing physical sight and mental function need attention.

＊hope to look 〔see〕 many pictures

3.4. Processing of Error Data

Basically one card was provided for one error or one erroneous unit and its analysis was entered on the card, section by section, with symbols such as PS for Part of Speech (Misuse) and XX for Non-Relevant. When the error unit fell in more than one error category in the same section, additional symbols were registered in the Related Problems section on the card.

The 2,201 cards were processed by computer for various statistical computations and cross-referencing.

4. Results

The results of the analysis will be shown first quantitatively using the statistics in Tables 1 to 7, and then qualitatively citing error examples.

4.1. Basic Statistics of the Essays

The average number of words, sentences and errors per essay was 643.7, 47.2, and 95.7 respectively. The ranges of these numbers in the 23 essays were rather wide, especially in the case of the number of errors—46 to 157, and this tendency was reflected in the ratios of errors to words and sentences. Incidentally, seen across all the essays, there was no significant correlation between the number of words per sentence (W／S) and the number of errors per word (E／W) or per sentence (E／S). (See Table 1)

Table 1   Basic Statistics of the Essays

Items	Average	High	Low
Words	643.7	786	464
Sentences	47.2	78	23
Errors	95.7	157	46
W／S	13.6	17.9	9.6
E／W	0.15	0.28	0.09
E／S	2	3.4	1.3

4.2. *Distribution of Part of Speech, Unit, and Mechanical Errors*

The total number of errors was 2,201 and that of related problems noted in the cards was 697 [7]. Part of Speech or word level errors were 82.1 per cent of the total, errors at the phrase, clause, and sentence level were 5.9 per cent, and mechanical errors were 12.0 per cent [8]. Among the parts of speech, Verb (21.4%), Adjective (20.1%) and Noun (14.9%) were the highest three in frequency, and it must be noted that Article (14.3%) accounted for more than two-thirds of the Adjective errors. In Related Problems, Preposition errors (15.3%) were more than Noun (14.3%) and Verb (13.9 %) problems. (See Table 2)

Table 2 Distribution of Part of Speech, Unit, and Mechanical Errors

Categories	Errors		Related Problems	
	Number	%	Number	% **
Noun	328	14.9	100	14.3
Pronoun	105	4.8	57	8.2
Adjective	442	20.1	60	8.6
(Article)*	(314)	(14.3)	(36)	(5.2)
Adverb	154	7.0	27	3.9
Verb	470	21.4	97	13.9
(Auxiliary)*	(117)	(5.3)	(17)	(2.4)
Preposition	194	8.8	107	15.3
Conjunction	113	5.1	10	1.4
Interjection	1	0.0	0	0.0
[Subtotal]	1807	82.1	458	65.6
Phrase	56	· 2.5	2	0.3
Clause	31	1.4	2	0.3
Sentence	42	1.9	0	0.0
[Subtotal]	129	5.9	4	0.6
Spelling	188	8.5	0	0.0
Capitalization	21	1.0	2	0.3
Punctuation	56	2.5	0	0.0
[Subtotal]	265	12.0	2	0.3
Total	2201	100.0	464	66.5

  * This is a subcategory, which is included in the category right above.
 ** Percentage to the total number of Related Problems (697) noted in the cards.

4.3. *Distribution of Form Errors*

Selection (32.9%) and Omission (26.2%) were two main features in the form of errors, followed by Word Form (14.7%) and Addition (10.0%). Ordering or Word Order (3.9%) was rather a small problem at the college level of writing. (See Table 3)

Table 3   Distribution of Form Errors

Categories	Errors		Related Problems	
	Number	%	Number	% **
Addition	220	10.0	16	2.3
Omission	576	26.2	29	4.2
Selection	725	32.9	9	1.3
Ordering	85	3.9	10	1.4
Word Form	324	14.7	8	1.1
Undefinable	271	12.3	0	0.0
Total	2201	100.0	72	10.3

** Percentage to the total number of Related Problems (697) noted in the cards.

4.4. *Distribution of Grammatical Errors*

Grammatical Errors in total were responsible for only 56.2 per cent of the whole body of errors. Number (7.7%), Determinatives (7.2%), and Tense (6.5%) constituted the highest-frequency group, followed by the next group — Verb Pattern (4.5%), Word Order (3.9%), Agreement (3.4%), and Reference (3.0%). In Related Problems, Verbal (2.3%), Tense (1.7%), and Word Order (1.4%) showed the highest percentage. (See Table 4)

Table 4   Distribution of Grammatical Errors

Categories	Errors		Related Problems	
	Number	% *	Number	% **
Part of Speech	31	1.4	4	0.6
Number	169	7.7	8	1.1
Agreement	75	3.4	8	1.1
Reference	65	3.0	3	0.4
Relatives	17	0.8	5	0.7
Comparison	14	0.6	2	0.3
Determinatives	159	7.2	3	0.4
Nagation	29	1.3	2	0.3
Verb Pattern	98	4.5	5	.0.7
Tense	143	6.5	12	1.7
Voice	27	1.2	4	0.6
Verbal	54	2.5	16	2.3
Modals	40	1.8	4	0.6
Subjunctive	16	0.7	0	0.0
Word Order	85	3.9	10	1.4
Question Pattern	18	0.8	1	0.1
Idiom	28	1.3	2	0.3
Collocation	50	2.3	5	0.7
Run-on Sentence	13	0.6	2	0.3
Fragmentary Sentence	21	1.0	0	0.0
Total	1237	56.2	86	12.3

 * Percentage to the total number of errors (2201).
** Percentage to the total number of Related Problems (697) noted in the cards.

4.5. *Distribution of Semantic Errors*

In contrast with Grammatical Errors, Semantic Errors, in total, registered 43.3 per cent of all the errors. It must be noted, however, that these percentages do not exclude each other; instead, in quite a number of cases both sections can overlap with each other.

More than half of the semantic errors were Word Choice problems (25.5%) and the second highest was Insufficient Wording (6.5%), followed by Redundancy (3.7%) and Poor Expression (2.1%). (See Table 5)

Table 5   Distribution of Semantic Errors

Categories	Errors		Related Problems	
	Number	% *	Number	% **
Word Choice	562	25.5	9	1.3
Redundancy	81	3.7	3	0.4
Choppiness	13	0.6	3	0.4
Insufficient Wording	144	6.5	13	1.9
Vagueness	18	0.8	7	1.0
Poor Expression	47	2.1	5	0.7
Illogicality	28	1.3	5	0.7
Confusion	15	0.7	4	0.6
Cohesion	29	1.3	8	1.1
Unity	9	0.4	8	1.1
Paragraphing	7	0.3	4	0.6
Total	953	43.3	69	9.9

    * Percentage to the total number of errors (2201).
    ** Percentage to the total number of Related Problems (697) noted in the cards.

4.6. *Distribution of Extra Feature Errors*

The most outstanding was Interference (9.9%) and the rest were insignificant in percentage. (See Table 6)

Table 6   Distribution of Extra Feature Errors

Categories	Errors		Related Problems	
	Number	% *	Number	% **
Interference	218	9.9	0	0.0
Overgeneralization	17	0.8	3	0.4
Time Phrase	32	1.5	1	0.1
Causal Phrase	21	1.0	1	0.1
Think Verb	17	0.8	1	0.1
Say Verb	15	0.7	0	0.0
See Verb	7	0.3	0	0.0
Total	327	14.9	6	0.9

    * Percentage to the total number of errors (2201).
    ** Percentage to the total number of Related Problems (697) noted in the cards.

4.7. *Error Features and Part of Speech* (1)

Based on Table 7, the relationship between parts of speech and a variety of error features will first be analyzed quantitatively according to each part of speech. (See Table 7)

Noun:

The highest frequency in the Error Form section is seen with Word Form errors (160), which really are problems of Number (154) in the Grammar section. Then comes Selection (125), most of which are Word Choice errors (109) in the Semantics section. Omission (19) naturally causes Insufficient Wording (18) in the Semantic section.

Pronoun:

Selection (68) or Word Choice problems (49) are mainly related with improper Reference (34) of pronouns.

Adjective:

Out of all Article problems (314), nearly half of which are Determinatives (147) or definite articles, Omission errors (185) are much more frequent than Selection (66) or Addition (63). The adjectives, excluding articles, have the highest frequency of problems with Selection (72) and therefore with Word Choice (53), while Omission (23) and Insufficient Wording (24) are the next biggest problems.

Adverb:

Omission (46), Selection (47), and Ordering (48) errors occur at similar rates. Compared with other parts of speech, Word Order (48) and Cohesion (20) are remarkably high with adverbs.

Verb:

Contrary to the case of Noun, Selection (180) is more frequent than Word Form (143), which mostly relates to Tense (139). This fact explains the highest frequency of Word Choice errors with Verb (132). Insufficient Wording is also highest with Verb (40) and a third of those problems are with Auxiliary Verb (13).

Preposition:

Of all the preposition errors, about 90 per cent are comprised of Selection (104) and Omission (74) problems, which account for the involvement of prepositions in Verb Pattern (44) and Collocation (21) errors.

Conjunction:

Naturally, because of its function, Conjunction, which has Omission (38), Selection (32), and Addition (23) problems in Error Form, is involved with Fragmentary Sentence

(14), Run-on Sentence (6), Question Pattern (5), Choppiness (10) and Causal Phrase (12).

Table 7   Error Features and Parts of Speech

Categories [Form]	Number of Errors	Part of Speech										
		N	PN	AJ	(AR)	AV	V	(AX)	P	CJ	IJ	TOT
Addition	220	15	10	72	(63)	9	30	(13)	14	23	1	160
Omission	576	19	22	208	(185)	46	108	(61)	74	38	0	515
Selection	725	125	68	138	(66)	47	180	(31)	104	32	0	694
Ordering	85	7	0	8	(0)	48	7	(0)	1	0	0	71
Word Form	324	160	3	14	(0)	4	143	(12)	0	0	0	324
Undefinable	271	2	2	2	(0)	0	2	(0)	1	20	0	29
Total	2201	328	105	442	(314)	154	470	(117)	194	113	1	1793
[Grammar]	Number	N	PN	AJ	(AR)	AV	V	(AX)	P	CJ	IJ	TOT
Part of Speech	31	8	0	9	(0)	4	4	(0)	4	1	0	30
Number	169	154	5	9	(5)	0	0	(0)	1	0	0	169
Agreement	75	7	6	5	(0)	0	57	(4)	0	0	0	75
Reference	65	15	34	12	(3)	0	1	(0)	1	0	0	63
Relative	17	1	10	2	(1)	0	1	(0)	2	1	0	17
Comparison	14	0	0	6	(0)	5	3	(0)	0	0	0	14
Determinative	159	1	7	148	(147)	0	0	(0)	3	0	0	159
Negation	29	0	2	4	(1)	13	6	(4)	1	1	0	27
Verb Pattern	98	5	5	3	(1)	2	32	(0)	44	2	0	93
Tense	143	0	0	0	(0)	2	139	(56)	1	0	0	142
Voice	27	0	0	1	(0)	0	26	(4)	0	0	0	27
Verbal	54	9	3	3	(0)	0	28	(0)	7	1	0	51
Modal	40	0	0	0	(0)	0	40	(37)	0	0	0	40
Subjunctive	16	0	0	0	(0)	0	14	(7)	0	0	0	14
Word Order	85	7	0	8	(0)	48	7	(0)	1	0	0	71
Question Pattern	18	0	0	0	(0)	5	6	(4)	0	5	0	16
Idiom	28	6	2	2	(0)	3	4	(0)	7	0	0	24
Collocation	50	7	0	8	(0)	5	6	(0)	21	2	0	49
Run-on Sentence	13	0	0	0	(0)	0	0	(0)	0	6	0	6
Fragmentary Sentence	21	0	0	0	(0)	0	1	(0)	0	14	0	15
Total	1237	220	74	220	(158)	87	375	(116)	93	33	0	1102
[Semantics]	Number	N	PN	AJ	(AR)	AV	V	(AX)	P	CJ	IJ	TOT
Word Choice	562	109	49	116	(63)	40	132	(23)	88	26	0	560
Redundancy	81	11	13	8	(1)	7	4	(1)	2	5	0	50
Choppiness	13	0	0	0	(0)	0	0	(0)	1	10	0	11
Insufficient Wording	144	18	7	25	(1)	20	40	(13)	7	2	0	119
Vagueness	18	4	2	3	(0)	0	2	(0)	0	0	0	11
Poor Expression	47	4	3	7	(3)	1	10	(0)	5	3	0	33
Illogicality	28	4	1	2	(1)	4	6	(0)	4	2	0	23
Confusion	15	2	0	1	(0)	0	0	(0)	0	0	0	3
Cohesion	29	0	3	0	(0)	20	0	(0)	1	4	0	28
Unity	9	0	0	1	(1)	1	0	(0)	0	1	0	3
Paragraphing	7	0	0	0	(0)	0	0	(0)	0	1	0	1
Total	953	152	78	163	(70)	93	194	(37)	108	54	0	842
[Extra Features]	Number	N	PN	AJ	(AR)	AV	V	(AX)	P	CJ	IJ	TOT
Interference	218	28	12	27	(1)	25	56	(8)	37	11	0	196
Overgeneralization	17	3	0	3	(1)	3	6	(0)	2	0	0	17
Time Phrase	32	1	0	0	(0)	14	3	(0)	9	1	0	28
Causal Phrase	21	0	0	0	(0)	3	2	(0)	3	12	0	20
Think Verb	17	0	0	0	(0)	1	6	(0)	9	0	0	16
Say Verb	15	1	1	0	(0)	0	8	(0)	5	0	0	15
See Verb	7	0	0	0	(0)	0	4	(0)	3	0	0	7
Total	327	33	13	30	(2)	46	85	(8)	68	24	0	299

4.8. *Error Features and Part of Speech* (2)

With the statistical survey done above, specific error examples will be presented across categories and briefly commented on to clarify the factors involved.

4.8.1. *Error Form*

Addition: The primary resulting problem here is redundancy, sometimes causing various issues in semantics.

In the following examples a blank pair of brackets ( ) indicates that the underlined part is not needed and should be removed.

Noun: *...watch <u>figures of</u> ( ) sports players

　　　　—The focus is shifted from their activity to their figures.

Pronoun: *It was full of <u>my</u> ( ) life.

　　　　—The idiomatic pattern is unnatural.

Article: *the history of <u>a</u> ( ) painting

　　　　*talked <u>a</u> ( ) little

　　　　*talked about <u>the</u> ( ) serious <u>thing</u> (things)

　　　　—The added articles cause a rather serious semantic change.

Verb: Tense and verb patterns are affected by added auxiliary verbs and prepositions.

　　　　*...are not <u>be</u> ( ) able to...

　　　　*President Kennedy <u>have</u> ( ) warned...already. (See Appendix, *l.* 26)

　　　　—He is not alive.

Preposition: *without restraining <u>of</u> ( ) my liberty

　　　　*If it were not <u>in</u> ( ) the case

　　　　*three hours before <u>from</u> ( ) the opening time

　　　　—The use of gerunds, verb patterns, and Japanese Interference are involved.

Conjunction: *I feel like <u>that</u> ( ) I have been here before.

　　　　*The most important thing is <u>that</u> ( ) how long....

　　　　—'That' added to a question clause occurred four times out of the six cases
　　　　of 'that'-addition in five essays.

Omission: This type of error especially relates to difficulties with adjective, verb and preposition usage, and semantically, to Insufficient Wording.

Adjective: *a [college] entrance examination

　　　　*A countermeasure [to safeguard the power plant]

　　　　—A word or phrase is needed for greater clarification or distinction.

Article: * [A] car is [a] very useful vehicle.

　　　　*in [the] United States

　　　　—A strong tendency exists to omit both the definite and indefinite articles.

Verb: *better for [sending] a message

　　　　*need not [be] an apple

　　　　—Main verb and copula omission can result in considerable obstruction of meaning.

Auxiliary: *You [should] try not to

　　　　*the government [must] take some effective steps

　　　　—Because of modal deletion, the notions of necessity, importance, and obligation are often not adequately conveyed.

Preposition: * [For] a long time,...

　　　　* [In] the first place, I think...

　　　　—At the beginning of many sentences, prepositions are left out of adverbial phrases of time or sequence.

Adverb: *He wished I had [already] become a doctor.

　　　　—This missing adverb can change the meaning from A to B:

　　　　A : "I am still studying medicine."

　　　　B : "I took a course other than medicine."

Selection: Semantic errors in this category are mostly Word Choice problems, many of which are probably due to Japanese Interference.

Noun: *find another fun [diversion]

　　　　*I'm doing home teaching [tutoring].

　　　　*I could not grasp the current [passage] of time.

Adjective: *An [Good] art often comes from....

　　　　*the inside is the empty [invisible].

　　　　*produce terrible [incredible] energy

　　　　—Sometimes needed value judgments are neglected. At other times, the modifiers result in exaggeration or unwanted negative connotations.

Verb: *pass through [take∕use] national roads

　　　　*happened [caused] a traffic accident

　　　　—Transitive and intransitive verbs are sometimes incorrectly interchanged.

Preposition: *go over [beyond] realism

　　　　*by [in] that way

An Error Analysis of College Composition (1)

* <u>at</u> [in] a moment

—Though perhaps not so serious, changing established collocations results in unnatural expressions.

Ordering: Word order problems occasionally involve nouns. Strange ordering of auxiliaries is most frequently observed in question patterns. However, this problem mostly deals with adverb placement.

Verb: * (See Appendix, *l.* 15)

Adverb: *study <u>synthetically certain matters</u> [certain matters synthetically]

—This error pattern occurs quite often.

*I <u>don't absolutely</u> [absolutely don't/ can never] forgive them

—When related with negation, the word order is crucial.

Word form: This error form mainly involves Number, Tense, Comparison, and Part of Speech misuses.

Noun: * American [Americans] have....

* a <u>photography</u> [photograph]

* Chronic alcoholism is a very miserable <u>sick</u> [sickness].

Verb: * <u>Doesn't</u> [Don't] Japanese talk while eating?

* Marriage <u>depend</u> [depends] on love.

* I stopped <u>to use</u> [using] a diary.

Adjective: * <u>more strong</u> and <u>rich</u> [stronger and richer]

* may be solved by <u>strictly</u> [stricter] selection of employees

* Are we perfectly <u>safety</u> [safe]?

Undefinable: Most undefinable errors involved lengthy phrases, clauses, sentences, or even paragraph units. In fact, some sentences exemplified almost complete semantic confusion, thereby defying classification according to any error form.

*<u>Even such a easy thing which we understand without a judicially anatomy.</u> [?]

4. 8. 2. *Grammatical Error Features:*

Main grammatical error features will be treated.

Part of Speech: Different types from those shown in 4. 8. 1. will be presented.

* <u>during</u> [while] they watch....

* After the <u>vanish</u> [disapperance]...

Reference: Of course, many reference problems occur when pronouns are used with no or an ambiguous preceding noun referent, but two other interesting cases may also be noted.

*....if I live with somebody I love. .... I will make <u>somebody</u> 〔her〕 happy.

—The writer consistently uses 'somebody' through the essay.

*Before his operation he said he wished I had already become a doctor and that he could be operated on by me. "<u>It</u> 〔That〕 is an unreasonable request...," I said and laughed.

—'It' is frequently used even when 'that' is preferred for stronger demonstrativeness.

Verb Pattern:

*On acid earth which refuses 〔to grow〕 even trees...

*<u>contain in</u> 〔contains〕 freon gas

*go to <u>see in</u> 〔 〕 the sea or mountains

*Noise which has been made <u>a sound</u> 〔 〕 by...

—In the largest sense, verb pattern errors involve improper omission, addition, or selection of verbals, prepositions, etc. Also refer to 4.8.4. Think／Say／See Verbs.

Tense: As seen in previous examples, wrong tense can be the result of additions, omissions, or improper word form. Sometimes, selection and tense problems can occur simultaneously.

*A car is splendid, because it <u>brought</u> 〔takes〕 me everywhere.

Run-On Sentence: This is a conjunction omission problem, or, seen from another angle, a punctuation selection error.

*...now there are 110 American football teams in Japanese high <u>schools, even</u> 〔schools, and even〕／〔schools. Even〕 the high school students can hear the contact.

Fragmentary Sentence:

*...you must avoid drinking too much <u>alcohol. Because</u> 〔alcohol, because〕 it is very troublesome for family and friends.

—Fragmentary sentences were very frequently caused by separated 'because' clauses. This is suspected to be a case of overgeneralization in that 'because' is first introduced at school in the form of an independent clause as an answer to a "Why...?" question.

4.8.3. *Semantic Error Features*

Word Choice: Since about one-fourth of all errors fall into this category, it must be given serious attention. Besides high frequency, such semantic, as opposed to syntactic,

errors greatly impact meaning. These are selection problems mostly involving content words, especially nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

　　*interested in <u>pictures</u> 〔art〕

　　*by <u>fullness</u> 〔an abundance〕 of things

　　*has <u>changed</u> 〔committed〕 a crime

　—Meaning shift ranges from slight to drastic.

Insufficient Wording: This category includes not only omissions of necessary elements but also many instances, as in the case of abjectives, where certain modifiers, though not altogether essential, are desired for stylistic embellishment, dramatic impact, or added detail.

　　*make 〔every〕 endeavor

　　*and <u>liked</u> 〔began to like〕 singing

　　*〔In the near future〕 I will expend more time....

Vagueness~Confusion:

　　*Football is very suitable for posters and commercials. <u>If we</u> 〔People think that anyone who can〕 win an American football game, <u>we</u> 〔 〕 must have a clear head and great physical strength.

　—Who will be impressed by the posters or commercials? This basic notion which bridges the first and the second sentences is missing, because the writer mistakenly thinks that the reader should know it.

　　*<u>And though this is indeed the infidence that consist of their jobs</u> 〔？〕

　—This kind of confusion comes not only from syntactical, but also from semantic errors. The writer seems to have his own logic, though it is erroneous.

Cohesion: Improper pronoun reference and omission of sequential adverbs or conjunctions cause cohesion problems.

　　*I must go to the station and await the arrival of the bus or train. <u>We</u> 〔I〕 become very tired.

　—A sudden shift in point of view breaks unity and the flow of thought.

　　*We should 〔also〕 decrease the number.

　　*So, I 〔finally〕 grasped the situation.

　—Contextual coherence is enhanced by these sequential adverbs.

　　*We talked about college life 〔while〕 drinking beer and eating hors d'oeuvres.

　—If this important conjunction is omitted, the idea of simultaneous occurrence cannot be understood. In fact, the reader might mistake the writer to mean,

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"We talked about college life, drinking beer, and eating hors d'oeuvres."

4.8.4. *Extra Features:*

L1 Interference: Japanese interference occurs at the levels of lexical choice, word or phrasal usage, syntax, and stylistics.

＊the diary is <u>white</u> 〔blank〕

　〔日記はまっ白だ〕

＊live with <u>our mind restful</u> 〔a peaceful mind〕

　〔こころ安らかに生きる〕

＊<u>he</u> 〔his condition〕was out of hand

　〔彼は手に負えなかった（＝手に負えない状態だった）〕

＊with <u>a lot of</u> 〔more〕girls than when...

　〔...のときよりも沢山の少女たち〕

＊the characters are full of life, <u>just like really live</u> 〔as if they were really living〕

　〔まるで本当に生きているように〕

＊however <u>they may be strange</u> 〔strange they may be〕

　〔それらがどんなに変でも／どんなにそれらが変でも〕

＊"be guilty of" —This is not an error, but a stylistic problem: the same phrase is used 8 times in 18 successive sentences in an essay. In writing Japanese there is a tendency to reuse the same word or phrase without thinking it stylistically dull, especially in the case of immature students. [9]

Think／Say／See Verbs: Lexical choice and verb pattern（with or without a preposition）problems are main features seen in these common verbs. In many cases Japanese interference is involved.

＊A car also has other advantages. I can go anywhere whenever I <u>think</u> 〔want to〕.

＊think 〔about〕difficult things

＊several things which are <u>said</u> 〔considered to lead to〕happiness

＊Talking 〔to〕each other

＊look 〔at〕the pictures

＊hope to <u>look</u> 〔see〕many pictures

＊if I <u>watch</u> 〔view／look at〕the picture

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5. Discussion

To summarize the findings of the present research that analyzed all types of composition errors at the college level, it must be noted first that the mechanical errors were 12 per cent of the total and the rest were grammatical and semantic errors, which in relative ratio marked 56.2 per cent and 43.3 per cent respectively. The data reflects the fact that the figures overlap with each other in certain categories, yet the data is still a reliable indicator of the general trend of writing errors at our college. After all, a linguistic error will surely involve various factors.

Considering the proficiency level of English of our medical college students, it is interesting to focus on the relative ratio of grammatical and semantic errors. The authors are inclined to think that if it were at junior or senior high school level, grammatical errors would far exceed semantic errors. According to Hirano (1980), which dealt only with vocabulary, syntax, and morphology errors from junior high school through college, article and preposition errors decrease from 46.0 to 14.6 per cent and from 14.4 to 12.7 per cent respectively as school levels go up, whereas word choice errors of verbs tend to increase. Her report seems to support our contention.

The second remarkable phase of the tendency is that more than half of the semantic errors were Word Choice problems, mostly in content words, which in many cases were suggestive of L1 intereference, especially due to an improper use of dictionaries. In spite of the encouragement in class to use an English-English or collocation dictionary, as well as a Japanese-English dictionary, many students tend to pick up the first translation they find in their Japanese-English dictionary without checking the nuance or usage of the English word or phrase. In the worst case, they may mistake the meaning of the original Japanese word itself and naturally select the wrong English version. In this light, word choice errors are expected to decrease by arousing the students' consciousness towards a better use of dictionaries.

Insufficient Wording, the second highest frequency category in Semantics, also attracts our attention. This seems not so much a matter of an immature way of expressing the writer's idea as it is a problem of the Japanese way of thinking. As Tsuneki (1968) concludes on 'the influence of cultural differences upon the nature of rhetoric,' Japanese tend to grasp a matter intuitively only by taking a vague survey and touching on the peripheral, situational features of the matter, while Americans approach the core of a matter directly and describe it analytically and logically. In the sentence 'A countermeasure will not be perfect if it happened earthquake,' 'A countermeasure' is

really intended to mean 'A countermeasure to safeguard the power plant.' (See Appendix, *l.* 21) The categorization of Insufficient Wording in this research is expected to help students understand such differences in thinking patterns, together with a comparative reading of both American and Japanese college compositions.

Article omission is a notable topic in Grammatical Errors. The percentage of all article errors (14.3%) to the total errors was similar to Hirano's (1980) college level data (14.1 and 13.6) to begin with, and interestingly Article Omission (185 in number) was more than Article Selection (66) and Article Addition (63) combined in our research just like Hirano's finding — Omitted (10.6 and 8.4) versus Wrongly Selected (6.4 and 3.6) and Redundant (8.9 and 2.6). With article errors, omission is said to be the highest-frequency feature among ESL learners of other countries as well, [10] but in the case of Japanese writers this tendency probably comes from the fact that articles are not to be found in the Japanese language. In a broad sense many article errors could be counted as L 1 Interference errors, but in this research L 1 Interference was confined to obvious cases such as verbatim translation.

During the analysis, especially of L 1 Interference and Confusion errors, the authors sometimes wished they could have interviewed the writers to know their real intentions. Even for such complicated errors the writers must have had their own reasons, which could not be fully extracted by reading the erroneous papers alone. In this sense, it cannot be denied that the data given above may have an inevitable limitation; however, this will not much impair the grasp of the general trend.

6. Conclusion

All types of errors in college composition were analyzed quantitatively and discussed in terms of grammar and semantics. Real implications of those error distributions and error features discussed above, however, will be revealed in the phases of further research and teaching when error gravity is known of each error aspect in terms of communicability to native speakers. The present research will hopefully serve as a 'chart' for such native speaker response to an EFL composition like the one presented in the appendix, and further as a 'data base' for a practical composition manual for class use.

No one can expect to speak or write well 'without goofing,' much less in the case of ESL or EFL students. Some error habits may be remedied, and some will persist. However, the latter error pattern, though seemingly hopeless, should be changed little by

little toward more efficient communication at this time of internationalization. That is what error analysis of any kind should exist for and what this research has confirmed for us.

Notes

(1) Corder (1981), p.45.

(2) Fujieda (1983), (1984).

(3) Corder (1981), p.10.

(4) Wrong spacing was also noticed in some essays, but since it was rather sproradic, it was excluded from Mechanics.

(5) Corder (1981), p.36.

(6) 'Cohesion' as defined in Halliday and Hasan (1976).

(7) The figure 697 is the sum of the total numbers of Related Problems in Tables 2-6; 464, 72, 86, 69, and 6.

(8) Roughly speaking, as Mechanical errors were 12 per cent of the total errors, the rest (88 per cent) can be considered as grammatical and semantic errors.

(9) Also see the case of 'somebody' in 4. 8. 2. Reference.

(10) Hirano (1981), p.31.

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APPENDIX: A SAMPLE ESSAY WITH CORRECTIONS

The Dangers and Advantages of Atomic Power Generation

1   I didn't consider so much a matter of atomic power generation before I came in FUKUI. We live

near atomic power plant. Are we perfectly safety? Electoric power by the atomic power generation

is efficiency and moderate cost. Petleum resources in earth have a limit, and we can aquire atomic

energy not relying other countries.

5   The radioactive waste is accumulated by working of atomic reactort. These waste is refregerated

for a long time. Present these are not be able to establish the disposal of the waste. A medium atomic

reactor which work a year accumurates the radioactive substance as thousand times as released in

Hiroshima. Besides the matter of a nucleus energy, there is important thing. It is the leakage of

radioactive substance. And more dangerous thing is "melt down". An atomic reactor can melt and

10 fall down. If this phenomina happen, we can't do nothing.

On 1986, April, 25 the atomic generation in Chernobyl was exploded by remarkable heat. And it

happened chain reaction, the explosion happened next to next. Innumerable people were

victims of the accident. This accident was a small scale. But we always have possibility to meet a

larger accident. Such a accident have the risk which pollute easily the world.

15 In spite of such terrible danger, why the atomic power plant are increasing? The atomic power

energy acquire moderate cost. Countries which is economically poor must use this energy. I hear

Soviet Russia increase the number of this plant in spite of a disaster in Chernobyl.

While Other fuel, for exanple oil, coal, gas, are decreasing. The atomic power energy is efficient. The

move to line 16.

nuclear power

S *incredible*
atomic power plant produce ~~terrible~~ energy in a moment. The politician will believe that ~~this~~ way is
CA

only after considering the economic *s*
20 profitable ~~of the comparison of~~ merit and demerit.   *This idea does not belong in this ¶. Please move it to line 30.*

must
We consider more careful the risk. At first we ~~can~~ think earthquake. A countermeasure will not
-ly *CA* *should* *about* *S* *to safeguard the power plant*

-ly safe *an*
be perfect if ~~it happened~~ earthquake. What do we do a natural calamity~~, for example~~ earthquake
happens *during* *such as an* *?*

Besides this *threaten*
The plants my be attacked by terrorist Atomic power energy is enough terrible to ~~thread~~ the
l.c. *sp*

the threat of being *Such* *and* *be*
people. We must consider ~~to~~ destroy from the inside. ~~It is~~ sabotage careless in operation may

-d *-er* *-ed* *disasters, like earthquakes, can't be*
25 solve by strictly selection. But the other ~~thing don't anticipate when it come.~~ *anticipated.*
of employees.

previously *people of*
President Kenedy ~~have~~ warned the risk of atomic power ~~already~~. Now American ~~prove the risk~~
sp *-s* *-s are aware*

hazards of *-s have been*
of the atomic energy. ~~The order of an~~ atomic reactor ~~are~~ forbitened. The number of the atomic
are quick

Plans to build new *sp* *to realize*
power plants ~~are~~ increasing till 922 but ~~after~~ 922 it ~~will be~~ decreasing. American ~~feel at once~~ the
was *1982?* *Since 1992?* *has been* *-s* *action*

they *don't*
risk. Japanese may feel the risk, too. But Japanese ~~doesn't persist on, or~~ insist on political thing.
l.c.

economics but *the* *-ment*
30 Japanese are good at ~~ecoomy~~, not goot at political thing I think that we must stop to establish the
sp

of new *-s*
atomic power plant till the matter of the radioactive waste is solved. We should decrease the
Begin new ¶.

Of course, *for* *in* *However,*
number of the atomic power plant. ~~But~~ we must use energy to work ~~of our~~ daily life. We should
l.s.

(Am. spelling)
(z) *solar* *World countries are* *need to*
utilise more ~~sun~~ energy. Third ~~powers~~ troubled ~~at a loss~~ of energy. These countries may use the
of *over the lack* *i.e.*

of *the* *forms of*
atomic power ~~energy~~ which is low cost in future But we should develop other energy or make
CA

safe *-s* *about our*
35 truely ~~perfect~~ atomi power plant. It ~~would be~~ the right way when we think future and our
sp *sp* *is only*

descendants.