



A Study of Thai EFL University Students' Errors in Using English Relative Clauses

การศึกษาข้อผิดพลาดในการใช้คูปานุประโยคภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนชาวไทย
ที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศSiridon Jangho¹, Sirima Paunpom², and Amolnut Hunthane³สิริदनย์ แจ้งให้¹ สิริมา ป้วนป้อม² และอมลนัฐ หุ่นธานี⁶

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Abstract

English grammar in English language acquisition is considered to be an important element when learning English. Of all grammar rules, English relative clauses (ERCs), has been problematic for many EFL learners. The present study aims to 1) investigate the frequency of each kind of relative pronouns errors in ERCs, 2) examine the frequency of occurrence of each type of errors in ERCs, and 3) compare and contrast the errors in ERCs between high and low English proficiency learners. The participants were 50 fourth-year students who enrolled in the Faculty of Education, English major, at Naresuan University. This study was based on mixed methods with both quantitative and qualitative datasets. Three instruments were employed to collect the data, namely a sentence combining test, a translation test, and an interview. The results showed that the English relative pronoun *whom* (44.59%) was the most problematic, followed by *which* (33.56%), *whose* (16.67%), and *who* (5.18%), respectively. Both high and low English proficiency learners shared similar potential in using the three relative pronouns, i.e., *which*, *whose*, and *who*, except *whom*. Moreover, the results also revealed that the error types that Thai EFL learners produced the most to the least were: the incorrect use of relative pronouns (52.92%), the omission of prepositions (19.50%), the resumptive noun/pronoun (14.85%), and the incorrect placement of ERCs (12.73%). Learners with lower English proficiency committed considerably more errors than those with higher proficiency.

Keywords: English relative clauses, Errors in ERCs, Thai EFL learners

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Introduction

English sentence structures can be classified into three types: simple, compound, and complex. When it comes to the complex sentences, they are generated by combining dependent clauses—noun clauses, relative clauses, and adverbial clauses—and independent clauses.

English relative clauses (ERCs) are dependent clauses which modify a noun or noun phrase. Additionally, ERCs serve as clauses which provide more details and descriptions as well as identifying a noun (Azar, 2002). They are introduced by two types of relative markers: pronouns and adverbs (Cowan, 2008).

While relative clauses (RCs) in learners' first languages (L1) who are studying English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) may share some similarities with ERCs, they also differ in some ways, e.g., Japanese and Chinese (Kano, 2006; Lin & Chuang, 2014). As a result, these differences are considered to be challenging and difficult for EFL/ESL learners when they are studying ERCs (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Pratiwi, Hidayah & Edy, 2020). Therefore, the use of English relative clauses has been problematic for many EFL/ESL learners.

Previous research has been conducted by non-Thai researchers, and they demonstrated that there have been examined the use and errors in using English relative clauses, especially in the aspect of relative pronouns by EFL/ESL learners from various nations such as Indonesia, Germany, and Turkiye (e.g., Kusumadewi, 2019; Musonah, 2014; Syarif, 2011; Yas, 2016). Besides, in the Thai context, a few researchers such as Phoocharoensil (2009) and Phoocharoensil and Simargool (2010) employed descriptive essay and translation tasks in order to explore Thai EFL learners' strategies in acquiring ERCs and identified the problems caused by these strategies. In addition to the two methods mentioned above, Termjai (2020) analyzed English major students' argumentative essays to examine errors in ERCS in their writing.

Nevertheless, it appeared that the aforementioned research seemed to overlook using an interview as a research tool and using learners majoring in English as representative samples in a few of its other research. Therefore, in order to fill the gap, this research is particularly to focus on: 1) investigating the frequency of each kind of relative pronouns errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English, 2) examining the frequency of occurrence of each type of errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English, and 3) comparing and contrasting the errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English between high and low proficiency levels. Potential findings would assist teachers to realize how to effectively teach relative clauses in English, and learners are aware of their weaknesses in using ERCs in order to improve and spend more time learning English, specifically ERCs. Thus, the following research questions were formulated based on the aforementioned objectives.

Research Questions

1. What is the frequency of each kind of relative pronouns errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English?
2. What is the frequency of occurrence of each type of errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English in terms of incorrect use of relative pronouns, resumptive noun/pronoun, omission of prepositions, and incorrect placement of ERCs?



3. What are the differences in the ERCs' errors made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English between high and low proficiency levels?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

1. English Relative Clauses

English relative clauses (ERCs) are dependent clauses which modify nouns or noun phrases, serving as clauses which provide more details and descriptions (Azar & Hagen, 2009). Furthermore, ERCs are introduced by two types of relative markers. First, English relative pronouns can be classified into five relativizers: *who*, *whom*, *which*, *that*, and *whose*. Second, English relative adverbs can be classified into three relativizers: *where*, *when*, and *why* (Cowan, 2008; Swan, 2009).

English relative pronouns, specifically *who* and *whom*, are used to refer to people. *Who* can be employed in the position of subject and object in ERCs, as in (1) and (2) respectively; however, when it comes to an object position, *whom* can only be occupied in that position, as in (2) (Master, 1995). In object position, *who* is used in informal contexts whereas *whom* is considered to be used in formal contexts, as in (2). Additionally, when relative marker *whom* is used as object of preposition, preposition will precede it in formal contexts, as in (3) (Azar & Hagen, 2009).

- (1) I thanked the woman *who* helped me.
- (2) The man *whom/who* I saw was Mr. Jones.
- (3) She is the woman *about whom* I told you.

(Azar & Hagen, 2009, pp. 270 - 274)

In order to describe things and animals, *which* and *that* are selected; nevertheless, *that* can also be applied to any nouns, including people (Cowan, 2008). These two relativizers can be utilized in the subject position, as in (4), and object position, as in (5), of ERCs. In formal context, preposition will be followed by *which* to generate relative clause, as in (6) (Azar & Hagen, 2009).

- (4) It's a book *which/that* will interest children of all ages.
- (5) The movie *which/that* we saw last night wasn't very good.
- (6) This is the room *in which* I was born.

(Azar & Hagen, 2009, p. 273; Swan, 2009, p. 483)

Whose can be used to refer to human and non-human, and it is always placed at the beginning of nouns the same as possessive pronouns. Additionally, *whose* + noun can be employed in the position of subject and object, as in (7) and (8) respectively.

- (7) I saw a girl *whose beauty* took my breath away. (subject)
- (8) It was a meeting *whose purpose* I did not understand. (object)

(Swan, 2009, p. 480)



In the aspect of omission (\emptyset), only the relative markers in the object position in ERCs can be omitted, as demonstrated in (9), whereas relativizers in the subject position are not allowed to be omitted in ERCs, as in (10) (Azar & Hagen, 2009).

(9) The music we *which/that/∅* listened to last night was good.

(10) The book *which/that* is on the table is mine.

(Azar & Hagen, 2009, pp. 270 - 274)

2. Typical errors found in ERCs made by ESL/EFL learners

Using relative clauses in English can be challenging for many EFL/ESL learners. Researchers have investigated the errors in ERCs, particularly those involving relative pronouns, among EFL/ESL learners from a diverse range of nations, including Germany and Turkiye (Yas, 2016), United Arab Emirates (Khan & Al-Namer, 2017), Iraq (Khazaal, 2021), China (Ping, 2022), Japan (Kano, 2006), Indonesia (Kusumadewi, 2019; Musonah, 2014; Syarif, 2011), and Thailand (Phoocharoensil, 2009; Phoocharoensil & Simargool, 2010; Rattanasak, 2014; Termjai, 2020; Timyam 2021).

This research partially adopted the framework about common errors found in ERCs committed by EFL/ESL learners from Termjai (2020), which will be demonstrated below.

2.1 Incorrect use of relative pronouns

Learners wrongly and inappropriately employ relative markers. For example, there has been an error between relativizers *who* and *whom*. When the relativizers in ERCs are in the position of a subject and the nouns refer to people, thus, the relativizer *whom* is not allowed to utilize in this position, but rather to use *who* or *that* instead.

*Do you know the professor ~~whom~~ will give us a speech next week? (Bao, 2015, p. 144)

Moreover, learners use other English relativizers, followed by possessive adjectives, instead of using *whose*. Therefore, this error is the incorrect use of genitive relative pronoun, as exemplified below.

*My brothers were both here last night, so I cannot know ~~which's~~ umbrella it was that was left behind. (Seppänen, 2004, p. 37)

2.2 Noun/pronoun retention (resumptive noun/pronoun)

Thai and English are similar in that resumptive noun/pronoun are not permitted to be used (Phoocharoensil & Simargool, 2010, p. 112). Despite the fact that learners must remove a noun or a pronoun to which English relative markers have already referred, they tend to repeat that noun or pronoun, as exemplified below.

*She got a couch at Sears that ~~#~~ was on sale. (Cann, Kaplan, & Kempon, 2005, p. 7)

*The woman that I gave a book to ~~her~~ is my sister. (Ellis, 1994, p. 303)

2.3 Omission of prepositions

The omission of prepositions occurs because the first language of some EFL/ESL learners differs in some syntactic structures from English, particularly in ERCs (Nga & Phuong, 2022). For example, Thai syntactic structures do not have the object-of-preposition, so Thai EFL/ESL learners tend to form ERCs in an unacceptable way (Phoocharoensil & Simargool, 2010).



*He has a book which I am interested __.

*He has a book __ which I am interested.

2.4 Incorrect placement of ERCs.

ERCs are not arranged in the proper order by EFL/ESL learners. For instance, some learners might use the proper English relative pronouns, but they place the ERC in the incorrect position, causing them to modify the wrong nouns or noun phrases (Kusumadewi, 2019).

*Vina's brother named his newborn baby Tommy who is extremely diligent. (incorrect)

Vina's brother who is extremely diligent named his newborn baby Tommy. (correct)

Previous Research

Previous studies conducted by non-Thai researchers have primarily concentrated on the EFL/ESL learners' errors in using ERCs, particularly relative pronouns or relativizers. Many previous studies were conducted with different in the aspects of participants, research instruments, contexts, and locations or regions, e.g., Indonesia, China, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, and Thailand.

In non-Thai research, Syarif (2011) employed the multiple choice and interview in order to investigate and discuss the errors made by students who were 31 second-year students of MAN Cijeruk in using English relative clauses. This study found that both internal and external factors contribute to students' ineffective ERCs usage. As a result, *whom* was the relativizer which became the most problematic; on the other hand, *who* was considered to be the least complicated one. Besides, Khan and Al-Namer (2017) also shared the same result in that *whom* was the relative pronoun which 50 Arabic EFL students from Al Ain University of Science and Technology, Al Ain, the United Arab Emirates mostly committed errors. Another study by Khazaal (2021) investigated 50 students studying at Al-Nahrain University/College of Political Sciences. The findings were similar to both aforementioned studies' results as well. In contrast, Musonah (2014) utilized multiple choice, sentence completion, and interview with the purpose of exploring which the relative markers were frequently made mistakes and the types of errors. The participants of this research were 24 second-year students of Fatahillah Senior High School; the findings indicated that *whose* was the errors which students made the most, supported by Ping (2022)'s study. Furthermore, mis-selection is the type of errors students typically made following by omission and addition, and these results are also similar to the findings reported by Kusumadewi (2019).

In Thai context, most of the Thai researchers focus on investigating the frequency of RC types on the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (NPAH) and examining Thai EFL users' characteristics of relative clauses (Rattanasak, 2014; Termjai, 2020). However, there have been a few studies on errors in ERCs. Phoocharoensil (2009) and Phoocharoensil and Simargool (2010) utilized descriptive essays and translation task in order to identify and explain the problems of Thai EFL learners in using ERCs. The participants were 90 first year bachelor's degree students from different faculties at Thammasat University. The results illustrated that learners' first language transfer, avoidance, transfer of training, and overgeneralization were the causes of students to commit errors in ERCs. For instance, when it comes to L1 influenced to L2, particularly English relative markers, *whose* – which was the non-existed relativizer in



Thai – was considered to be problematic for Thai EFL learners when forming ERCs. Additionally, this issue could lead students to use another relative marker, e.g., *who* or *that*, instead of using *whose*. Besides, Timyam (2021) supported the aforementioned studies that the complexity in some syntactic structures of ERCs, i.e., genitive RCs, was challenged for Thai EFL learners, and the learners were hardly use the relativizer *whose* and avoided using it as well.

In conclusion, the previous studies reveal the similarities between non-Thai and Thai studies on the ERC errors. Furthermore, most of the related studies employed tests (e.g., multiple choice, sentence completion, translation) and essays. For these reasons, the current study fills the gap by utilizing a sentence combining test, a translation test, and an interview in order to investigate the frequency of each kind of relative pronouns errors, examine the frequency of occurrence of each type of errors in ERCs, and compare and contrast the errors in ERCs used between students with high and low proficiency levels. Moreover, the previous studies pay attention to non-English major students; thus, the present study focuses on English major students with two levels of language competency.

Research Methodology

This study focused on examining the frequency of occurrence of each type of errors and investigating the frequency of each kind of relative pronouns errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English. This section is divided into four sub-parts: participants, instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

Participants

The participants of this study were 50 fourth-year students from English major in the Faculty of Education, Naresuan University. The participants were divided into two groups which are high and low English proficiency based on their CEPT (Cambridge English Placement Test) scores. The high English proficiency group was the participants whose CEPT scores range from 30 to 50. The low English proficiency group was the participants whose CEPT scores range from 20 to 29. Their age range was 21-22 years old. In addition, all of them had experienced in learning English for more than 15 years. Purposive sampling was employed to select the participants of the study.

Instruments

This study is based on mixed methods for both quantitative and qualitative datasets. The researchers used three research instruments to collect the data: a sentence combining test, a translation test, and an interview. First, the sentence combining test was adapted from Yas (2012)'s study (see Appendix A) . The test consists of ten questions, i.e., *who* 2 questions, *whom* 5 questions, *which* 1 question, and *whose* 2 questions. Second, the translation test was derived from Phoocharoensil and Simargool (2010)'s study (see Appendix B). This test comprised ten questions – *who* 2 questions, *whom* 2 questions, *which* 4 questions, and *whose* 2 questions. The participants translated ten sentences from Thai into English. In addition, for the in-depth information, the researchers employed the structured interview to cover all of aspects of the research focus. Thus, the researchers made six questions as follows.

1. Do you know the importance of English relative clauses? And how?
2. How long have you been learning or using relative clauses in English?
3. Have you ever done an additional independent study on English relative clauses outside textbooks from school?



4. Do you acknowledge how to employ English relative clauses in both formal and informal contexts?

5. Could you explain and differentiate the functions of each English relative marker?

6. Why is the relative marker used in this sentence? And explain your reason for using the relative marker in this sentence.

Data collection

The researchers employed Google Forms to collect data from 50 fourth-year English major students who enrolled in the Faculty of Education at Naresuan University. After collecting data from Google Forms, the researchers started an interview process. The researchers contacted 10 participants to find the proper and convenient time for both researchers and the participants in order to schedule them for interviewing.

The researchers informed interviewees that their responses would not have an impact on their academic performance and grade and began interviewing with six questions. The individual respondents spent around 20 minutes completing the interview session.

Data analysis

The data from Google Forms were transformed into numbers and analyzed. The findings of the present research employed descriptive statistics, which include tables and percentage figures. In order to show whether there are statistically significant differences between the high and low English proficiency groups' answers and responses in both parts of the tests, the researchers also utilized a t-test independent technique via Microsoft Excel. Additionally, the content analysis was employed to analyze and synthesize the information received by the interview process in order to be able to acquire and obtain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives in using ERCs.

Findings

Research Question 1: What is the frequency of each kind of relative pronouns errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English?

Table 1: The frequency of each kind of relative pronouns errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English

Relative Pronouns	Total Questions (Qs)	Combining test		Translation		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Who	4	10	5.29	13	5.10	23	5.18
2. Whom	7	118	62.43	80	31.37	198	44.59
3. Which	5	34	17.99	115	45.10	149	33.56
4. Whose	4	27	14.29	47	18.43	74	16.67

Table 1 illustrates the frequency of each kind of relative pronouns errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English. It was found that the relative marker *whom* was frequently made mistakes the most with 44.59%, followed by *which* (33.56%) and *whose* (16.67%). Moreover, the relativizer which was seen as problematic the least for Thai EFL learners was *who* (5.18%).

Research Question 2: What is the frequency of occurrence of each type of errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English? It should be noted that the major focus would be incorrect use of relative pronouns, resumptive noun/pronoun, omission of prepositions, and incorrect placement of ERCs.

Table 2: The frequency of occurrence of each type of errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English

Typical errors found in ERCs	Combining test		Translation		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Incorrect use of relative pronouns	170	44.27	229	61.89	399	52.92
2. Resumptive noun/pronoun	92	23.96	20	5.41	112	14.85
3. Omission of prepositions	34	8.85	113	30.54	147	19.50
4. Incorrect placement of ERCs	88	22.92	8	2.16	96	12.73

Table 2 demonstrates the frequency of occurrence of each type of errors in ERCs. The results reveal that the error's types which were found to be erroneous the most for Thai EFL learners were incorrect use of relative pronouns (52.92%), followed by omission of prepositions (19.50%), resumptive noun/pronoun (14.85%), and incorrect placement of ERCs (12.73%).

Research Question 3: What are the differences in the ERCs' errors made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English between high and low proficiency levels?

Table 3: The differences in the English relative pronouns' errors made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English between high and low proficiency levels

Relative pronouns	English proficiency	f	%	Mean	S.D.	t	p-value
1. Who	High	9	39.13	0.32 (4)	0.31	-1.05	0.15
	Low	14	60.87	0.56 (4)	1.01		
2. Whom	High	79	39.90	2.92 (7)	5.49	-2.75	0.00
	Low	119	60.10	4.76 (7)	5.69		
3. Which	High	53	35.57	3.24 (5)	3.02	-1.27	0.11
	Low	96	64.43	3.84 (5)	2.56		
4. Whose	High	32	43.24	1.28 (4)	1.63	-1.14	0.13
	Low	42	56.76	1.68 (4)	1.48		

According to the Table 3, the mean scores on the errors in the aspect of English relative pronoun *who* produced by the high and low English proficiency groups were 0.32 (S.D.=0.31) and 0.56 (S.D.=1.01), respectively. Moreover, when it comes to the relativizer *which*, the mean score of the high group was 3.24 (S.D.=3.02), and the mean score of the low group was 3.84 (S.D.=2.56). Additionally, the mean scores for the relative marker *whose* of the high and low English proficiency group were 1.28 (S.D.=1.63) and 1.68 (S.D.=1.48), respectively. On the one hand, those three aforementioned relativizers were found not to be significantly different – i.e., *who* ($t=-1.05$, $p=0.15$), *which* ($t=-1.27$, $p=0.11$), and *whose* ($t=-1.14$, $p=0.13$). On the other hand, only *whom* was statistically significant different at $t=-2.75$ and $p=0.00$, and the mean scores between the high and low English proficiency groups were 2.92 (S.D.=5.49) and 4.76 (S.D.=5.69), respectively.



Table 4: The differences in the English occurrence of each type of errors made between Thai EFL learners majoring in English of high and low proficiency levels

Typical errors found in ERCs	English proficiency	f	%	Mean	S.D.	t	p-value
1. Incorrect use of relative pronouns	High	157	39.35	6.28 (20)	19.46	-2.58	0.01
	Low	242	60.65	9.68 (20)	24.06		
2. Resumptive noun/pronoun	High	30	26.79	1.20 (20)	3.17	-3.14	0.00
	Low	82	73.21	3.28 (20)	7.79		
3. Omission of prepositions	High	61	41.50	2.44 (20)	3.67	-2.11	0.02
	Low	86	58.50	3.44 (20)	1.92		
4. Incorrect placement of ERCs	High	34	35.42	1.36 (20)	3.07	-2.16	0.02
	Low	62	64.58	2.48 (20)	3.68		

Table 4 reveals the differences in each type of errors made by Thai EFL learners majoring in English: the high and low proficiency levels. The high and low English proficiency groups' mean scores in terms of the incorrect use of relative pronouns were 6.28 (S.D.=19.46) and 9.68 (S.D.=24.06), the resumptive noun/pronoun were 1.20 (S.D.=3.17) and 3.28 (S.D.=7.79), the omission of prepositions was 2.44 (S.D.=3.67) and 3.44 (S.D.=1.92), and the incorrect placement of ERCs were 1.36 (S.D.=3.07) and 2.48 (S.D.=3.68), respectively. Furthermore, the results from the Table 4 shows that all types of errors in ERCs made by Thai EFL learners were statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$).

The qualitative data from interview can be used to answer the research question 1, 2, and 3. The researchers interviewed 10 participants. Below are the interesting examples from both high and low English proficiency learners:

High 1: "I understand this grammar topic really well, and I can tell the forms and functions of each relative marker."

High 2: "When using the relative markers, such as whom and which, I am aware of the importance of prepositions."

Low 1: "Actually, I've been studying English relative clauses for many years, but I still don't know what the differences between formal and informal forms of ERCs are."

Low 2: "I prefer using *that* and *who* to other relativizers since I feel like those two are easier to use."

Low 3: "English relative clause is considered to be one of the hardest grammar points for me because I'm confused whether this position should use ERCs as subject or object position."

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the English relative pronoun *whom* was discovered to be the most problematic, followed by *which*, *whose*, and *who*, respectively, for Thai EFL learners who enrolled in the Faculty of Education, English major, at Naresuan University. The findings of the present study are also consistent with the findings of past studies by Syarif (2011), Khan and Al-Namer (2017), and Khazaal (2021), which found that the relativizers *whom* and *who* were the most and least inaccurate relative markers made by EFL learners. The reason for this could be that *whom*'s usage may indeed be comparatively limited, i.e., *whom* is the relative marker which can be used to refer to



only people and in the position of object of verb, and object of prepositions (Master, 1995; Azar & Hagen, 2009). Moreover, this current finding confirms that the relativizer *who* was the easiest of all relativizers in English to acquire and employ in ERCs which is associated with the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (NPAH), proposed by Keenan and Comrie (1977). When it comes to comparing the relative pronouns' errors committed by the high and low English proficiency groups, the three relativizers, i.e., *who*, *which*, and *whose*, were found not to be statistically significant different, implying that both groups had similar potential in using those three relative pronouns. However, *whom* was the only relative marker which statistically significant difference, meaning that the high group performed better than the low group since they made a small number of errors in the ERCs tests and vice versa. This is supported by Phoocharoensil and Simargool (2010) who stated that when making comparisons *whom* with the other relativizers, e.g., *who* and *that*, utilizing in the same context, EFL learners, especially the learners with a low English proficiency, were inclined to use *whom* in the smallest amount, or they tended to avoid producing the relativizer *whom*. There are several possible explanations for this result from the current study's qualitative data. For one thing, some learners with low English proficiency level felt uncomfortable using *whom*. They said that they were confused whether this position should use the English relative clauses as the subject or the object of verb/prepositions, thus, they decided to use *who* or *that* instead of using *whom* in the sentence because both *who* and *that* could be used in any positions. Therefore, it can be inferred that students with lower levels of English proficiency may not have adequate knowledge since they may not dedicate as much time to study ERCs as students with higher levels do in their free time. Besides, the high English proficiency groups of learners may even take extra English tutorial classes for improving their English skills. In contrast, the study by Musonah (2014) and Ping (2022) indicated that the relative pronoun *whose* was the most difficult and challenging for learners. It is possible that the participants in the two previous studies were non-English majors, whereas the participants in the current study were English majors who were more familiar with relative clauses than those who were not majoring in English, regardless of their level of English proficiency.

Apart from the relative markers' errors in English, the occurrence of each type of errors in ERCs are reflected in the findings as well. The incorrect use of relative pronouns, omission of prepositions, resumptive noun/pronoun, and incorrect placement of ERCs were the error types that Thai EFL learners produced the most to the least, respectively. This result was consistent with previous research, which showed that the improper use of relative pronouns and the omission of prepositions were the most frequently occurring type of errors made by learners, respectively (Musonah, 2014). Moreover, when compared between the high and low English proficiency groups, the results reveal that all types of errors in English relative clauses were statistically significant difference. It can be inferred that the high proficiency learners were found to commit fewer errors' types than the low proficiency learners. The reasons why the findings were statistically significant difference between the two groups were: first, some high learners could tell the differences between ERCs used in formal and informal contexts, and they could explain the forms and functions of each relative marker. However, the learners with low English proficiency did not realize the difference between formal and informal forms of English relative clauses, and they also could not make a decision in utilizing the relative pronouns whether those pronouns were supposed to be used as the subject or object positions, making them use relative pronouns in improper ways. For example, in the current study, the researchers had instructed them to use the formal forms of



relativizers, but some participants tended to use the relativizer *that*, which was the informal form, instead of using other relativizers, and doing such actions caused numerous errors in both combining and translation tests. Besides, some learners even made errors by placing the ERCs in erroneous positions. Second, the learners did not acknowledge the importance of prepositions in ERCs since Thai syntactic structures lack the object-of-preposition RC, causing Thai EFL learners to frequently form ERCs in an inappropriate manner. For this reason, the preposition was omitted in the sentence by, particularly, the low English proficiency groups of learners. Moreover, learners were unaware that when relativizers were used in a sentence, the noun being referred to was required to be omitted. According to the present findings, the participants, especially with low English proficiency, regularly repeat nouns or pronouns in the combining test. For example, *I like the composition which you wrote *it*.

Even though the results illustrate that the learners with a high level of English (High CEPT scores) produced fewer errors than the learners with a low level of English (Low CEPT scores), when the researchers examined the combining and translation tests' answers with in-depth analysis, the results demonstrate that there seemed to be no significant difference in the language errors between the two groups. Therefore, it can be inferred that the CEPT score is not an indicator of learners' acquisition of ERCS since the CEPT test mainly measures the test-takers' listening and reading abilities, rather than their ability to produce ERCs.

Conclusion

This research focuses on Thai EFL university students' errors in using English relative clauses, particularly relative pronouns. According to the current findings, the most to the least frequent errors in using relative pronouns were: whom, which, whose, and who. Both learners with a high and low level of English proficiency have similar potential in using the three relative pronouns, i.e., which, whose, and who, except whom. Moreover, the results also reveal that the error types that Thai EFL learners produce the most to the least were: the incorrect use of relative pronouns, the omission of prepositions, the resumptive noun/pronoun, and the incorrect placement of ERCs. Learners with lower English proficiency commit considerably more errors than those with higher proficiency.

Suggestions for Future Studies

First, the participants in the current study mainly focused on the fourth-year Thai EFL learners majoring in English. Hence, future research should be carried out with a variety of participants such as learners from different year levels and non-English major learners. Second, the current study focused on the English relative pronouns, i.e., who, whom, which, and whose. Consequently, further studies should investigate in terms of the English relative adverbs. Finally, the present research mainly examined the types of errors in ERCs. With this reason, it should be useful to conduct future research on the factors causing these types of errors.



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Appendix A

Sentence Combination Test

คำชี้แจง: โปรดรวมประโยคต่อไปนี้ให้สมบูรณ์ โดยนำประโยค (B) ไปรวมกับประโยค (A) โดยใช้ English Relative Pronouns ได้แก่ who, whom, whose, which, that ประโยคที่ได้ควรวใช้ในบริบทที่เป็นทางการ (We will assume that all these sentences would be used in formal context) ยกตัวอย่าง เช่น

(A) The person is a teacher.

(B) He plays the piano.

Answer: The person who plays the piano is a teacher.

(A) I like the composition.

(B) You wrote it.

1.....

(A) I know the man.

(B) His bicycle is new.

2.....

(A) Jenny likes the teacher.

(B) He explained the answers to the class.

3.....

(A) The man called the police.

(B) His wallet was stolen.

4.....

(A) The woman spoke English.

(B) She was nice.

5.....

(A) The author is well known.

(B) My mother mentioned him.

6.....

(A) The woman is a nurse.

(B) Bill passed a note to her.

7.....

(A) Mr. Smith looked at the girl.

(B) I gave a book to her.

8.....



(A) I liked the woman.

(B) I danced with her last night.

9.....

(A) The candidate didn't win the election.

(B) I voted for him.

10.....

Combination Test Answer

1. I like the composition which you wrote.
2. I know the man whose bicycle is new.
3. Jenny likes the teacher who explained the answers to the class.
4. The man whose wallet was stolen called the police.
5. The woman who was nice spoke English.
6. The author whom my mother mentioned is well known.
7. The woman to whom Bill passed a note is a nurse.
The woman whom Bill passed a note to is a nurse.
8. Mr. Smith looked at the girl to whom I gave a book.
Mr. Smith looked at the girl whom I gave a book to.
9. I liked the woman with whom I danced last night.
I liked the woman whom I danced with last night.
10. The candidate for whom I voted didn't win the election.
The candidate whom I voted for didn't win the election.



Appendix B
Translation Test

1. เพลงที่เราฟังเมื่อคืนไพเราะมาก
.....
2. ฉันชอบเรียงความที่คุณเขียน
.....
3. เด็กผู้หญิงคนที่ชนะการแข่งขันหัวเราะเสียงดัง
.....
4. ผู้หญิงคนที่ฉันให้พจนานุกรมขยันเรียนมาก
.....
5. ฉันรู้จักผู้ชายคนที่จักรยานถูกขโมย
.....
6. หนังสือสองเล่มที่เขาซื้อเมื่อวานมีราคาแพง
.....
7. เด็กผู้ชายคนที่ฉันซื้อกระเป๋าตังค์ให้ยิ้มกว้าง
.....
8. ฟุตบอลเป็นกีฬาเพียงอย่างเดียวที่ฉันสนใจ
.....
9. นักเรียนคนหนึ่งที่นั่งข้างฉันกำลังนอนหลับ
.....
10. น้องสาวของฉันมีลูกชายซึ่งมีผมสีน้ำตาล
.....

Translation Test Answer

1. The song to which we listened last night was very beautiful.
The song which we listened to last night was very beautiful.
2. I like the essay which you wrote.
3. The girl who won the competition laughed loudly.
4. The woman to whom I gave a dictionary is very studious.
The woman whom I gave a dictionary to is very studious.
5. I know the man whose bicycle was stolen.
6. The two books which he bought yesterday were expensive.
7. The boy for whom I bought a wallet smiled broadly.
The boy whom I bought a wallet for smiled broadly.
8. Football is the only kind of sport in which I am interested.
Football is the only kind of sport which I am interested in.
9. The student who is sitting next to me is sleeping.
10. My sister has a son whose hair is brown.