English Verb Use in Korean College Students’ Essays: A Corpus-based Study

Hyonjin Cho
(Sogang University)
Isaiah WonHo Yoo
(Sogang University)**


This study investigates the types and frequencies of verb errors in Korean college students’ essays in order to ascertain what aspects of English verb use Korean learners find most troublesome. The data used in this study were retrieved from a learner corpus consisting of essays written by 399 students who major in humanities at a university in Seoul. The 686 verb errors found in the corpus were classified into the following four major categories: (a) omission of necessary items in a verb phrase, (b) addition of unnecessary items in a verb phrase, (c) misformation of a verb phrase, and (d) misordering of items in a verb phrase. A careful examination of these 686 verb errors has revealed that misformation is the most common form of error, accounting for over 60% of all the errors. A sub-category of misformation errors, agreement errors in turn accounted for more than half of all the 416 misformation errors (216 tokens), a number bigger than any of the other three categories of error types, i.e. omission (175 tokens), addition (72 tokens), and misordering (23 tokens). This finding might have resulted from negative influence from the students’ L1, as Korean verbs do not conjugate according to grammatical person. Another noteworthy finding is the fact that the students made a great number of errors with both the lexical and the auxiliary uses of be and have. Considering that both uses of these two verbs are taught early on in Korea, this finding suggests that Korean students need to be continually provided with contexts in which they can practice different uses of be and have.

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** 1st author: Hyonjin Cho; Corresponding author: Isaiah WonHo Yoo
I. INTRODUCTION

The English verb contains a variety of complex characteristics and functions, and there are significant differences between the verb system of English and that of Korean. Examples of such differences include (a) the presence of inflection according to person and number in English verbs, as opposed to the absence of such features in Korean verbs, and (b) the stricter distinction in the tense and aspect system of English verbs, compared to that of Korean verbs.

Due to such complexity of the English verb system, many learners of English as a Second or Foreign Language commit errors related to verbs frequently. Many existing studies have examined English verb errors committed by learners from several different angles. Franck, Vigliocco, and Nicol (2002) and Kaan (2002) investigated subject-verb agreement errors, both pointing out linear distance as a possible cause for such errors. Incorrect orderings and subject-object asymmetry in verb phrases were dealt by White (1990/1991) and Lee (2009), respectively. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), on the other hand, presented a more detailed analysis on verb errors by providing examples of verb omission, misuse of tense, and subject-verb agreement errors.

What lacks in all these studies, however, is the analysis of the specific areas of English verb use with which learners struggle most. Consider the following example, retrieved from a learner corpus consisting of English essays written by Korean college students:

(1) If traffic is in awful situation, we get upset and *lost out valuable time. For example when we go out with our car for an appointment and got stuck in traffic jam we feel annoyed and that feeling *(is) going to affect their original appointment.

This example contains errors of incorrect tense use and the omission of a necessary item in a verb phrase. More specifically, the past tense form of the verb lose is not consistent with the preceding verb phrase get upset, which is used in present tense, and the verb be is omitted in the periphrastic modal be going to. Consider also the following two examples:

(2) Also, many people want to live *(in) a comfortable place. If this moving *(continue, small towns will *be become empty.

(3) But if I get more time to think what I like to learn and *who am I, reading more books is more important than earning to get spec.
In (2), the preposition *in* is missing after the verb *live*. The second sentence also contains two errors: (a) the subject-verb disagreement between *this moving* and *continue* and (b) the addition of the unnecessary verb *be* between *will* and *become*. In (3), on the other hand, the subject-auxiliary inversion in *who am I* is unnecessary because the clause should be an indirect *wh*-question.

Most of the students who wrote the essays in which these errors were detected have achieved nearly perfect scores in the English section of the Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test (KSAT), a fact which implies that they had mostly mastered the grammatical items taught throughout primary and secondary education. However, the verb errors related to the most basic use seen above indicate that the students may not be able to transfer their grammatical knowledge into actual language production. By ascertaining what aspects of the English verb Korean college students have the most difficulty with, we can come to a better understanding of which English verb use Korean students need more instructions and practice of. Thus, this study aims to investigate the types and frequencies of Korean learners' verb errors in their essays. Findings of such a study can help English teachers prioritize items related to verb use when they teach students or have students practice various forms of the English verb.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. The English Verb

Many of the current publications provide plenty of insight into verbs. Aarts (2008, p. 33) introduces verbs as "action words" and explicates the various syntactic argumentations of the verb with appropriate examples. Carter and McCarthy (2006) and Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985) provide detailed explanations about the various features of the verb: verb classes (e.g. transitivity, stative, and dynamic), functions (e.g. tense, aspect, voice, and mood), multiword verbs (e.g. phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs), and verb forms (e.g. infinitive and inflection).

Huddleston and Pullum (2002) also provide an in-depth analysis of the English verb, including clarifications of some controversial issues regarding certain verb rules—for instance, the accurate tense category of the modal verb *will*. Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999), on the other hand, present corpus-based findings on the distribution of types of verbs in various contexts. Finally, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), Cowan (2008), and Parrott (2010) provide teachers of the English language with helpful guidelines for teaching the complex English verb system. Parrott (2010), for instance, devotes separate sections in the book to point out several features
of the English verb, with corresponding examples of learners’ errors, that are particularly difficult for learners to acquire, e.g. (a) the use of auxiliary verbs, (b) various verb forms used for tense, number, person, negation, or question formation, and (c) different rules depending on such characteristics of verbs as transitivity and dynamicity.

2. Previous Studies on Verb Errors

As the verb is a mandatory component in sentence formation, it is important to be concerned with the errors of verb use when studying learners’ grammatical errors in language production. As briefly mentioned in the introduction, a number of studies have analyzed verb errors committed by English learners with diverse language backgrounds. Franck, Vigliocco, and Nicol (2002) focus on subject-verb agreement errors in sentence production, relating the issue to the linear distance hypothesis, the distance between the subject head noun and the verb. The hypothesis suggests that learners tend to have more difficulty with subject-verb agreement when there are more intervening elements between the subject head noun and the verb. Kaan (2002) also points out the linear distance as an important factor for learners’ subject-verb agreement errors, further arguing that “the presence of an intervening noun phrase with interfering number feature” is another factor contributing to learners’ committing subject-verb agreement errors (p. 165). The study has found that subject-verb agreement errors tend to be more frequent when a plural noun separates the singular subject head noun and the verb.

White (1990, 1991), on the other hand, examines learners’ errors by relating them to the influence of the learners’ first language (L1), i.e. French. White points out the difference in negative placement in English and French as the reason for ungrammatical sentences such as Mary *likes not John.

Using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen’s (1982) classification of learners’ errors in general language production, Yu and Yoo (2010) examine the erroneous uses of prepositional verbs committed by Korean university students. They discuss four main categories of prepositional verb errors: (a) preposition omission (e.g. looking *(at) me), (b) wrong prepositions (e.g. worried *at me), (c) preposition addition (e.g. enter *in university), and (d) misordering (e.g. *to go school). They have found that a considerable number of errors had resulted from the students’ inability to distinguish the different uses of transitive and intransitive verbs, a finding particularly evident in the following two types of errors: (a) the incorrect use of some verbs that can be used both as a transitive and an intransitive verb (e.g. believe and believe in) and (b) preposition omission due to the inability to distinguish transitive from intransitive verbs (e.g., listen *(to) music).

As with Yu and Yoo (2010), J. Shin (2011) used data retrieved from a learner corpus
consisting of essays written by Korean college students. Limiting her study to investigating overpassivization errors with the four most frequently overused verbs, i.e. *happened, occurred, appeared, and died*, she found that the students were less likely to commit overpassivization errors as their proficiency levels increased.

Providing the most in-depth coverage of verb errors made by English language learners, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) classify learners’ verb errors into two categories: (a) verb phrases and (b) verb-and-verb constructions. Errors regarding the formation of verb phrases in turn include the following three types of errors: (a) omission of verb (e.g. *He *(is? fell?) in the water*), (b) use of progressive tense (e.g. *The bird was *shake his head*), and (c) agreement of subject and verb (e.g. *The apples *was coming down*). The errors included in the verb-and-verb construction category, on the other hand, are as follows: (a) omission of *to* in the identical subject construction (e.g. *I go *(10) play*.), (b) omission of *to* in the verb-and-verb construction (e.g. *I see a bird and got *(10) the leaf*), and (c) attachment of the past marker to the dependent verb (e.g. *He was going to *fell*). Unlike the other studies discussed above, which focus on a specific area of verb errors, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen’s (1982) study aims to classify all the verb errors in two umbrella categories. The subcategories of these two main categories, however, overlap in many respects since three of the six subcategories are omission errors of some sort, as can be seen in the discussion above. Thus, the present study will adopt Dulay, Burt, and Krashen’s (1982) classification of learners’ errors in general language production, rather than their specific classification used for verb construction errors—i.e. omission, addition, misformation, and misordering—to analyze the verb errors detected in Korean college students’ essays.

III. METHOD

1. Data Collection

Collected in February 2010, the data used in this study consists of 102,632 words written by 399 freshman students majoring in humanities at a university located in Seoul. All the 399 students had completed their primary and secondary education in Korea, and the average percentile of their performance in the English section of the KSAT was 98. The writing task was part of the placement test for mandatory freshman English classes at the university. The students were given 50 minutes to write a well-developed essay on the following writing prompt: “If you could change one important thing about your hometown, what would you change? Use reasons and specific examples to support your
The collection and the evaluation of the essays were done with the assistance of the Criterion® Online Evaluation Service, an on-line writing and evaluation program developed by Educational Testing Service. This program provides a variety of essay topics, and essays are evaluated by an automatic grading and correction program called e-rater (Kim, 2009). In preparation for the administration of the writing test, 20 teaching assistants (TA) participated in a workshop in which they learned the procedures involved in administering the test properly. The 399 students taking the test were seated in nine separate computer labs on campus, and each lab was supervised by two TAs. One of the TAs in each lab demonstrated how to use the Criterion® program, while the other TA was in charge of circulating the lab and giving help to anybody who needs it. Using dictionaries or any other on- or off-line resource was not permitted during the test.

2. Data Analysis

This study adopts Dulay, Burt, and Krashen’s (1982) classification of general language production errors, whose four categories are as follows: (a) omission (e.g. *Billy has no milk.), (b) addition (e.g. *Is this is a cow?), (c) misformation (e.g. *He got a flower.), and (d) misordering (e.g. *What this is?). With qualifications specific to verb errors, these four categories were used to group all the verb errors in the essays collected in the manner discussed above: (a) omission of necessary items in a verb phrase, (b) addition of unnecessary items in a verb phrase, (c) misformation of a verb phrase, and (d) misordering of items in a verb phrase.

First, omission errors are characterized as “the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance” (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 154). For the present study, this definition was narrowed down as follows: the absence of an item necessary for the verb phrase to function properly, i.e. the omission of an auxiliary verb, a main verb, or a preposition. Thus, the omission of the preposition to in sentence (4) is considered an omission of a necessary item in a verb phrase as the verb go cannot function properly without the preposition to:

(4) I must go *(to) the academy.

Second, as Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) suggest, addition errors can be considered the opposite of omission errors: “the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance” (p. 156). As with the omission error, the addition error for this study is defined as the addition of an item unnecessary for the verb phrase to function properly, i.e. that of an auxiliary verb, a main verb, or a preposition.
Sentence (5), for example, contains the unnecessary modal verb *will*, inserted in front of another modal *should*:

(5) If I could change one important thing about my hometown, I *will should* change hotel in my hometown.

The third type of error is the “misformation” error, which Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) define as “the wrong form of the morpheme or structure” (p. 158). Errors in this category are reclassified into the following four subcategories: (a) the misuse of aspect, (b) disagreement with grammatical person and number, (c) the use of inappropriate items in a verb phrase, and (d) inflection errors, all of which will be further discussed in the next section. Sentence (6) is an example of a disagreement error as the uninflected verb *have* does not correspond with the singular subject *my hometown*:

(6) My hometown *have no* subway station.

Finally, errors in the “misordering” category are defined as “the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance” (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 162). The present study investigates two types of errors in this category: (a) misordering in declarative sentences and (b) misordering in questions. Thus, sentence (7) is an example of misordering, in which the necessary subject-verb inversion in a *wh*-question did not occur:

(7) *What we can* do to stop the decreasing of population?

**IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the 399 essays consisting of 102,632 words, a total of 686 verb-related errors were found. As indicated in Table 1 below, misformation errors (416 tokens, 60.6%) exhibited the highest frequency, followed by omission errors (175 tokens, 25.5%), addition errors (72 tokens, 10.5%), and misordering errors (23 tokens, 3.4%).
TABLE 1
Four Types of Verb Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misformation</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misordering</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>686</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Omission of Necessary Items in a Verb Phrase

As Table 2 shows below, the 175 tokens of omission errors consisted of three main types: the omission of (a) the main verb, (b) the auxiliary verb, and (c) the necessary preposition in a prepositional verb phrase. Although none of the three types were particularly dominant, the omission of prepositions (74 tokens, 42.3%) occurred most frequently, followed by the omission of main verbs (55 tokens, 31.4%) and the omission of auxiliary verbs (46 tokens, 26.3%).

TABLE 2
Omitted Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auxiliary verb</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main verb</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition in a prepositional verb</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>175</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since a prepositional verb “has an obligatory preposition” (Cowan, 2008, p. 271), the omissions of the prepositions in the sentences below do not allow the main verbs to function properly. Although prepositional verbs such as agree with, live in, and arrive at are extremely common, exhibiting over ten occurrences per million words (Biber et al., 1999), the examples below demonstrate that the students are not even aware of the most basic uses of prepositional verbs.

(8) a. I’m sure other people will agree *(with) my opinion.
    b. If you live *(in) Daejeon, you can go *(from) Seoul *(to) Busan easily.
    c. So when I use car or taxi, it takes more time to arrive *(at) the place.

The omitted main verbs could be broadly classified into two types. The first type is the non-auxiliary be, do, and have, e.g. (9a), (9b), and (9c), respectively:
(9) a. Because of this situation, many students *(are) tired.
b. They do not *(do) their work but just take places of the park.
c. So people often could hurt the body and *(have) trouble with bus owner.

The second type accounts for the omission of other main verbs, as in the case of (10a) and (10b):

(10) a. When I go around downtown, I often *(see) dirty things like dumped trash.
b. As a result, kids may not want to *(play) game in the playground.

Of the 55 tokens of main-verb omission errors, 44 tokens were instances of the former and 11 the latter. A number of errors were also caused by omitting auxiliary verbs (46 tokens, 26.3%). Auxiliary verbs included (a) the verbs be, do, and have used as operators, e.g. (11), and (b) the modals such as will, should, and can, e.g. (12):

(11) a. As I *(was) saying, I want to change my hometown to a cultural city.
b. Population of my hometown *(does) not increase.
c. City being or *(having) been capital of one nation gives a lot of advantage.

(12) a. Therefore, I *(will) write down about the bus system of Busan.
b. I think that we *(should) make our hometown cleaner.
c. I believe we have the power that *(can) change our hometown.

2. Addition of Unnecessary Items in a Verb Phrase

As with the omission errors, the addition errors could also be grouped into the following three categories: (a) main verbs, (b) auxiliary verbs, and (c) prepositions. As Table 3 shows below, the addition of auxiliary verbs (49 tokens, 62%) was found to be most frequent, followed by the addition of prepositions (16 tokens, 20.2%) and the addition of main verbs (7 tokens, 8.9%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Added Items</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auxiliary verb</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main verb</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In (13a), the presence of the causative verb *make* renders the auxiliary *could* unnecessary; in (13b), the correct auxiliary verb is *would*, but *will* and *should* are used together instead:

(13)  
   a. I would hire people who clean the bushes of dead branches to make the trees *could* grow better and look great.  
   b. If I could change one important thing about my hometown, I *will should* change hotel in my hometown.

The errors of adding an extra main verb, as in (14), were committed much less frequently as there were only seven such tokens:

(14)  
   I *think feel* the nature is really important for people to be healthy.

The addition of prepositions in (15a) and (15b) seems to have stemmed from the inability to distinguish transitive from intransitive verbs. Errors such as (16), however, seem to have resulted from the failure to recognize *somewhere* as an adverb, as the insertion of *to* would be necessary if a noun that designates a specific place had taken the place of *somewhere*:

(15)  
   a. Many people from the other cities *envy* of the charming streets full of people, places that are worth visiting with friends or family.  
   b. Dirty buildings can *harm* to children in another reason.

(16)  
   So when I *went* *to somewhere*, I felt comfortable.

3. Misformation of Verb Phrases

As presented in Table 4 below, this study reclassifies the total of 416 errors in this category into five subcategories: (a) the misuse of aspect, (b) disagreement with grammatical person and number, (c) the use of inappropriate items in a verb phrase, (d) inflection errors, and (e) others. The agreement errors (216 tokens, 51.9%) accounted for over half of all the misformation errors. The next most frequent errors were those of the misuse of tense (84 tokens, 20.2%), followed by inflection (46 tokens, 11.1%) and inappropriate items (44 tokens, 10.6%). Finally, the errors classified as “others” (26 tokens, 6.3%) include inappropriate uses of verb forms or sentences containing a mixture of different errors, e.g. (17):
(17) I think Seoul has few artistic factors *to attract*ive other country people.

TABLE 4  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misformation Errors</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of aspect</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate items</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflection</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) The Misuse of Tense and Aspect

As Table 5 shows below, this study classifies the various types of tense errors in terms of the aspect, “a grammatical category that reflects the way in which the action of a verb is viewed with respect to time” (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990, p. 51). Of the 84 errors in this category, those regarding the simple aspect (61 tokens, 72.6%) were the most frequent, e.g. (18), in which the adverbial phrase *last year makes it clear that the intended tense of the verb *decide is the simple past *decided:

(18) *Last year, Kimpo city *decide to construct *Kungjunchul.*

TABLE 5  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misuse of Aspect</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple aspect</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>72.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive aspect</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect aspect</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, relatively fewer errors occurred in the use of the progressive (9 tokens, 10.7%) and the perfect aspect (14 tokens, 16.7%), e.g. (19) and (20), in which the prepositional phrase *for 4 years requires the perfect aspect *have lived and the preceding verb phrase *is subsiding the progressive aspect *changing, respectively:

(19) *I *live in Yoido Seoul *for 4 years* and I’m satisfied that I live there.

(20) My town is *subsiding and *changes gloomier.
2) Disagreement with Grammatical Person and Number

As can be seen in Table 6 below, most of the agreement errors (210 tokens out of 216, 97.2%) were found in sentences in which the subject was third person. Errors regarding first person (6 tokens, 2.8%) occurred only a few times, while no errors were found in with second person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; person</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; person</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; person</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several different reasons could account for the numerous errors regarding third person. First, the “linear distance” (Kaan, 2002, p. 165) between the subject *this mess* and the verb *cause* in (21a) might have caused the inability to use the third person singular form correctly. As for (21b) and (21c), confusion seems to have stemmed from the inability to recognize the gerund *smoking* as third person singular and the irregular *children* as third person plural, respectively:

(21) a. *This mess* makes noise and *cause* air pollution.
     b. So just *smoking* in smoking area *don’t* have bad influence on others.
     c. *Children* *is* the future.

It is generally known that beginning learners of English tend to “simplify and leave off altogether the third person singular inflection” (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 57). Despite the relative rareness of doing the reverse, i.e. applying the third person singular inflection rule to first person, a few such errors could still be found, e.g. (22). The verbs that are inflected in the third person singular form in (22a) and (22b) do not agree with the subjects of the sentences—first person singular and first person plural, respectively.

(22) a. If *I* *wants* to ride a bike, I have to ride a bike with car on the road.
     b. We *needs* more parking place under the market.
3) Use of Inappropriate Items in a Verb Phrase

This category discusses the errors that are in fact closest to the original definition of misformation errors by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), “the wrong form of the morpheme or structure” (p. 158). The errors detected in this category included the misuse of several items as indicated in Table 7, thus causing verb-related ungrammaticality. Misused items consisted of (a) auxiliary verbs (11 tokens, 25.0%), (b) main verbs (10 tokens, 22.7%), and (c) prepositions (23 tokens, 52.3%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inappropriate Items</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auxiliary verb</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main verb</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While (23a) and (23b) require the use of the auxiliary verbs do and have, respectively, the modal verb can is necessary in (23c). In (24), on the other hand, the main verb be must replace the verbs has and does:

(23) a. But in the new subway system, the train *is not come many times.
    b. Even though Incheon *was never been a capital city, still it holds many
       historical sites such as Walmedo.
    c. On the other hand, not far from my village, there are many people who *are
       not afford to buy some food to eat or their own house.

(24) a. There *has so many cars.
    b. But it *doesn't true.

In this category, the misuse of prepositions in a verb phrase was the most frequent. The prepositions used in the sentences in (25) do not agree with the preceding verbs. Prepositions more appropriate for these sentences are suggested in parentheses.

(25) a. Actually, I'm **satisfied** *of my hometown, including its policy. (with)
    b. When some people smoke, other people are **upset** *to that. (about)

Since the main verbs preceding the prepositions contain most of the meaning, learners
might naturally pay less attention to the prepositions.

4) Inflection

Errors in this category include regularization and the non-use of dictionary forms. As shown in Table 8 below, regularization errors (29 tokens, 63%) occurred more frequently than the non-use of dictionary forms (17 tokens, 37%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 8</th>
<th>Regularization &amp; Non-use of Dictionary Forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tokens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularization</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-use of dictionary forms</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A term narrower than overgeneralization, which "describes almost all developmental errors observed," regularization occurs when "learners apply the rules used to produce the regular ones to those that are irregular" (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 157). The sentences in (26) are instances of regularizing the past tense formation rule of adding the morpheme -ed to irregular verbs. In parentheses are the correct forms that should have been used.

(26) a. So, I think more eco systems have to be *builted in Ilsan. (built)  
b. So I was always tired and I *losed identity. (lost)

The non-use of dictionary forms refer to those that include markings of a feature that is not required in the context. The ungrammaticality of (27a) and (27b) result from the non-use of dictionary forms of main verbs following modal verbs, while the ungrammaticality of (28) stems from the fact that the causative verb make requires the dictionary form of the verb look:

(27) a. However, this work would *takes long time.  
b. Having nice city may *looks good.

(28) It made Seoul *looks modern and beautiful.

Several instances of the non-use of dictionary forms also included errors that Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) call "double markings," errors in which "two items rather than
one are marked for the same feature” (p. 156). For example, third person singular is doubly marked on doesn’t and tries in (29a) and the past tense on did and took in (29b):

(29)  
   a. But then Indonesia doesn’t *tries to develop their education system. 
   b. So where did I *took her too?

4. Misordering

As shown in Table 9 below, the misordering of verb phrases could be classified into two different types: the misordering of items in a verb phrase in a declarative sentence (15 tokens, 65.2%) and in a question (8 tokens, 34.8%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misordering Errors</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misordering in declarative sentences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misordering in questions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In (30a), the present participle thinking is incorrectly placed after the comparative adverb more; in (30b), subject-operator inversion is unnecessary as the sentence is followed by a tag question:

(30)  
   a. I think my hometown should be *more thinking about the path. 
   b. “Ah, *is it an Army city, isn’t it?”

In (31a), the object noun phrase this system must precede the adverb well; in (31b), the infinitive marker to should be placed after the object noun phrase lots of people in my hometown:

(31)  
   a. Many people living in other areas don’t know *well this system. 
   b. I want *to lots of people in my hometown experience cultural life and change like my friend especially many students.

Finally, the sentences below are examples of misordered verb phrases in direct and indirect wh-questions. No tokens of misordering in yes-no questions were found. While direct wh-questions require subject-auxiliary inversion, indirect wh-questions do not. However, the following errors result from doing the opposite of this rule. Whereas (32a)
and (32b) are ill-formed wh-questions that did not undergo subject-auxiliary inversion, unnecessary inversion is done in (33a) and (33b):

(32)  
   a. *What we can do to stop the decreasing of population?  
   b. Then *why people of Youngwol are leaving the town?  

(33)  
   a. Like that, they didn't look *where are the results from.  
   b. Then I thought *how can people build apartments to this terrible place.

V. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

A careful examination of the 686 verb errors found in the essays written by 399 college students has revealed that misformation is the most common form of error, accounting for over 60% of all the errors. A sub-category of misformation errors, agreement errors in turn accounted for more than half of all the 416 misformation errors (216 tokens), a number bigger than any of the other three categories of error types, i.e. omission (175 tokens), addition (72 tokens), and misordering (23 tokens). This finding might have resulted from negative influence from the students' L1, as Korean verbs do not conjugate according to grammatical person. Furthermore, the feature of distinguishing number in Korean is not as systematic and strict as that in the English language.

Another noteworthy finding is the fact that the students make a great number of errors with both the lexical and the auxiliary uses of be and have. Errors regarding these verbs were abundant throughout most of the error categories discussed in this study. First, the students exhibited a tendency to omit or add the verb be in inappropriate contexts. Moreover, many students were apparently unable to distinguish the appropriate contexts in which be and have must be used, using the two verbs interchangeably in contexts where only one of them is appropriate. Considering that both the lexical and the auxiliary uses of these two verbs are taught early on in Korea, this finding suggests that Korean students need to be continually provided with contexts in which they can practice different uses of be and have.

The students were also relatively poor in using appropriate prepositions with intransitive verbs: the misuse of prepositions ranked the highest among the addition and misformation errors. The English textbooks used in Korea do include numerous prepositional verbs; however, Korean students seem to be unfamiliar with the concept of prepositional verbs and may need to be taught more explicitly that some intransitive verbs are used only with certain prepositions.

Finally, a word of caveat is in order in interpreting the results of this study. As
students were given only 50 minutes to compose a structured essay, they might not have had enough time to proofread their essays. If the same assignment had been given as a take-home exam, they would have had more time to plan, organize, and proofread their essays, thus being able to generate products of higher quality. In a study comparing the quality of timed essays and term papers written by Korean college students on the same topic, S. Shin (2011) indeed found “a meaningful difference in the areas of content, language use, and mechanics” (p. 163). Therefore, some of the errors shown in this study might not truly reflect the students’ lack of grammatical knowledge. That said, such errors could have also resulted from the lack of opportunity to practice the productive skills. As Swain (1985, 2005) argues, pushed output is an indispensable component in language learning experience for students to fully acquire the structural aspect of the target language. Thus, Korean students may also need to be provided with more activities in which they can use their grammatical knowledge to create their own language production.

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Applicable levels: tertiary education

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Hyonjin Cho
Graduate School of Education
Sogang University
#1, Shinsu-dong, Mapo-gu
Seoul, Korea
Email: hyonjin1@hanmail.net

Isaiah WonHo Yoo
Department of English