

## **Linguistic Error Analysis on Students' Thesis Proposals**

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### **Abstract**

This study identified and analyzed the common linguistic errors encountered by Linguistics, Literature, and Advertising Arts majors in their Thesis Proposal classes in the First Semester 2016–2017. The data were the drafts of the thesis proposals of the students from the three different programs. A total of 32 manuscripts were analyzed which was based on the actual number of groups. Results showed that of the three kinds of errors, namely grammatical, syntactical, and mechanics/substance, grammar as a main concern in writing competency was the most common linguistic error among these students. Moreover, the prevalent grammatical errors were: disagreement between the pronoun and antecedent, wrong usage of tense, and disagreement between the verb and subject. In the area of syntax, the most problematic areas were: fragments and run-ons. Lastly, in terms of mechanics, the top errors were: punctuation and spelling.

This study recommends that an intensive refresher writing course that focuses on the error-prone areas be conducted to prepare graduating students for their thesis proposal writing; to consider that team teaching and other interventions be considered so linguistic problems together with content can be addressed, since form and content go together, and finally, that a thesis editing guide or writing handbook be prepared, with an abundance of examples, practice exercises and writing activities, for instructors' and students' use.

**Keywords:** grammatical errors; higher education; linguistic errors; mechanics; syntactical errors; thesis proposal writing

## Introduction

Thesis Writing is an important part of any college education program. Before students can obtain any degree in a university, they should have a passing grade in a thesis writing class. A thesis is an end product that students must write after attending several major courses accompanied with English courses.

Among the four macro skills, writing is considered as the “most intricate and most complex task.” It is deemed as the “most difficult of the language abilities to acquire” according to Allen and Corder (1974) cited in Lasaten (2014). It was further observed that errors still exist even for those students in the tertiary level despite that they were already exposed to language courses in their academic years (Lasaten, 2014). It is in this context that this research was undertaken since the researchers believe that the Linguistics and Literature majors are not spared from this phenomenon.

Brant (1946) cited in Alinsunod (2014) mentioned that for the educators to be satisfied with the written work of students, the latter should submit works which have “good grammatical structures, appropriate punctuation marks, verbs in their right tenses, pronouns in the right case and correct spelling of words.” It had been assumed that these students, having passed several English courses would have acquired those skills and therefore could prepare well-written thesis proposals for their thesis writing class. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case.

The researchers’ actual experience handling the Thesis Writing class in their home department in the Department of Communications, Linguistics and Literature (DCLL), and lately partnering with the Fine Arts Department where the latter’s thesis proposal classes are handled by DCLL instructors showed that students encountered the same problems. Thus, it is necessary to systematically study the drafts of the thesis proposals submitted by students in order to identify and describe the common flaws in writing thesis proposals. The results can serve as basis for a rigorous training aimed at helping the students improve their way of writing. Thus, DCLL, together with the Department of Fine Arts, will be able to advance the issue of thesis quality.

To reiterate, it is important that DCLL attend to matters such as this so that the thesis proposals of good quality are produced, which will culminate in a quality thesis in the second semester because a well-written proposal is the foundation of good research.

### Linguistic Errors

This section presents the different linguistics errors identified by Darus and Ching (2009) cited in Lasaten (2014). The study includes three major categories, namely: grammatical errors, syntactical errors, and mechanics.

First, grammatical errors include the wrong usage of the different parts of speech. All examples mentioned here were taken from Lasaten (2014).

### Verb Tenses

Example: A year ago, I need (needed) to stop from studying because my parents cannot (could not) afford to send me to school.

## Prepositions

Example: He wanted to go out to (from) the room, but he was scared.

## Articles

Example: I felt gap between me and him.  
I felt a gap between me and him.

The second part encompasses the analysis determining the syntactical errors. All examples mentioned here were taken from Lasaten (2014).

### a. Fragment

Example: Myself undesirable and unwanted.  
I am undesirable and unwanted. (sentence)

### b. Run-on sentence

Example: The sale was in full swing in the store people crowded the aisles.  
The sale was in full swing. In the store, people crowded the aisles.

### c. Misplaced modifier

Example: A man fell over a rock running in a race.  
A man running in a race fell over a rock.

### d. Dangling modifier

Example: To go to the game, seats must be reserved.  
To go to the game, you must reserve seats.

### e. Faulty parallelism

Example: Planning, drafting, and revision are three steps in the writing process.  
Planning, writing, revising are three steps in the writing process.

Third, mechanics refers to “the technical part of constructing sentences.” All examples mentioned here were taken from Lasaten (2014).

### a. Capitalization

Example: The instructor began by saying, “music is a way of painting a picture with melodies.”  
The instructor began by saying, “Music is a way of painting a picture with melodies.”

### b. Punctuation

Example: In our relationships we encounter several struggles. (omission of comma)  
In our relationships, we encounter several struggles. (comma inserted)

### c. Spelling

Example: I beleive that someday I can make a difference. (believe)  
I saw him with his redish eyes. (reddish)

## Review of the Related Literature

Certain language researchers (Kikula and Qorro, 2007; Manchisi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015; Purnawan, n.y.; Lasaten, 2014; and Darus and Ching, 2009) have been interested to

conduct studies analyzing the common mistakes in writing either a research proposal or an academic writing.

The first part of the literature comprises studies where the analysis targeted the common problems encountered when participants wrote and submitted their research proposals.

Kikula and Qorro's (2007) research objective was to identify the common mistakes and problems in research proposal writing. The data consisted of 240 proposals. Their results revealed that the top three most problematic issues were: writing the research problem, articulating the importance of the research problem, and proposing an appropriate methodology.

Similarly, Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza's (2015) study focused on establishing the common mistakes committed by postgraduate students. A total of 100 respondents participated in face to face interviews and focus group discussions. The findings of their study indicated that, first, the respondents presented broad and unclear topics, failed to state the problem and identify the gap in the literature, employed wrong methodology, wrong referencing style, and lastly, committed plagiarism. Second, when respondents were asked about the different challenges they faced, their responses centered on the unavailability of lecturers for consultation, negative comments from supervisors, limited time to write the proposals, and lack of materials. In the same way, the Linguistics, Literature and Advertising Arts majors were asked to validate the results of the study concentrating on the most problematic linguistic errors.

Another research that identified the common flaws in students' research proposals was done by Purnawan (n.y.). Her study analyzed 30 proposals. It revealed the following flaws: lack of vocabulary mastery, grammatical mistakes, citation and methodological flaws.

The second group of studies investigated the most common linguistic errors of students in their writing classes.

Lasaten (2014), Darus and Ching (2009), and Tizon (n.y.) examined students' errors. In the study of Lasaten (2014), he analyzed the common linguistic errors in the English writings of teacher education students. The most common errors were on verb tenses, sentence structure, punctuations, word choice, spelling, prepositions, and articles.

Likewise, Darus and Ching (2009) determined the most common errors in essays written by Chinese students. Results revealed that mechanics, tenses, preposition, and subject-verb agreement were the most common errors of the students. For Tizon (n.y.), she analysed the local and global errors of 236 students from the different colleges of La Salle University. In her study, local errors are minor mistakes which do not cause problems in comprehension. In contrast, global errors are major mistakes which make a sentence difficult to understand. The findings revealed that the School of Hospitality Management got the highest number of local and global errors. Thus, she suggested that students in the said school should actively attend remedial activities to reinforce their writing ability.

The researchers mentioned here in the second part did not analyze thesis proposals, but the results of their study can greatly help in explaining the occurrences of the different linguistic errors which this study aimed to investigate.

## Statement of the Problem

This study attempted to identify and analyze the common linguistic errors incurred by the Linguistics, Literature, and Advertising Arts majors in their Thesis Proposal classes in the First Semester of AY 2016-2017.

- a. What linguistic errors occurred in the thesis proposals of the students?
  1. Grammatical Errors
  2. Syntactical Errors
  3. Mechanics/Substance Errors
- b. How does each error qualify for a specific linguistic error?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed content analysis as it described and analyzed the frequent linguistic errors observed in the students' thesis proposals. Moreover, students were also interviewed in order to validate the findings.

### Research Participants

The participants were the fourth-year level students who were enrolled in English 115A (Thesis Proposal) in the Department of Communication, Linguistics and Literature (DCLL), and AA410 (Thesis Proposal) in the Department of Fine Arts, during the first semester of 2016-2017. For English 115A, two programs were covered: Linguistics and Literature.

### Research Data

The data were the drafts of the thesis proposals submitted by Linguistics, Literature, and Advertising Arts majors to their English 115A or AA410 Instructors, respectively, in the first semester of academic year 2016-2017. A total of 32 manuscripts were analyzed (AA 10; Ling 15; Lit 7).

### Research Procedure

#### Gathering of Data

A letter was sent to the Chairs of the Department of Communications, Linguistics and Literature and the Department of Fine Arts requesting permission to conduct a study analyzing the thesis proposals of students enrolled in English 115A and AA410, respectively. The students were assured that all information gathered will be treated with strict confidentiality.

#### Treatment of Data

When these students submitted their drafts to their research instructors, the researchers compiled the drafts and afterwards coded the errors as grammatical, syntactical, or mechanics-related. The details of each of the errors were written in the coding sheets. The

coding sheets reflected the specific kind of error and the exact phrase/sentence containing the error.

A summary of the percentages of error by linguistic category and by program was illustrated in Table 1. To further illustrate the linguistic errors, Table 2 showcased the grammatical errors; Table 3 exhibited the syntactical errors; and Table 4 conveyed the different errors in mechanics. These four tables answered the first sub-problem. After the presentation of each linguistic error, the researchers took specific samples from the thesis proposal drafts to illustrate the most prevalent errors in grammar, syntax, and mechanics, and provided a detailed explanation to answer the second sub-problem. Aside from the descriptive statistics, a chi square test was done to determine if there was a significant relationship between the linguistic errors and the three programs from which the thesis proposal manuscripts were taken.

After obtaining the results on the most prevalent linguistic errors, students enrolled in English 115A and AA410 validated the findings. The purpose for doing the validation was to find out whether the students were aware of their writing problems and whether their responses were consistent with the findings. Through this activity, the views of the students were used to crosscheck the results of the study.

### Results and Discussion

Table 1: Kinds of Linguistic Errors.

| Kinds of Errors     | Advertising Arts | Linguistics | Literature |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------|------------|
| Grammatical Errors  | 69.39%           | 60.50%      | 43.48%     |
| Syntactic Errors    | 12.02%           | 25.21%      | 32.61%     |
| Mechanics/Substance | 18.59%           | 14.29%      | 23.91%     |

From the percentages of the three categories of errors, namely, grammatical, syntactical, and mechanics/substance that have been the main objective of this study, it can be noted that grammar as a main concern in writing competency is the most common error among the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students while writing their thesis proposals.

Because grammatical error appeared as the top linguistic error across the three programs, confirmation was sought from the students, and majority of the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature majors agreed that it was indeed a major problem for them. The following are direct quotes from students:

Because for the past 3 years in Advertising, we only focus on execution (like making artworks). We don't really write long paper works. Now, we are expected to write a book without reviewing our English grammar before we started writing our thesis (AA#20).

I agree that advertising arts students have difficulty in grammar because I believe we are more visual. English is not our major and maybe that is another reason why we are not good in grammar (AA#17).

Grammatical errors occurred the most frequent because students have deadlines to meet and it is obvious that students have little or no time to proofread or recheck (Ling#56).

We somehow tend to overthink during our drafts and revisions, Yes, I can agree that this could be one of the reasons why grammatical errors appeared to be the most committed mistake in our thesis writing. Other reasons could also be because of cramming and procrastination. Oftentimes when we do our paper, and some of us do not have enough time to proofread everything anymore (Ling#47).

Yes, because up to now I am still confused by many grammar rules, like subject-verb agreement and verb tenses (LIT # 2).

I think it's because we really need to master the rules in grammar and have more exercises or drills to internalize the rules (LIT #6).

Table 2: Kinds of Grammatical Errors committed by Advertising Arts, Linguistics and Literature Students.

| Errors  | AA  | LING | LIT | Total |
|---|-----|------|-----|-------|
| Disagreement Between the Pronoun and Antecedent | 95  | 12   | 3   | 110   |
| Disagreement Between the Verb and Subject       | 56  | 13   | 6   | 75    |
| Wrong Usage of Tense                            | 51  | 26   |     | 77    |
| Wrong Verb Form                                 | 20  | 6    | 1   | 27    |
| Lacking Verb                                    |     |      |     |       |
| Unnecessary Verb                                |     |      |     |       |
| Wrong Preposition                               | 27  | 2    | 5   | 34    |
| Unnecessary Preposition                         | 3   |      |     | 3     |
| Lacking Preposition                             | 2   | 3    |     | 6     |
| Wrong Pron                                      | 15  | 6    | 1   | 22    |
| Lacking Pron                                    | 1   |      |     | 1     |
| Wrong Indefinite Pronoun                        | 1   | 2    |     | 3     |
| Wrong Number of Noun                            | 8   |      | 1   | 9     |
| Lacking Determiner                              | 2   |      |     | 2     |
| Wrong Determiner                                | 1   |      |     | 1     |
| Unnecessary Determiner                          | 2   |      | 2   | 4     |
| Disagreement Between the Determiner and Noun    | 5   | 2    | 1   | 8     |
| Incorrect Embedding of Wh- Question             | 8   |      |     | 8     |
| Total   | 297 | 72   | 20  | 389   |



As shown in Table 1, grammatical errors were found to be the most common category of linguistic error in the thesis proposal drafts of the students in Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature. Table 2 lists the different kinds of grammatical errors committed by the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature majors.

The top three grammatical errors were: **disagreement between the pronoun and antecedent** which marked the highest number of errors, followed by **wrong usage of tense**, and lastly, **disagreement between the verb and the subject**. This finding calls to mind the research of Ulla (2014) in which she noted that pronoun-antecedent agreement has not been fully grasped by the respondents resulting in this particular grammatical error to be one of the highest percentages of errors in her study.

Noting the top three grammatical errors, students offered the following sentiments:

I think we lack knowledge about the pronoun and antecedent (AA#23).

Because we are not aware of the pronouns used and the corresponding antecedents used (AA#21).

We just wrote down right away what is in our mind that time without noticing the error (AA#13).

The wrong usage of tense might have been the highest or most frequent type of grammatical error because sometimes we forget about the context where the verb is being used. It is sometimes confusing especially when it is enclosed in embedded sentences and lengthy sentences (Ling#41).

I agree that wrong usage of tense is the most grammatical error committed because sometimes there is confusion in determining the proper tense to be used in the entire research paper (Ling#40).

I think it is because during our research writing ideas get complicated or complex that we are unable to use the correct tenses for a specific idea (Ling#44).

I really have this grammar problem, especially subject-verb agreement. It's very confusing for me (Lit #5).

I have to review preposition use. I'm confused about what antecedent means, too. I'm really challenged here (Lit # 4).

This part presents specific examples of grammatical errors taken from the thesis proposal drafts of the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature majors. The study provides examples which are accompanied by explanations regarding the three most frequently-incurred grammatical errors.

### **Examples of Disagreement between the Pronoun and Antecedent**

The Ranch Resort has problems in communicating to their possible target market (from the Advertising Arts program).

All languages have the same linguistic aspects such as syntax, morphology, phonology, and etc. but they differ in the content of its variety depending on the speaker of the language (from the Linguistics program).

... both pitfalls can be remedied by the adaptations as it prompts the readers to go back . . . (from the Literature program).

To recall, pronouns should agree with the nouns that they refer to, or their **antecedents** (Yarber and Yarber, 2010). Students in these three cases were not mindful of what the antecedents of their pronouns are, thereby committing error in pronoun-antecedent agreement. In example 1, *The Ranch Resort* is the antecedent and a singular noun, hence, the pronoun that refers to it should have been the singular form *its* rather than the plural *their*. On the other hand, in example 2, the singular pronoun *its* is used although the antecedent is the plural noun *languages*. Thus, the correct pronoun should have been *their*. Example 3 illustrates the same type of error with the use of the singular pronoun *its* rather than *their* since the antecedent is *adaptations*.

### Examples of Wrong Usage of Tense

. . . the researchers proposed an advocacy campaign for marine conservation in Moalboal (from the Advertising Arts program).

In addition, Anton-Carillo (2011) presented a discourse analysis of race and otherness in press editorials published in Cuban newspapers during specific periods of the twentieth century. It analyses the discursive strategies... (from the Linguistics program).

Advertising Arts students failed to remember the proper use of the different verb tenses. To recall, the past tense can only be used when one describes events that took place in the past (Lester and Beason, 2013). In example 1, the students knew very well that their research is yet to be conducted in the second semester of 2016-2017. Hence, the simple past tense *proposed* cannot be used; rather, it should be the future tense form, *will propose*, made up of the base form of the verb coupled with the modal *will*. In contrast, example 2 suggests that Linguistics majors failed to observe consistent tense use in talking a study that was conducted in the past. In the follow-up statement, the simple past form *analysed* should be used instead of the present tense, *analyses*.

### Examples of Disagreement between the Verb and Subject

The price of their cottages are 300 and 500 depending on its sizes (from the Advertising Arts program).

Lakoff have included context as a deciding factor in determining a tag's usage . . . (from the Linguistics program).

There is *Ang Camatuoran* (1908), *El Precursor* (1910), *La Revolucion* (1910) . . . (enumerating pre-war Cebuano periodicals) (from the Literature program).

Agreement here means that the number of the verb must match the number of the subject of the statement (Lester and Beason, 2013). Apparently, the Advertising Arts students have difficulty in identifying what the real subject is when a prepositional phrase comes between

the simple subject and the verb. In example 1, the prepositional phrase, “of the cottages”, comes between the simple subject “price” and the verb, and so the students misidentified “cottages” as the subject. This led them to use the plural verb “are” which makes the sentence erroneous. Langan and Goldstein (2011) noted that “the subject of the sentence is never part of a prepositional phrase” (p.40).

For most English sentences, the verb follows the subject just like in example 2. Although the subject and the verb are close together, Linguistics students used the incorrect number of the verb *have* which is plural although the subject, the scholar Lakoff, is singular hence the verb should have been singular in form, “has”. Lastly, example 3 demonstrates a common error made by students when beginning a statement with *there* or *it*, the so-called **expletives**, which results in a “postponed” or delayed subject, according to Fowler (1980). Moreover, an inverted subject-verb order occurs with the expletive construction of “There . . .” or “It . . .”, but the verb should still agree with the subject despite the inversion (p. 166). In example 3, the sentence subject is the various periodicals, but the student mistook *there* for the subject and based her verb use on it.

Table 3: Kinds of Syntactical Errors committed by Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students.

| Errors              | AA | LING | LIT | Total |
|---------------------|----|------|-----|-------|
| Fragments           | 20 | 11   | 12  | 43    |
| Run-ons             | 15 | 12   |     | 27    |
| Comma Splice        | 10 | 5    | 3   | 18    |
| Misplaced Modifiers | 1  |      |     | 1     |
| Faulty Parallelism  | 7  | 2    |     | 9     |
| Total               | 53 | 30   | 15  | 98    |

Table 3 presents the specific types of syntactical errors made by the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students in their AA410 class.

Details of syntactical errors presented in Table 3 show **fragments** to be most pervasive, followed by **run-ons**, and **comma splices**. According to Lester and Beason (2013), “Even though fragments are common in speech and informal writing, they are considered one of the most serious types of errors in formal writing” (p. 111).

The students shared the following reasons for having committed these syntactical errors:

Fragments surface a lot in our paper since students fail to identify if their sentences provide a complete thought (AA#16).

Advertising students are so used to writing short headlines that help create poster ads successful. It could be possible that this is the reason why advertising students write fragments instead of long sentences (AA#12).

It is difficult to write complete sentences because even if it is fragmented, we assumed that it has already a complete thought (AA#17).

I guess we committed a lot of run-ons because we didn't know how to end or where to the sentence/s (Ling#33).

I would attribute this to how students at times have to so much to say and would therefore put too much in a sentence (Ling#39).

Run-ons surface to be the most frequent error in syntactical errors because Linguistics majors have full of ideas, in which it causes less awareness on when to divide a sentence (Ling#52).

I guess it's because I tend to just follow where my thoughts go when writing (Lit# 1)  
I really need to review rules in sentence construction (Lit# 6).

I thought it was OK to use comma between two long sentences (Lit # 3)

The following examples were extracted from the drafts of the thesis proposals of the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students. This study provides an explanation for the three most common syntactical errors.

### **Examples of Fragments**

Younger age groups as well, along with their parents and guardians (from the Advertising Arts program).

Specifically, in the Philip Van Engelen building in the School of Arts and Sciences (from the Linguistics program).

By questioning what, how and how much a character eats, as well how food is prepared, served (from the Literature program).

The three examples are groups of words that cannot stand alone as grammatically complete sentences, hence, **fragments**. Example 1 only presented the subject but lacked a verb. In order for this fragment to have a complete thought, this should have a predicate. Example 2, in contrast, needs a subject. Woods (2010) stresses that “every complete sentence has at least one subject-verb pair and must express a complete thought” (p. 59). The third and longest example is still a fragment since it does not express a complete thought. In this example, the student writers have failed to consider the two conditions in composing a complete sentence as emphasized earlier by Woods (2010). According to Yarber and Yarber (2010), “fragments usually suggest that the writer is careless and unable to formulate a complete thought” (p. 190).

### **Examples of Run-On Sentences**

The role of branding is in great significance in the food business there are already a number of this kind of business in the food industry (from the Advertising Arts program).

Perlocution refers to the action which hearer will do what the speaker's wants and it refers to an action that produces consequences or effects on the hearer through the speaker's utterance (from the Linguistics program).

As defined by Langan and Johnson (2013), “A run-on is made up of two complete thought that are incorrectly run together without a connection between them.” (p. 102). Example 1 should be revised by inserting a period and starting the separated sentence with a capital letter. The revision should be: The role of branding is in great significance in the food business. There is already a big number of this kind of business in the food industry. Moreover, according to Langan and Goldstein (2011), “When there is no punctuation at all separating two complete statements, the result is a run-on.” (p. 72). For example 2, the run-on can be remedied if the statement is broken into two sentences.

### Examples of Comma Splice

In getting around the island people can ride a pedicab or motorcycle which usually cost Php 20.00, people may also rent a bike if they prefer for Php 10.00 only per hour (from the Advertising Arts program).

A linguist named J.R. Firth believed in a tradition where the approaches of function is to describe the language as interactive an interpersonal, and cited by Berns (1984a, p. 5), it is a way of acting and making others act (from the Linguistics program).

It was set in the modern era of the US, essentially it was modernized (from the Literature program).

To recall, “A comma splice consists of two independent clauses connected by only a comma” (Yarber and Yarber, 2010, p. 197). The students failed to recognize that they were actually writing two independent clauses and were using commas to separate them. This kind of error as shown in examples 1 to 3 can be corrected by using end punctuation such as semi-colon or a period between the independent clauses, making two separate sentences. Fowler (1980) considers comma splices along with run-on sentences and sentence fragments as “serious errors” suggesting carelessness on the part of the writers or lack of understanding of sentence structure.

Table 4: Kinds of Mechanic/Substance Errors Committed by Advertising Arts Linguistics, and Literature students.

| Errors         | AA | LING | LIT | Total |
|----------------|----|------|-----|-------|
| Capitalization | 25 | 5    | 3   | 33    |
| Punctuation    | 34 | 10   | 4   | 48    |
| Spelling       | 23 | 2    | 4   | 29    |
| Total          | 82 | 17   | 11  | 110   |

Table 4 notes the details of the difficulties of Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students in terms of mechanics.

The three kinds of errors in terms of mechanics/substance incurred by the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature majors suggest that they were mostly confused on **punctuation**. This finding is similar to that of Alinsunod (2014) where the writings of her Filipino respondents also manifested difficulties in punctuation and capitalization.

According to Raimes (2004), “Punctuation is a visual aid used to help readers understand the meaning of a written text” (p. 26). She observed that those “inexperienced writers of English have trouble with the conventions of English punctuation” (p. 26). Students shared the following sentiments:

I always have difficulties on using punctuation marks. It is very confusing (AA#22).

Advertising Arts students have difficulty writing punctuations because we don't analyze sentences very well. Maybe some of us weren't really taught well in the previous years how and when to use punctuations (AA#18).

When writing our paper, we get confused of the correct punctuation we have to use in the sentences (Ling#46).

It is difficult to master punctuations because we sometimes forget as to what and how a punctuation can be used in the sentence (Ling#45).

. . . MS Word sometimes correct the words I encode automatically. What's unfortunate is that their auto-corrections causes errors in my paper (Lit # 2).

I get confused what the proper punctuation should be, especially comma and period (Lit # 4).

The following examples of errors are taken from the drafts of the Advertising Arts, Linguistics, and Literature students. This study provides an explanation of the most prevalent errors in mechanics/substance.

### **Examples of Punctuation**

For example, the bloggers<sub>s</sub> reaction towards the place will give its feedback like place, space, preservation and nature (from the Advertising Arts program).

What specific linguistics strategies can elicit positive audience response from Atkinson (1984) Linguistic Strategies? (from the Linguistics program).

Bacatan research shows that . . . (from the Literature program).

One of the uses of apostrophe is to signal possession or ownership (Raimes, 2004). In example 1, it is indicated that the reaction belongs to the bloggers. But Advertising Arts students failed to put the apostrophe right after the plural noun “bloggers”. Also, students in example 2 omitted the apostrophe when in fact “Atkinson” possesses the Linguistic Strategies. To form the possessive of the singular noun “Atkinson”, the Linguistics students should add 's (apostrophe s). In example 3, the writer refers to a research done by Bacatan, hence should have written “Bacatan's research” or “the research of Bacatan”. Table 5 below reveals the result of the chi-square.

Table 5: Result of the chi-square.

| Kinds of Errors                      | Programs         |             |            |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|------------|
|                                      | Advertising Arts | Linguistics | Literature |
| Grammatical Errors                   | 69.39%           | 60.5%       | 43.48%     |
| Syntactic Errors                     | 12.02            | 25.21       | 32.61      |
| Mechanics/Substance                  | 18.59            | 14.29       | 23.91      |
| Chi square = 23.98, df = 4, p < .001 |                  |             |            |

Chi square test of association indicates that there are significant differences in terms of the linguistic errors and the respective programs of the papers being analyzed: chi square (4, N = 597) = 23.98,  $p < .001$ . Across all programs, the top linguistic error is grammar. Among literature and linguistics students, most errors are found in grammar, syntax, and mechanics respectively. Among advertising arts students, most errors are found in grammar, followed by mechanical errors, and lastly, syntactic errors.

### Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate which of the three kinds of linguistic errors could be the most pervasive linguistic error across the three tertiary programs (Linguistics, Literature and Advertising Arts). The findings of this study showed that the most prevalent errors in grammar, syntax and mechanics were incurred in varying frequencies across the three programs. Thus, it can be inferred in this present study that despite the fact that the students had been studying grammar, syntax, and mechanics since grade school until the tertiary level, they could not be said to have fully grasped or mastered the basics of correct written English, and even appeared to be in need of reminders on those oft-repeated conventions especially on grammar and mechanics. Also, based on the disclosures or explanatory comments of the students, this study has also concluded that errors have surfaced because students did not spare time to proofread their thesis manuscripts before submission.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, there really is a need for an intensive language refresher course for incoming fourth year students in order to prepare them for thesis proposal writing. The short refresher course, or writing workshop, which may be conducted during the summer term immediately preceding the semester the students are due to enroll in the thesis writing course, should not just be a review of the basic rules of writing but must be focused on the identified error-prone areas in grammar, syntax and mechanics with samples taken from the students' writing outputs to serve as authentic examples or exercises.

It is also highly recommended that language teachers or teachers of academic/technical writing courses (such as a thesis writing course) take the results of this study positively by considering course/syllabi enhancements on the writing component to incorporate grammar, syntax and mechanics review, as applicable, with particular emphases yet again on the identified, repetitive linguistic errors and proposing specific outcomes. Also, teachers should allow more time for the students to edit and proofread their drafts.

Team teaching in which one of the instructors tackles the language component of the thesis proposal writing course, as already practiced in DCLL and the Department of Fine Arts, should be considered as another important intervention, on condition that the language

instructors pay particular attention on the error-prone areas, with visible positive results in the written outputs.

Lastly, it is highly recommended that a thesis editing handbook or writing practice book/work text be seriously considered for preparation as a product and offshoot of this study, to serve as a handy reference for both instructors and students' use, and with an abundance of authentic examples and practice exercises.

If their focus is not only content but also linguistic accuracy, instructors should bear in mind that students' writing flaws can greatly obscure content or hamper clarity of meaning or message; therefore, equal importance should be given to both content and form or linguistic accuracy in thesis proposal writing. Finally, it bears noting that, of all the significant writing projects students do in their college years, thesis proposal/thesis writing is the one that they tend to take most seriously, considering that the thesis is unquestionably an important graduation requirement. Therefore, students have a vested interest in writing their theses well, and a stronger grasp of grammar, syntax and mechanics in their written English will help them achieve that goal.

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