

# ข้อผิดพลาดแบบไทยในการใช้คำคุณศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษ<sup>1</sup>

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้เสนอการวิเคราะห์ข้อผิดพลาดในการใช้คำคุณศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษ ของนักศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าธนบุรี การศึกษานี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจวิเคราะห์รูปแบบการปรากฏร่วมกันของคำคุณศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษกับคำหมวดอื่นๆ ในประโยค เมื่อนักศึกษาเข้าใจผิดว่าคำคุณศัพท์เหล่านั้นเป็นคำกริยา

แม้ว่ารูปแบบการปรากฏร่วมกันเหล่านี้จะถือว่าผิดไวยากรณ์ภาษาอังกฤษ แต่ก็ได้รับการยอมรับว่าถูกต้องตามไวยากรณ์ภาษาไทย ทำให้เกิดข้อสงสัยขึ้นว่าข้อผิดพลาดเหล่านี้จะสามารถสืบสาวโยงกลับไปถึงการจำแนกหมวดคำตามมโนทัศน์ของนักศึกษาซึ่งได้รับอิทธิพลจากภาษาไทยหรือไม่

สมมุติฐานในการวิจัยนี้คือ ข้อผิดพลาดของนักศึกษาไทยในการใช้คำคุณศัพท์ภาษาอังกฤษ นั้นสืบเนื่องมาจากการแทรกแซงของภาษาแม่ และผลการศึกษาปรากฏว่าเป็นไปตามสมมุติฐานที่ตั้งไว้

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## Thai Errors in Using English Adjectives <sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper presents an error analysis in using English adjectives by KMUTT students. This study aims to investigate the co-occurrences of the students' English adjectives with words from other categories when they are mistaken for verbs.

Though erroneous in English, these co-occurrences are approved in Thai. This arouses a question whether these errors could be traced back to the students' conceptual categorization from their native language or not.

The hypothesis of this study is that Thai students' errors in using English adjectives derive from the interference of their mother tongue. From the analysis, the hypothesis was confirmed.

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## 1. Introduction

### **Thai students' errors in using English adjectives**

As an English teacher, I noticed that many Thai students mistake English adjectives for verbs. These students treated English adjectives in the same manner as they would treat a verb. For example, they substituted English adjectives for sentence predicates. Behaving like a verb, their adjectives occurred with modal auxiliary verbs such as 'he must tall'; aspect markers such as 'I always hungry'; and negations such as 'it not big'. At the same time, their adjectives occurred with intensifiers such as 'it very dangerous'; and comparative markers such as 'it more beautiful than', like any English adjective would do.

Though erroneous in English, these co-occurrences are grammatical in Thai. This arouses a question whether these errors could be explained in terms of the students' native language or not. This research therefore focuses on the error analysis of Thai students' using English adjectives.

### **The importance of language awareness in learning a foreign language**

It is essential for students to be aware of the nature of the language they are learning because this will increase the language resources available to them and to foster their mastery of them [1]. Hawkins [2] says that there is a mass of research showing that insight into pattern lies at the root of successful foreign language learning.

From these viewpoints, we can see that the language awareness of the syntactic pattern of the target language is a key factor to the success of learners.

### **Interference and Errors**

In studying English as a foreign language, students transfer both good and weak writing skills from their first language to English [3]. It has also been found out that they tend to think in two different languages at the same time and that may result in inappropriate translation from the first language [4].

Jackson [5] (cited in James [6]) states that interference happens when an item or structure in the second language manifests some degree of difference from, and some degree of similarity with the equivalent item or structure in the learner's first language. Interference certainly causes difficulty in studying a second language, especially when the target language form is 'marked' while the first language is 'unmarked' [7]. The learners whose native language is less marked, that is, less complex, rare, special, and constrained, would incline to transfer the patterns from their first language to the second language. This transfer will be unsuccessful and will result in error.

### **Study of Thai students' errors**

Most researchers have studied Thai students' errors in terms of classification. Their studies provided types of errors and their frequency. For example, Khemthong [8] found that English Teaching Major Students at Ramkhamhaeng University committed most errors in punctuation, the second in rank was vocabulary and expressions whereas spelling and grammatical patterns were the third and the fourth respectively. She also confirmed that there was a correlation between these four areas of errors and the errors in writing sentences. Kerdphol [9] analyzed students' free essays that were sent to Student Weekly and classified their errors into 5 groups, namely interference errors, developmental errors, ambiguous errors, unique errors and vocabulary errors. He found that interference errors occurred most, about 41.79% of the total. He suggested that since Thai students tended to translate word by word from Thai to English, they committed errors in using vocabulary in lexical meanings and grammatical functions. The recent study by Malayamonthon [10] found that 61.50% of Thai high school students' errors were probably associated with Thai grammatical transfer. When matching the errors with the subjects' communicative strategies, he believed that the strategies that reflected interference from the Thai language were simplification and literal translation.

So far, these studies have been concerned mostly with the general and overall characteristics of Thai students' errors in writing English. On the other hand, the specific types of errors such as adjectives being mistaken as verbs are still uninvestigated.

### **Characteristics of Thai so-called adjectives**

In Thai, the classification of adjectives is problematic. Several linguists treat them differently according to their linguistic approaches. Panupong [11] proposes that, according to its distribution in the sentence structure, a word occurring after a noun is categorized as an adjective if it functions as a noun modifier, and a sub-category of intransitive verb if it functions as a predicate.

Sookgasem [12] separates the part of speech called "adjectives" into two types: attributive and predicative. Based on semantic criterion, her attributive adjectives include the ones that concern quality, color, shape, size, age, temperature, distance, time and origin. Nevertheless, in classifying words into verbs or adjectives, semantic criterion may cause problems because it depends on individual interpretation.

Prasithrathsint [13] argues that Thai verbs and so-called adjectives actually belong to a single word class, that is, the verb category. Many other linguists also agree with this criterion such as Haas [14]; Starosta [15]; Indrambarya [16]; Savetamalya [17] and Warotamasikkhadit [18] (cited in Prasithrathsint [13]).

Prasithrathsint's viewpoint is based on syntactic distribution of the words. She says that the so-called adjectives in Thai behave like a verb in 4 aspects :

1) Occurring in the predicative position: Since Thai verbs are not marked by any inflectional affix, the position of the word is the only marking of predication. The verb and the so-called adjective can occur in the predicative position.

2) Negation: This is a criterion used for testing whether a word is a verb in Thai (see Panupong [11]; Intratat [19]). Words that can be preceded by /mây/ ไม้ 'not' are typical verbs. She shows that negation markers can precede Thai adjectives as well.

3) Imperative: Thai adjectives can occur in the imperative construction, following /karuna/ กรุณา 'please' the same as other typical verbs.

4) Occurring with words signifying aspect: The words signifying aspect can occur with a verb or a so-called adjective, alike. For example, the words such as /léew/ แล้ว 'already' (perfective), /kamlaŋ/ กำลัง 'happening now' (progressive) and /cà/ จะ 'will' (future).

Prasithrathsint [13] also points out that Thai verbs and the so-called adjectives also share some other common characteristics. For example, both of them can occur in patterns of comparison, being followed by /thaâw/ เท่า 'as-as', /kwàa/ กว่า 'more', /mâak kwàa/ มากกว่า 'more than', /thîi sùt/ ที่สุด and /mâak thîi sùt/ มากที่สุด 'the most'. She concludes that adjectival category needs not exist in every language and that word classification should depend on syntactic criteria.

### **Conceptual categorization**

One of the most famous cognitive linguists, Lakoff [20] says that categorization is the basis of human thought, perception, action and speech. Human categorization is essentially a matter of both human experience and imagination.

When comparing Thai with English, it is clearly seen that speakers of the two languages have different conceptual categorization. For Thai students studying English, a problem in word categorization arises. While English is more complex with separated categories for verb and adjectives, Thai is more simple. Thai verbs and so-called adjectives actually belong to a single word class so Thai speakers have the concept of verb category only. On the other hand, English speakers have the concept of two categories, verb and adjective. For this reason, it is not only interesting to study the effect of these different concepts but also inspiring to accumulate more information to support the proficiency of Thai students' studying of English.

## 2. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the co-occurrences of the students' English adjectives with words from other categories when they are mistaken for verbs. This will lead to the inferring of the students' errors and provide additional information for English teachers in designing teaching materials and remedial exercises for their students.

## 3. Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study is that Thai students' errors in using English adjectives derive from the interference of their mother tongue.

## 4. Data

The data investigated in this study were 430 samples in which the writers committed errors in using an adjective instead of a verb. They were collected from passages written by 240 KMUTT freshmen who studied English writing courses with me from 1997 to 2000 and 60 graduate students who took the English course for Graduate students in the first semester of 2000. The data was then analyzed for patterns and frequency of co-occurrences.

The detail of the data is shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** The Data

Group of Students	Number of Samples	
	(Total = 430)	(Total = 100%)
Freshmen (1997-1999)	169	39.30%
Graduates (2000)	44	10.23%
Freshmen (2000)	217	50.46%

## 5. Findings

From the analysis of the data, when the students mistook English adjectives for verbs, there are 8 patterns of co-occurrences. In comparing these co-occurrences with Thai structures, there are remarkable similarities that show the evident interference of the students' mother tongue. These co-occurrences are presented in order of frequency as follows:

### 5.1 Unmarked

In this research, the ‘unmarked’ pattern refers to the pattern in which the predicate in the sentence is replaced by an adjective without any other constituent.

The highest percentage of frequency (50.93%) belongs to this pattern of co-occurrence where the students simply substitute an English adjective for a verb. For example:

1) \*I think it expensive for most people.

Here, the predicate of the sentence is replaced by the adjective ‘expensive’. This pattern is grammatical in Thai as in the Thai version below:

(Thai version) ฉัน คิดว่า มัน แพง สำหรับ คน ส่วนมาก  
 ‘I think it expensive for people most’

We can see the similarity between the Thai version and the student’s example. It clearly shows the inference from the students’ native language. Since the students had false analogies from the Thai version where the word is a verb, they used the English word of equivalent meaning as a predicate.

### 5.2 Modal

In this research, the ‘modal’ pattern refers to the pattern in which the predicate in the sentence is replaced by an adjective with modal auxiliaries. The modal auxiliaries precede verb stems and give them special shades of meaning, such as futurity, volition, possibility, probability, permission, and necessity [21]. This pattern is the second in percentage of frequency (16.97%). The students’ English adjectives occurred with modal auxiliaries in the same way as a verb would do. For example:

2) \*It must necessary to rely on other energy.

(Thai version) มัน จำเป็น ต้อง พึ่งพา พลังงาน อื่น  
 ‘It necessary must rely on energy other’

In the example above, the student also committed overgeneralization by using a modal auxiliary with the adjective “necessary” that he mistook for a verb.

### 5.3 Negation

In this research, the ‘negation’ pattern refers to the pattern in which the predicate in the sentence is replaced by an adjective with negation markers. Some students used a simple negation marker ‘not’ and some applied English rules by using the auxiliary ‘don’t’.

This pattern is the third in percentage of frequency (11.16%). The students’ English adjectives occur with negation markers with or without an auxiliary. For example:

3) \*Energy from a dam not adequate.

The predicate of the sentence is replaced by the adjective ‘adequate’ with negation marker ‘not’. This pattern is grammatical in Thai as in the Thai version below:

(Thai version) พลังงาน จาก เขื่อน ไม่ พอเพียง  
 ‘Energy from dam not adequate’

4) \*I don’t sure to answer this question.

The predicate of the sentence is replaced by the adjective ‘sure’ with an auxiliary and negation marker ‘don’t’. This pattern is also grammatical in Thai as in the Thai version below:

(Thai version) ฉัน ไม่ แน่ใจ ที่จะตอบ คำถาม นี้  
 ‘I not sure to answer question this’

From the examples above, it is evident that the students mistook these English adjectives for verbs. In example 3), the writer transferred directly the Thai negation. In example 4), he committed overgeneralization by assuming that ‘sure’ should occur with an auxiliary to form negation according to English grammar.

### 5.4 Intensifier

In this research, the ‘intensifier’ pattern refers to the pattern in which the predicate in the sentence is replaced by an adjective with an adverb to reinforce its meaning. The most popular intensifier that the students used with their adjectives is “very”. Its equivalent in Thai is also acceptable with Thai verbs. For example:

5) \*It has radioactivity which very dangerous.

(Thai version) มัน มี กัมมันตรังสี ที่ อันตราย ยิ่ง  
 ‘It has radioactivity which dangerous very’

In this example, the writer followed the rule of word ordering in English and put the intensifier before the adjective.



### 5.5 Comparative

In this research, the ‘comparative’ pattern refers to the pattern in which the predicate in the sentence is replaced by an adjective with comparative markers. There are two variations of this pattern. In the first pattern as in 6), the writer followed the English word ordering by placing their adjectives between “more...than” or after “most”. In the second pattern as in 7), they transferred the Thai pattern by placing their adjectives before the comparative markers.

6) \*It more beautiful than many beaches.

(Thai version) มัน สวย กว่า ชายหาด หลายแห่ง  
‘It beautiful more than beach many places’

7) \*I think that study important more than.

(Thai version) ฉัน คิดว่า การเรียน สำคัญ กว่า  
‘I think study important more than’

In this example, the writers overlooked the co-occurrence restriction. While in English, these comparative markers occur only with adjectives, in Thai, these markers normally occur with Thai verbs. This is a further evidence of Thai interference.

### 5.6 Infinitive

In this research, the ‘infinitive’ pattern refers to the pattern in which the predicate in the sentence is replaced by an adjective with the infinitive particle “to”. Though the infinitive “to + V” is typical English, the students ignored the co-occurrence restriction that it is applied with verbs only. For example:

8) \*For our goal, we have to diligent.

(Thai version) เพื่อ เป้าหมาย ของเรา เรา ต้อง ชยัน  
‘For goal our we have to diligent’

This is an even further evidence that the students’ mother tongue interfered with their English because they mistook an English adjective for a verb therefore they applied the restriction of verbs in infinitives as they did for negations, and modals.

### 5.7 Aspect

In this research, the ‘aspect’ pattern refers to the pattern in which the predicate in the sentence is replaced by an adjective with expressions of meaning showing aspect. These aspect

markers show the continuity or distribution of events in time, for example, the beginning, the end, the frequency, or the repetition of events. They may also show habitual performance of events, and their progression, duration or completion as well [21]. The students overgeneralized that, since their English adjectives were mistaken for verbs, these “verbs” could have occurred with aspect markers as if any verb could. For example:

9) \*I always lazy.

(Thai version) ฉัน ซี้เกียจ เสมอ  
'I lazy always'

In the example above, the writer used the aspect marker “always” with an adjective. It is noticeable that he also followed the rule of word ordering in English.

#### 5.8 Changing Forms

The last pattern of co-occurrences is typical English in which the verbs changed their forms according to the subject and tense. The students committed fewer errors with this pattern. In fact, there are only two examples of errors, each one showed the writers' application of English grammar rules on past form and continuous form respectively. Since this pattern is significantly different from Thai, it is understandable that most students did not use them.

The examples of this pattern are as follows.

10) \*I was prouiding of myself.

(Thai version) ฉัน ภูมิใจ ใน ตนเอง  
'I proud in myself'

The writer of this example applied the continuous form for his mistaken verb.

11) \*Yesterday I happied, today I sad.

(Thai version) เมื่อวาน ฉัน สุข วันนี้ ฉัน เศร้า  
'Yesterday I happy today I sad'

In the same manner as in 10), the writer of this example applied the past form for his mistaken verb.

The percentage of the error frequency is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2** Frequency of adjective errors

Patterns of Occurrence	Number of samples from each group			Total
	1 <sup>st</sup> year 97-99	Graduates 2000	1 <sup>st</sup> year 2000	%
1. Unmarked	69	30	120	50.93
2. Modal	48	5	20	16.97
3. Negation	21	3	24	11.16
4. Intensifier	6	2	30	8.84
5. Comparative	9	2	12	5.35
6. Infinitive	11	1	8	4.65
7. Aspect	3	1	3	1.62
8. Changing Forms	2	0	0	.46
Total	169	44	217	100

Table 2 shows the frequency of the students' errors in using English adjectives as verbs. Of all the 8 patterns of co-occurrences, six patterns, which constitute 94.89% of the total frequency, are typical co-occurrences of Thai verbs. Only two patterns, namely Infinitive and Changing Forms, which are typical English, show the examples of the writers' endeavor to apply English rules with their Thai concept of verbs.

## 6. Conclusion

The result obtained from the study shows that Thai students mistook English adjectives for verbs. The students put these English adjectives in the co-occurrences which are typical to Thai or applied English rules with Thai verbs.

The evidence from this study confirms the hypothesis that Thai students' errors in using English adjectives derive from the interference of their mother tongue.

## 7. Discussion

The students' errors in this study can be explained linguistically in terms of conceptual categorization. From the result that Thai native speakers have the concept of verb category instead of adjective category, Thai students then regard English adjectives as verbs. Their errors in using English adjectives point out that, in teaching English to Thai students, both teachers and learners should be aware of the difference in concepts between the two languages.

The result of this research proposes the profit of specific contrastive study between Thai and English. The teaching of English should be treated in the light of Thai grammar, that is, the teacher should bear in mind the students' conceptual categorization. Only the patterns and rules of English language are not enough; the new concept is essentially required. The students would profit more if their concepts are extended.

Therefore I would like to suggest that in designing teaching material or remedial exercises, there should be some topics to deal with adjective errors. These topics should include the different conceptual categorization of verbs in Thai and adjectives in English and the contrastive distribution of this problematic word class in both languages. From the data in this research, special focus should be put on the attributive adjectives such as quality, color, shape, size, age, temperature, etc., because they cause most errors.

## 8. Suggestions for Further Study

8.1 In collecting data for this study, I also found some samples where the students mistook some English prepositions for verbs. These equivalent prepositions in Thai are the ones that have been grammaticalized from verbs [19] which still maintain some characteristics of verb, for example, /klây/ ใกล้ 'near'. It would also be interesting to study further Thai students' using prepositions instead of verbs in English.

8.2 Many languages in South East Asia such as Chinese, Vietnamese, and Laos are in the same typological group as Thai which has no clear dividing line between verbs and adjectives. It is very likely that the students in those countries also regard English adjectives as verbs in the same way as Thai students, and their English teachers might face the same problems. A further study in these other languages, like in this present research, would be profitable to both teachers and students as well.

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