



## **An investigation into L1 interference in Lao EFL students' writing and translation for curriculum and teaching improvement**

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### **Abstract**

L1 interference in Lao students' English writing and translation is widely believed to be a source of errors, but it has not been taken into account. As a result, students' English becomes interlanguage which is considered as an error. This research aimed at investigating the students' errors in English writing and translation. To collect data, writing and translation tests were administered to 213 (= 30%) EFL university students in the Department of English Language (DEL) in a university in Vientiane Capital, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). The data were annually analyzed, categorized and counted up participants making errors in percentage. It took approximately six months to finish analyzing errors in 213 English paragraphs and 213 translation-test papers. Both grammatical and lexical errors in sentence level were found due to direct translation word for word from Lao into English. It was also found the percentage of participants making errors in writing and translation was not much different. The results could be used in the curriculum and teaching improvement.

**Keywords:** English writing and translation; grammatical and lexical errors; Lao EFL student; L1 interference

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## Introduction

Laos is located in South East Asia and surrounded by five neighboring countries: Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Its language (*Lao*) belongs to *Tai* family of languages (Sisouvanh et al., 2000). Lao is used as the official language, and English is used as a foreign language. Because Laos is a member of ASEAN countries and has opened its doors to the world, English has become essential and been widely used in Laos. It becomes a necessary means of communication in business, tourism, and international cooperation and communications. Due to its importance, the Department of English Language (DEL) in a university in Vientiane Capital has paid more attentions to improve the quality of teaching and learning through curriculum and teaching improvement in order to produce competent human resources to serve the country. Even though DEL has tried their best to improve the quality of teaching, materials and even curriculum, students at DEL still face problems in English skills due to lack of practice, confidence in speaking, reading skills, ideas, deep knowledge of English grammar and vocabularies (Keomany, 2006; Khamphanh & Kommaly, 2020; Lorvanhnoy et al., 2016; Sisouphakone & Chaayang, 2020; Soulignavong, 2007; Vongkhamchanh et al., 2015; Vongphachanh & Soukhathamavong, 2020; Xanouxay & Somsanith, 2020).

To improve curriculum and teaching practice needs more information from empirical research, and the data obtained from previous studies seem not enough for DEL educators to apply to the process of curriculum and teaching improvement. It is said "to get enough information from diagnosing what students lack and what needs to be improved is very important to determine what a curriculum should be for a given population" (Taba, 1962, p. 12). However, to deal with language problems students face in learning L2 by improving the curriculum alone is not enough, since a language teacher still needs to understand systems and functioning of L2, and similarities and differences between L1 and L2 (Brown, 1980). To evaluate students' learning performances is a well-known method to help educators see more about what knowledge and skills students have already mastered, and what needs to be improved in the process of teaching and learning. Oliva (1969) also indicates that "to test students' writing performance can show us not only students' strengths

and weaknesses of learning but also the effectiveness of teachers' instruction" (p. 203). In addition, Ellis (1985) points out the goal of traditional errors analysis (EA) is pedagogical, since errors provide valuable information which could be used to sequence items for teaching or to devise remedial lessons. Karim and Nassaji (2013) add that "First language (L1) transfer has been a key issue in the field of applied linguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), and language pedagogy for almost a century" (p. 117). According to Fithriani et al. (2020), L1 interference is still crucial for a second language acquisition. Also, if learners' difficulties in learning L2 are carefully examined, something can be done to help learners overcome their difficulties gradually through pedagogical process (Abushihab et al., 2011; Maros et al., 2007).

It is widely believed learners with different mother-tongues have different difficulties and ease in learning English (L2) due to similarities and differences between their L1 and L2. That is, when L1 and L2 systems are different from each other, it is likely to cause difficulties or errors in L2 learning, whereas the similarity between L1 and L2 is believed to facilitate learners to learn their L2 with ease (Abushihab et al., 2011; Bhela, 1999; Hayati, 1998; Hyland, 2003; Silva, 1993). Some linguists called the term '*similarity between L1 & L2*' as '*positive transfer*' and '*difference between L1 & L2*' as '*negative transfer*' (Ellis, 1985; Gass & Selinker, 1994; Kaweera, 2013; Odlin, 1989; Sabbah, 2015). Based on the previous studies, errors seem inevitable in L2 learning context. It does not matter whether L1 and L2 share similarities or differences in language features; errors can still occur in L2 (Bhela, 1999; Ellis, 1985; James, 1998). Hence, the only way to help students of L2 avoid committing errors when using L2 is to find out sources of L2 errors and apply pedagogical remediations. It is commonly found two main sources of L2 learners' errors—L1 interference (resulting from mother-tongue influence) which is called "*interlingual error*", and the language being learned (L2) which is called "*intralingual error*" (Gass & Selinker, 1994). Here are some examples of previous researches affirming that learners with different L1 have different difficulties when learning L2: Fithriani et al. (2020) found three linguistic aspects on a Chinese learner of English, viz. phonology, morphology, and syntax. Also, the results of an error analysis on students' descriptive writing of a senior high school in Jakarta by Bustomi (2009) revealed L2 learners of English had difficulties in articles, verb tenses, and word choices. Sharma (2018) found sixteen common errors in Nepali university students' English essays, viz. noun, main verb, auxiliary verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, article, singular/plural, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, possessive, conditional sentence, punctuation, capitalization, and spellings. Sattayatham and Honsa (2007) found the most frequent errors in English writing and translation

made by Thai medical students were on the syntactic and lexical levels resulting from incomplete rule application, omission, building of false concepts and mother-tongue interference. Bennui (2008) also found three levels of L1 interference representing more negative transfer than positive one in Thai students' written English. As mentioned, different L1 learners of English have different difficulties or errors in learning L2.

Therefore, it is a need for educators to diagnose their learners' difficulties before pedagogical intervention. Heydari and Bagheri (2012) states that it is consequential for EFL educators to re-conduct research on errors analysis of L2 learners in order to improve teaching strategies and help EFL students learn better. Bennui (2008) also adds "Even though L1 interference is not a new trend in studies on second language acquisition, it is an important factor to be considered in ESL/EFL writing instruction" (p. 73). In Lao context, errors resulting from L1 interference are widely believed to appear at Lao EFL students' English use, especially in English writing and translation. Despite such a prevalent belief, chronic interlingual errors and their causes have not been intentionally studied. Hence, the main purpose of this study was to investigate L1 interference in Lao EFL students' English writing and translation in order to gain more empirical data for the process of curriculum and teaching improvement in DEL in a Lao university in Vientiane Capital. That is, to investigate students' errors in English writing and translation could enable educators to gain more insights into real difficulties students face in learning their L2 and get more information to determine curriculum for particular group of students (Taba, 1962). Besides, errors analysis is for pedagogical purposes (Ellis, 1985). To guide this research, the following two research questions need answering:

- (1) What types and sources of errors do Lao students of English make in English writing and translation?
- (2) What are potential suggestions for DEL to improve its curriculum and teaching practice?

## **Method**

### ***Design***

To answer the research questions in this study, it employed mixed methods research design. According to Creswell (2014), when statistical and text analyses were used together in a research study, the research design of that study was

mixed methods research. It is applicable in this study because it investigated the types and sources of errors of Lao students of English made in English writing and translation and investigated potential suggestions for the Department of English Language (DEL) in a university in Vientiane Capital to improve its curriculum and teaching practice. The researchers gave students writing and translation tests, identified errors in students' English paragraphs and translation, categorized them, and counted up participants committing errors in each type of errors in percentage.

### **Participants**

To select the sample for this study, the two-staged random sampling method was used. First, the stratified random sampling method was employed to select 30% of students (213 students) as the sample from 709 students of the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> year at DEL in a Lao university in Vientiane Capital. Then the simple random method was applied to draw individual subjects from each year of study. More details can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics information of the participants

Year of study	Population	Sample (30%)
1 <sup>st</sup> year	235	70
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	126	39
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	182	54
4 <sup>th</sup> year	166	50
Total	709	213

### **Research instruments**

Writing and translation tests were used to detect participants' errors resulting from L1 interference. That was, to test students' writing performance, it reveals not only students' strengths and weaknesses in learning but also teachers' effective instruction (Oliva, 1969). Also, teachers can gain deeper insights into students' competence and difficulties in their L2 learning (Norrish, 1983). The writing test consisted of six familiar topics, viz. (1) *playing games a lot*, (2) *smoking*, (3) *drinking a lot of alcohol*, (4) *internet*, (5) *how to deal with traffic jams in Vientiane Capital*, and (6) *how to reduce global emissions*. The participants were asked to choose only one topic based on their individuals' preference to express opinions with at least 150 words in a paragraph. For the translation test, questions were at sentence level. It covered both grammatical and lexical items, which were believed Lao students tended to make interlingual errors. It comprised of 63 questions in total, 19 of which were of lexical items, and 44 of which were

grammatical items. Before the test was distributed to 213 participants, it was validated by a specialist in the field of Lao language.

### **Data collection**

After the permission letter to collect data had been approved by the dean of the faculty where DEL is located, the writing and translation tests were administered to 213 participants. They were assigned to sit for the tests in three lecture rooms with 12 proctors (71 participants/one lecture room and four proctors/one lecture room). Before the test, the participants were clearly told the purpose of the tests to prevent from cheating or any concerns. They were told not to write their names on their test papers. The first test distributed to the participants was the translation test, and they were asked to translate from Lao into English and given 60 minutes to complete it. They were allowed to have a 10-minute break between the two tests. They were also given 60 minutes to complete the writing test. The time allocated for both tests seemed enough for them, since many handed in their test papers before the time allotted.

### **Data analysis**

To tackle errors in the participants' English writing and translation, the researchers adopted Gass and Selinker's (1994) six steps of data collection as follows:

Step 1 (Collecting Data): The writing and translation tests were administered to 213 participants in DEL in a Lao university in Vientiane Capital to collect the data.

Step 2 (Identifying Errors): After test papers were collected, errors were annually checked by three examiners who had got experiences of teaching English to university students for more than 10 years. They checked participants' papers one by one for errors basing on their types and using codes adapted from 'The Grammar Book' written by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999). To identify errors in writing objectively, the criteria were set according to items tested in the translation test. That was, the researchers included all items that were likely to be interfered by the mother-tongue in the translation test. Hence, not all errors in writing test papers were identified. 71 English paragraphs and 71 translation-test papers were assigned to each examiner to check for interlingual errors. They read through each test paper carefully and identified each error by using the codes. In identifying process, errors resulting from overgeneralization of English rules or intralingual errors as defined by Richards (1984); for example, "*he can sings, or you should studying harder," were not taken*

into account as the data in this research (p. 6). That was, intralingual errors (resulting from the target language learned) were found in a lot of previous researches, and sources of errors were similar or even the same in some researches such as overgeneralization of L2 rules, incomplete learning of L2 rules, ignorance of L2 rule restrictions, false concepts hypothesized, and developmental errors (Jie, 2008; Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007; Sermsook et al., 2017; Simbolon, 2015). On the other hand, there is no research done in Lao interference in English writing and translation. Hence, the researchers focused solely on interlingual errors.

Step 3 (Classifying Errors): After checking each test paper for errors, the examiners tabulated errors based on their types. Then errors were cross-checked by the three examiners again to make sure that all errors were correctly classified.

Step 4 (Quantifying Errors): The researchers did not count the total number of errors in each type. Instead, they counted the number of participants making errors in each type. That was, the researchers did not apply any software programs to help in identifying, classifying, and quantifying errors. The process of each step was annually done. It was very time consuming to count frequency of items used and errors by hand. That was the reason the total number of errors were not counted.

Step 5 (Analyzing Sources of Errors): The researchers sought for sources of errors and described why such errors occurred.

Step 6 (Remediating for Errors): Potential suggestions for pedagogical remediation would be proposed to DEL in a Lao university in Vientiane Capital in order to help educators improve their curriculum and teaching practice. It took approximately six months to finish all the six steps—it was very time consuming. The codes, types of errors, and percentage of the participants making errors can be seen in Table 2.

## Findings

The main purpose of this study was to investigate students' errors in English writing and translation. The findings were found as shown in Table 2. It indicates the codes used in identifying each type of errors, classifications of grammatical and lexical items, examples of errors found in students' English writing and translation, and the percentage of participants committing errors. More details of types and descriptions of errors are also explained.

Table 2. Codes, classifications, examples, and percentage of participants

Codes	Classification of grammatical and lexical items	Classification of grammatical and lexical errors & Examples of errors	Percentage (%) of participants making errors	
			Writing	Translation
C	Conjunction	<u>Misuse of two conjunctions to combine clauses:</u> <i>Even though</i> they know smoking is not good, <i>but</i> they keep on smoking.	97	93
Pro.	Pronoun	<u>Using Lao topic-comment construction:</u> People in Vientiane Capital <i>they</i> have a big problem about commuting to work due to traffic jam.	83	85
SVA	Subject-verb agreement	<u>Subject-verb agreement:</u> Global emission <i>become</i> a controversial issue.	60	58
T	Tense	<u>Using 'will' to describe facts:</u> Drinking alcohol <i>will</i> affect your health.	79	65
P	Punctuation	<u>Using colon after 'such as':</u> Internet is beneficial for us such as: searching for information, studying online, selling and shopping online, watching YouTube, and listening to music.	62	56
NRT	Nonreferential 'there' as a subject	<u>Errors in 'there is/are' construction:</u> There are some people <i>drink</i> beer a lot.	90	86
Adj.	Adjective	<u>Using adjectives as verbs:</u> They <i>late</i> for work because of traffic jam.	41	38
VF	Verb Form	<u>Keeping base forms of verbs after prepositions:</u> We should advice people by <i>tell</i> them effects of alcohol.	50	47
CF	Comparative form	<u>Errors in comparative forms of adjectives/adverbs:</u> People know going to work by bus is <i>cheap than</i> by their own cars.	63	61
V	Verb	<u>Using double verbs:</u> It <i>is depend</i> on their preference.	54	56
Pre.	Preposition	<u>Unnecessary preposition:</u>	89	91

		The government should <i>discus about</i> this problem.		
WC	Word choice	<u>Word choice:</u> You will be a <i>cancer</i> if you smoke a lot.	77	76
		Drinking alcohol a lot <i>destroy</i> your health.	65	58
		Teenagers <i>use</i> money in a wrong way.	52	45
		They <i>used</i> 12 hours driving to Pakse.	25	18
Red.	Redundancy	<u>Redundancy:</u> <i>In my opinion, I think</i> people should stop burning garbage.	89	87

### ***Types of errors made by Lao students of English in English writing and translation***

It was found that the participants made interlingual errors in both grammar and lexicon as follows:

#### *Errors in grammar*

*Misuse of two conjunctions to combine clauses together.* This error was the most prevalent in both writing and translation. 93% of the participants made this error in translation and 97% writing. The subordinating conjunction '*even though, even if, although*' was used with the coordinating conjunction '*but*' in the same sentence: '*Even though* they know smoking is not good, *but* they keep on smoking'. This is the application of a paired conjunction in Lao '*even though...but*', '*even if...but*', '*although...but*'. Hence, errors occurred when they applied them to English. The examples of errors are shown in Table 2.

*Using Lao topic-comment construction system.* It was found that the majority of the participants applied the "Topic-comment" construction of Lao to English writing and translation, which accounted for 83% in writing and 85% in translation. For example, 'People in Vientiane Capital *they* have a big problem about commuting to work due to traffic jam'. In this example, '*people in Vientiane Capital*' becomes the topic of the sentence, and '*they have a big problem about commuting to work due to traffic jam*' is the comment. The examples of errors are shown in Table 2.

*Errors in subject-verb agreement.* The subject-verb agreement errors were found the most amongst students in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year, whose English was still at low level. It accounted for 60% in writing and 58% in translation. The error resulted in due to applying Lao system to English. The subject-verb agreement system does not exist in Lao. Both singular and plural subjects take the same verb form—a

singular verb form (no *-s/-es* marker) (Sisouvanh et al., 2000). If students apply this system when they use English, errors result like this 'Global emission *become* a controversial issue'. Examples of errors are shown in Table 2.

*Misuse of 'will' to describe facts.* It was found '*will*' was used to describe facts as in Lao, which accounted 79% in writing and 65% in translation. For example, 'Drinking alcohol *will* affect your health'. It is used as a result clause of a conditional sentence in English, where the part of *if-clause* is omitted. It is very common and acceptable in Lao. The examples of errors are shown in Table 2.

*Misuse of colon after 'such as'.* To use the colon (:) after '*such as*' is strange in English, where it is very prevalent in Lao. However, when it is applied to English, it becomes an error: '*Internet is beneficial for us such as: searching for information, studying online, selling and shopping online, watching YouTube, and listening to music.*' This error was found 62% in writing and 56% in translation. In Lao, if the colon is not used with such a word, it is considered to be wrong. The examples of errors are shown in Table 2.

*Errors in nonreferential 'there is/are'.* It was found that the majority of participants made error of nonreferential '*there*' due to applying Lao topic-comment construction to English. This accounted for 90% in writing and 86% in translation. For example, 'There are some people *drink* beer a lot.' instead of 'There are some people *drinking* beer a lot', or 'There are some people *who drink* beer a lot'. In this example, '*There are some people*' is the topic and '*drink beer a lot*' is the comment. Moreover, to use an adjective clause after the noun '*people*' like the given example is very strange in Lao. Also, the *ing* does not exist in Lao (Sisouvanh et al., 2000). The examples of errors are shown in Table 2.

*Errors in redundancy.* This error occurred when participants used an unnecessary expression to repeat the word mentioned before. This is common and accepted in Lao; for example, '*In my opinion, I think* people should stop burning garbage'. In this example, '*In my opinion*' and '*I think*' are similar in meaning. This can be explained as transferring *Topic-comment* system of Lao into English. '*In my opinion*' is the topic and '*I think + clause*' is the comment. This error accounted for 89% in writing and 87% in translation. The examples of errors are shown in Table 2.

#### *Errors in lexicon*

Errors in lexicon were found amongst Lao students of English, since they chose a wrong choice a word due to the application of L1; for example, 'Teenagers *use* money in a wrong way'. This can be explained that some Lao words are broader

in meaning than English ones; for example, the word “ໃຊ້(xai)” in Lao is equal to many English words: *use, spend, take, utilize, make use of, employ, apply, put into service & work*. Hence, if students think in Lao while writing or translating into English, collocation errors result. Moreover, adding an unnecessary preposition to a verb was also found in this study due to translating word for word from Lao into English; for example, ‘The government should discuss *about* this problem’. As it was pointed out, L2 learners automatically transferred their L1 to L2 due to habit of using L2 (Jie, 2008). The examples of errors are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Codes, classifications, examples, and percentage of participants

Codes	Classification of lexical items	Classification of lexical errors & Examples of errors	Percentage (%) of participants making errors	
			Writing	Translating
WC	Word choice	<u>Word choice:</u> You will be a <i>cancer</i> if you smoke a lot.	77	76
		Drinking a lot <i>destroy</i> your health.	65	58
		Teenagers <i>use</i> money in a wrong way.	52	45
		They <i>used</i> 12 hours driving to Pakse.	25	18
Pre.	Preposition	<u>Unnecessary preposition:</u> The government should <i>discuss about</i> this problem.	89	91

### **Sources of errors made by Lao students of English in English writing and translation**

All errors found came from two sources such as (1) *Lao language interference*: Students applied their L1 elements to L2 when writing and translating; for example, ‘*Even though* they know smoking is not good, *but* they keep on smoking’. In this example, they applied a paired conjunction in Lao ‘*even though...but*’ to English; and (2) *transferring of habits from L1 to L2*: Lao students were likely to think or digest the information in Lao first, and then transfer their L1 forms and meaning habitually to their L2 writing and translation in order to compensate for what they lacked in L2. For example, ‘They *used* 12 hours driving to Pakse’. The meaning of this example is absolutely correct in Lao but not in English.

### **Potential suggestion for DEL’s curriculum and teaching improvement**

The educators of the Department of English Language (DEL) in a university in Vientiane Capital could insert grammatical and lexical items that are likely to

cause difficulties for students into teaching materials or supplementary materials to help their students be aware of such items when learning English; for example, the majority of Lao students misused two conjunctions 'even though/although/even if' and 'but' in the same sentence. More activities about the conjunction 'even though/although/even if' and 'but' should be supplemented in when teaching the unit of conjunctions. It is good to include activities that help students practise finding and correcting mistakes themselves, give them enough time to practise each activity and provide them with explicit useful feedbacks. Moreover, when teachers know what grammatical and lexical areas their students still need improving, they could direct to the points when teaching their students. They need to prepare necessary supplementary materials and exercises containing grammatical and lexical elements students face difficulty in using English due to language differences. In addition, it is a good idea for language teachers to train their students to deal with their learning problems through self-editing and peer feedbacks, and teachers need to teach them codes or symbols used in giving feedbacks intentionally and explicitly. Also, it is very necessary for teachers to collect students' errors anonymously, and then give them feedbacks in the whole class. To do this helps all students be aware of errors resulting from Lao interference.

## Discussion

In this study, most of the participants made errors in two linguistic levels—*grammar* and *lexicon*—in their English writing and translation due to Lao (L1) interference and habitual transfer. That was, they applied their L1 elements to English (L2) writing and translation. It was very common for Lao students to think or digest the information in their L1 before they started communicating in L2. Hence, they were likely to translate word for word from L1 to L2, which resulted in interlingual errors. The results of this study affirmed the theory and previous findings of "negative transfer" by Bhela (1999), Ellis (1985), Gass and Selinker (1994), Kaweera (2013), Odlin (1989), and Sabbah (2015). Both grammatical and lexical errors were influenced by negative transfers can be discussed.

The majority of Lao students tended to transfer their L1 grammatical rules to their L2 when writing and translating. This resulted in interlingual errors. Applying the topic-comment construction was one that most Lao students did; for example, "There are a lot of people have their own computers". 'There are a lot of people' is the topic, and 'have their own computers' is the comment. This supports

the study undertaken by Gass and Selinker (1994) to investigate errors in English written restrictive relative clauses by four groups of native speakers of Persian, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese. The result showed that Chinese and Japanese speakers tended to apply their L1 topic-comment construction to English; for instance, "There are so many Taiwan people live around the lake", "There were lots of events happen in my country", and "...there are so many tourist [sic] visit there".

Another interesting feature is that Lao students were confused in using an adjective as a state verb when writing in English, where the copula *be* was omitted; for example, 'They *late* for work because of traffic jam'. Similarly, the same error was found by Simbolon (2015) that Indonesian students were confused whether to use a verb or an adjective; for example, "I *cool* when I speak English". Also, one study on analysis of errors in written English sentences of Thai students by Sermsook et al. (2017) also showed the same error; for example, "He *stressed*" instead of "He *is stressed*".

When comparing interlingual errors committed by Thai students in the studies undertaken by Bennui (2008), Kaweera (2013), and Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013), it was found that Lao and Thai students committed similar interlingual errors. It may be due to the fact that the two languages are very close to each other. According to Smyth (2002), "Lao is a member of the *Tai* family of languages, including Thai, Shan (spoken in northern Myanmar), and some dialect spoken in southwestern China" (p. 1).

Also, wrong use of tense (especially 'will') was seen in both writing and translation because of applying their L1 to their L2. This result is in conjunction with the research done by Abushihab et al. (2011) that Arab learners of English faced difficulty in using correct tenses between simple past and present perfect, simple present and present perfect, simple past and past perfect, etc. due to their L1 effect. Sabbah (2015) confirmed Arab learners of English were confused about using tenses, since progressive tense does not exist in Arabic language, so they used simple present instead.

It is also indicated that the different system of preposition between L1 and L2 was a possible cause of errors in using an unnecessary preposition or omission of the preposition; for example, "The government should *discus about* this problem". The same error happened to Arab students of English as well due to L1 interference, for example, "He laughed *from* me because I was smoking" (Abushihab et al., 2011, p. 548).

In addition, most of the errors found in lexicon resulted from directly translating word for word from Lao into English or habitual transfer; for example, 'Smoking can *destroy* your health'. This finding is in conjunction with the one done by Bennui (2008) that,

Thai students violate some collocation restrictions when writing in English. For instance, 'My hair is busy. (My hair is messy.), I play a computer. (I work on a computer.), and I closed (opened) the radio. (I turned off (on) the radio.)' are examples of using Thai collocations in written expression in English. (p. 77).

The most interesting finding in this current study is that the majority of Lao students (the subjects of this study) applied a paired conjunction of Lao such as '*even though ... but*', '*although...but*' and '*even if...but*' into English. It is the highlight of this study; for example, '*Even though they know smoking is not good, but they keep on smoking*'.

This study also supported results of many previous studies revealing that L1 was the main source of errors committed by L2 learners. Sharma (2018) found sixteen common errors in Nepali university students' English essays. Bennui (2008) also found that 28 third-year English-minor students at a university in Thailand made errors resulting from L1 lexical interference, and borrowing structures from their L1 such as word order, subject-verb agreement, and noun determiners to L2. Moreover, it was said Thai students' written English were influenced by Thai grammatical structures, vocabulary use and discourse. It was, then, concluded that Thai students' written English was widely influenced by their L1. The results of this study are the same. All errors found resulted from applying L1 rules to L2. Yahya et al. (2012) did a research study with the sample of 30 secondary school students in Malaysia. 11 categories of errors were found in students' English writing due to L1 effect. Ridha (2012) conducted research with the sample of 80 EFL college students. The results revealed students committed errors in grammar, lexicon, word order, and mechanics because of their L1. Sawalmeh (2013) did a study with 33 male students joining the Preparatory Year Program at University of Ha'il. The errors were found in 10 categories, most of which resulted from L1 interference. Fithriani et al. (2020) conducted research and found errors in three linguistic aspects, viz. phonology, morphology, and syntax due to L1 interference. Sermsook et al. (2017) conducted a study with the sample of 26 second-year English major students, revealed the most frequently committed errors resulted from L1. It was also found that L2 learners had problems in grammar and vocabulary in writing L2 (Erkaya, 2012; Karim & Nassaji, 2013; Khoshsima & Banaruee, 2017; Mojica, 2010; Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong, 2008). Also, James' (1998) research revealed that at least 30% of L2 learners' errors resulted from wrong transferring L1 systems to L2, and it was found that one-third of L2 learners' errors were caused by transferring L1 systems to L2 (Kaweera, 2013). Sarfraz (2011) conducted an error analysis on English essays written by 50 undergraduate Pakistani students and found most of the errors were influenced by L1.

Islam (2020) conducted a study by reviewing relevant research literature and cited examples of the influence of L1 in different mother-tongues, and strongly confirmed that “the claim that interlanguage errors or deviant L2 linguistic features across cultures (English being the case in point) are overwhelmingly L1 driven notwithstanding the developmental factors within English itself” (p. 67). It was confirmed that most errors made by L2 learners resulted from L1 interference (Brown, 1980).

On the other hand, the research done by Simbolon (2015) revealed that the second-year Indonesian university students of English made errors in six categories, viz. errors in production of verb groups, errors in the distribution of verb groups, errors in the use of article, errors in the use of preposition, errors in the use of questions and miscellaneous errors in speaking activities using present simple and present progressive tenses due to the effect of L2 (intralingual error). That was accounted for 82.55%, 44.7% of which was claimed to overgeneralization of L2 rules. Also, some researchers found L1 interference was a cause of errors when L1 and L2 shared similarity in lexical items and grammatical structures (Bhela, 1999; Ellis, 1985). In the current study, however, intralingual errors were not focused on due to the fact that the main objective of this study was solely focused on L1 interference.

In spite of a large number of previous studies on errors analysis in English writing and translation, something new was still found in this current study, which could be good evidence for both L2 teachers and researchers, or even for L2 experts in the field of second language acquisition or applied linguistics; for example, applying Lao paired conjunctions ‘*even though...but, although...but & even if...but*’ to English.

## Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate Lao interference in English writing and translation of Lao EFL students. It was found that most of the participants made errors at two linguistic levels—*grammar* and *lexicon*. For grammatical errors, it can be condensed into 11 categories of errors, viz. errors in misuse of conjunction, errors due to keeping a base form of a verb in nonreferential ‘*there*’, errors in redundancy, errors resulting from applying Lao topic-comment construction to English, errors resulting from using ‘*will*’ to indicate a fact, errors in subject-verb agreement, errors in comparative of adjective/adverb, errors resulting from using double verbs, misuse of colon after ‘*such as*’, errors resulting from keeping base form of a verb after a preposition, and errors in using adjectives as verbs. Most

lexical errors are in collocation and result from picking up wrong choice of words to use in English, since Lao words are broader in meaning than English ones.

The sources of errors are due to Lao interference and habitual transfer from L1 to L2. That is, Lao students applied their L1 system to English, and they were likely to digest information in Lao first before writing in English and translating Lao into English.

All errors found here are very beneficial to EFL teachers, educators responsible for syllabus and textbooks, students of English, and even for researchers. That is, if teachers know and understand difficult areas their students face, they can direct to the points while teaching them to help them learn better. Moreover, if causes of errors are clearly identified, they will be beneficial for both teachers and learners. That is, teachers can reflect what they have done so far in their teaching and what needs to be improved, adjust their teaching styles and teaching materials to fit students' needs, and improve curriculum if necessary to fit their students' context. Besides, the results of this study can help students be aware of what they have learnt so far and what they need to be aware of while learning English, and avoid applying their L1 rules to English when using English.

Moreover, the findings of this study are essential for EFL teaching and learning in Laos, since it shows teachers what types of errors are more frequently made by Lao students of English, and what possible causes of such errors are. The teachers could use errors to reflect their teaching practice as a whole, to estimate how far towards the goal their students have progressed so far and what should be improved in the process of teaching and learning English to help students learn better. Last but not least, the findings could add to existing knowledge of second language acquisition, since they could show linguists evidence of how learners learn or acquire their L2. Also, it could be used to inform studies on other mother-tongues of English and how to identify errors of L1 interference in learning English as a second language.

The current study has limitations due to the following aspects: (1) only interlingual errors (at two linguistic levels: grammar and lexicon) were detected in students' writing and translation, whereas intralingual errors were excluded; (2) the study is limited to students' spontaneous utterances. Hence, L1 interference in pronouncing English words has not been found; (3) some minor classes in parts of speech like determiners as defined by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) were not examined in this study due to time constraint; and (4) problems concerning paragraph organization, coherence and unity have not been examined.

It is suggested that future research should be focused on errors in speaking to see more spontaneously utterance Lao students produce, and find out if they make any errors resulting from Lao interference. Also, research on investigation into paragraph writing is suggested to see if L1 influences writing style or paragraph structure when using L2.

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