*영어어문교육, 14*권 4호 2008년 겨울

Grammatical Accuracy and Possibility of Fossilization in Chatting by EFL College Students*

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Suh, Jae-Suk. (2008). Grammatical accuracy and possibility of fossilization in chatting by EFL college students. *English Language & Literature Teaching*, 161-178.

This paper investigated degree of grammatical accuracy of various language forms with a focus on the possibility of their becoming fossilized in a later use of L2. A study was undertaken in which sixty college students engaged in chatting on the Internet for one semester, and erroneous forms in chatting scripts were identified and analyzed. It was shown that erroneous forms employed during chatting were distributed across various linguistic categories, and that eight major grammatical levels accounted for more than 90% of total erroneous forms. Also erroneous forms of grammatical levels such as subject-verb agreement, voice and relative clause were found to have a much higher possibility of being fossilized than those of any other grammatical level under study. It was concluded that though many erroneous forms produced in chatting look simple, and are easy to learn in light of their grammatical functions in sentence, given their frequent occurrence in chatting, both teacher and students need to pay proper attention to them to the point that students' attempt at communication is not hindered.

[grammatical accuracy/fossilization/chatting]

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the controversial issues in classroom foreign language learning involves achieving a balanced development between accuracy and fluency in learner language.

* This work was supported by INHA UNIVERSITY Research Grant.

This issue is often likened with the two sides of the coin. An overemphasis on accuracy is likely to result in monitor-overusers who are preoccupied with error-free, correct use of language while a heavy focus on meaning with little attention to form leads to monitor-underusers and even fossilization (Krashen, 1982; Long, 2003; Selinker, 1972). It appears that a recent trend of communication-dominated, or proficiency-oriented instruction in L2 teaching profession has contributed to the weakening of both teacher's and learners' concern over correct language use though communicative language teaching (CLT) acknowledges the essential role of grammar in the development of communicative competence (Brown, 2007; Richards, 2002). So excessive, explicit grammar teaching has tended to be lessened, or avoided in many communicative, student-centered classrooms. Particularly in some teaching methods, the role of grammar learning in L2 development is not recognized, or is even ignored. For instance, in the Natural Approach in which fluency is given top priority with little time allotted for grammar learning, accuracy is handled in such a way that "focusing on communication over a wide variety of topics, the necessary grammar structures are automatically provided in the input" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 72), and thus accuracy would emerge all by itself. Unfortunately, an over-reliance on fluency-focused methods and techniques does not always deal with the issue of grammar satisfactorily as Richards (2002) pointed out, "The promise that the communicative methodologies would help learners develop both communicative competence as well as linguistic competence did not always happen" (p. 12).

A negligent, negative attitude toward grammar learning and teaching has attracted much criticism, and has been seen to have debilitating effects on the overall development of target language proficiency. Eskey (1983) expressed regret about the indifference toward grammatical accuracy, and said cynically that "now we seem to believe that if students somehow learn to communicate, mastery of the forms will take care of itself" (p. 319). Garrett also (1986) held that "some of the rhetoric on the subject of communicative competence has caused anxiety among some teachers … students who had been allowed or encouraged not to worry about grammar may develop a kind of irremediably inaccurate fluency" (p. 133). In light of these concerns and interests in grammar learning and teaching, it is not difficult to see what crucial role formal accuracy plays in L2 development. One such a role can be noted in terms of the existence of fossilized linguistic forms in interlanguage. According to Brown (2007), fossilization refers to "the relatively permanent incorporation of incorrect linguistic forms into a person's second language competence" (p. 270). Selinker (1972) was among the first to address the notion of fossilization in L2 learning by arguing that about 90% of learners tend to give up their learning when they are still short of a target language norm. Many researchers stressed the importance of formal accuracy in L2 learning in relation to fossilization.

Higgs (1984) warned that ignoring accuracy in the early stages of learning would produce fossilized learners. Likewise, Richards (2002) claimed that an emphasis on authentic use of language for communication particularly in the early stages of learning can result in learners who have "good communication skills but a poor command of grammar and a high level of fossilization" (p. 12). Moreover, VanPatten (1988) introduced a term 'fossilophobia' to describe the fear of fossilization, and said that fossilophobia is prevalent among foreign language teachers who might feel responsible for their students' incorrect, nontarget-like production unless they start to draw students' attention to accurate use of language from the early beginning. Similarly, Ellis (1985, 1994) worried that an over-emphasis on getting meaning across with little help of grammatical accuracy forces learners to fall back on oversimplified, incorrect forms, and increases the possibility of fossilizing those forms.

Despite the major role of fossilization in L2 development and a growing, constant interest in it in L2 research, there have been very few studies that examined fossilization with pedagogical, practical applications into EFL classrooms. One main reason for such a paucity of studies appears to lie in many difficulties in defining, identifying and analyzing fossilized forms in a valid, reliable manner (Long, 2003). Looking at the status quo of our EFL education characterized by both meaning-focused instruction in elementary school and grammar-centered instruction based mainly on reading in middle and high schools, at first glance, one might think that the EFL education in this nation attempts to pursue a balanced development between fluency and accuracy throughout academic years from elementary to high schools. But unfortunately, nearly few people would agree with such a misperception, and in reality, grammar-oriented classes have been unilaterally dominating our EFL education nationwide. Moreover, what has been really happening is that despite a main focus on grammar, many students have problems with correct, accurate use of English in communicative situations probably because they have rarely been given opportunities to practice learned grammatical knowledge for social, functional purposes. To make matters worse, insufficient opportunities for practice might have limited students' access to feedback on errors, and have made considerable contributions to an increase of incorrect, deviated forms inside their interlanguage system. As a result, it may be the case that some erroneous, inaccurate forms or expressions have been included or internalized in L2 system for quite a long time, which clearly would become a serious barrier to an ultimate attainment of communicative competence. So it would be interesting to know how many and what kinds of erroneous, incorrect forms exist in our students' L2 system, and further to determine which of erroneous, inaccurate forms would be more vulnerable to fossilization. More specifically, the present paper attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What kinds of and how many erroneous forms occurred when college students were engaged in chatting on the Internet throughout one semester?
2. Are there differences in degree of grammatical accuracy of chatting between the beginning and the end of semester?
3. Which erroneous forms have higher and lower possibility of becoming fossilized?

II. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Studies on fossilization to date either centered on building theoretical backgrounds of fossilization by stressing its role in L2 learning and searching for possible causes of fossilization, or on providing empirical evidence for actual fossilized forms in learner language. Selinker and Lamendella (1978, cited in Ellis, 1985) claimed that fossilization could be the result of either learner's satisfaction with his/her current L2 system to meet communicative needs, or a brain maturation restricting the operation of language-learning mechanisms. Brown (2007) considered learner-internal factors such as lack of motivation, and little intention to consciously focus on L2 as a major contributor in facilitating fossilization. Ellis (1997) understood fossilization in terms of availability of an opportunity to plan production. Learners who have time to plan speech seem to succeed in reaching a final stage for some grammatical features whereas learners who do not have enough time to prepare speech tend to fail to do so for other grammatical items which are likely to be fossilized later. Meanwhile, Eskey (1983) saw target language speakers' reaction to learner language as one major factor causing fossilization. That is, learner's incorrect forms and structures are highly likely to be fossilized by positive feedback since they are still understandable enough for message to be conveyed in spite of some ungrammatical inaccuracy in it. Likewise, Vigil and Oller (1976) explained fossilization by looking at external feedback given to language learners. Fossilized items are the result of a combination of positive affective feedback allowing learner to keep talking with positive cognitive feedback signaling a learner that his or her message is comprehensible and understandable. According to Vigil and Oller, too much positive cognitive feedback plays a key role in causing fossilization since it is highly likely to lead learners to conclude that their language is grammatically accurate and meaningfully appropriate although such is not the case. Incorrect language forms resulting from such improper feedback can be repeated, reinforced, and thus become fossilized to the end.

On the other hand, studies on fossilization from an empirical, practical perspective are very few in number. Washburn (1994) was among the first to examine fossilization from such a perspective. In a study in which ESL learners were divided into fossilized and non-fossilized groups in terms of length of residence, and data were collected via

methods like cloze test, grammaticality judgment task and imitation task, Washburn found that fossilized group was slower than non-fossilized group in producing given forms accurately and reacting to corrective feedback. Han (1998) looked into various passive sentences produced by two Chinese learners of EFL in advanced proficiency level over a two-year period, and reported that fossilized passive expressions were greatly affected by L1 transfer and type of task that her subjects were engaged in. As mentioned, the under-representation of empirical research on fossilization is due largely to difficulties in gathering and identifying fossilized forms in a scientific, objective way. So rather than judging a given erroneous form as a fossilized one in a definite, absolute fashion, the present study attempted to determine to what extent a given erroneous form is likely to become fossilized in a later use of L2, that is, a possibility of its being fossilized. For this purpose, the study assumed that in order for a specific erroneous form to be viewed as a form with a higher possibility of becoming fossilized, there should be an increasing, frequent occurrence of it during a relatively long period of time.

III. METHODS

1. Participants

The subjects in the study consisted of sixty Korean students who were enrolled at one of the major universities in the southern part of this nation. They were all undergraduate students who were taking a course entitled 'English Learning through CALL' at the time of study. Nearly all of them majored in English language & literature, and about two thirds of them were female. Subjects' self-rated English proficiency ranged from intermediate-low to advanced level. Except for a few students, most students did not have any experience to visit English-speaking countries. Almost all the students had much interest in the learning of English through CALL, so they seemed to have little difficulty working with computers.

2. Instruments and Procedure

Data in the study were collected through chatting in the L2. Since the subjects took a course on CALL, it was felt that it would be appropriate and helpful for them to be engaged in something involving the use of computer for communicative purposes in L2 as part of course assignment. So at the beginning of semester, individual subjects were instructed to find partners, work in pairs, and engage in chatting in English on the Internet. Each pair of subjects was asked to do chatting about whatever they would like

to talk about twice a week for a period of 14 weeks (i.e., one semester). As evidence of conducting chatting in a given week, each pair of subjects was instructed to print out its chatting script on the Internet, and submit it before the start of class in the following week.

3. Data Analysis

As the first step of analyzing data, an effort was made to identify all the erroneous forms in chatting scripts. Along with the submission of chatting scripts, as part of their assignment, the subjects were also asked to try to find out all mistakes or performance lapses, self-correct them, and write a one- or two-page long report in which they should discuss everything about chatting, both linguistic and non-linguistic. So since chatting scripts had already been checked out in this way by the subjects themselves for self-correction, grammatically incorrect forms that still remained in chatting scripts had to be seen as erroneous forms. That is, though a given, simple-looking, ungrammatical form had not been caught and corrected by the subjects for some reason, it was considered as an erroneous form if it was found by a researcher during data analysis. In this way, mistakes or mere performance lapses were distinguished from errors in the study.

Then, for description of identified erroneous forms, two different criteria such as linguistic and surface structure categories were employed (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; James, 1998). A linguistic category included various parts of speech or levels of grammar such as subject, verb, object, noun phrase, adjective, adverb, and conjunctions, among others, each of which was further sub-divided into more refined levels of grammar. For instance, erroneous forms involving verb were also classified into tense, aspect, subject-verb agreement, voice and auxiliary verb, among others. As Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) pointed out, more refined and more detailed classification was made whenever necessary rather than beginning with a fully-developed set of levels of grammar. Meanwhile, surface structure category was used to show in what ways a given language form was deviated or altered from target language norm. It was adopted from Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) and James (1998), and included five major ways (i.e., omission, addition, misinformation, misordering, and blends) in which learners modify their interlanguage, and make it ungrammatical (for definition and examples of each modification, see Appendix A). Next, based on the description of erroneous forms, charts were created in which type and frequency of all erroneous forms produced across one semester were shown. Given the charts, a statistical technique of chi-square test was conducted with a significance level set at .05 to see any differences in type and frequency of erroneous forms of chatting between the beginning and the end of semester.

Finally, an attempt was made to make a guess at to what extent frequently occurring erroneous forms would become fossilized in a later use of the L2.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Erroneous Forms in the Beginning and the End of Semester

As a result of the analysis of thirty chatting scripts, the number of erroneous forms used in both the first four-week period of chatting (i.e., the beginning of semester) and the last four-week period of chatting (i.e., the end of semester) was 260 and 194, respectively, which shows a decrease in total occurrence of erroneous forms between two different time periods of chatting.

TABLE 1
Erroneous Forms in Linguistic Categories in the First 4-week Period

Linguistic categories	Frequency	% of total erroneous forms
A. Noun Phrase		
1. Article	75	28.8
2. Plural marking	20	7.7
3. Singular marking	5	1.9
4. case marking	2	0.8
Sub-total	102	39.2
B. Verb phrase		
1. Tense	39	15
2. Subject-Verb Agreement	25	9.6
3. Non-finite verbs	17	6.5
4. Voice	15	5.8
5. Progressive & Aspect	12	4.6
6. Complement	8	3.1
7. Auxiliary verb	3	1.2
Sub-total	119	45.8
C. Complex sentences		
1. Noun clauses	9	3.5
2. Relative clauses	8	3.1
Sub-total	17	6.5
D. Adjective phrase		
1. Comparative & Superlative	3	1.2
2. Participle	2	0.8
3. Complement	2	0.8
Sub-total	7	2.7
E. Prepositional phrase		
1. Gerund	10	3.8
2. No preposition	5	1.9
Subtotal	15	5.8
Total	260	100

As seen in Table 1, the erroneous forms employed in the first four-week period of

chatting were distributed across five major linguistic categories from noun phrase to prepositional phrase. The category of verb phrase caused the highest number of erroneous forms, which amounts to almost half of total erroneous forms. This was followed by the category of noun phrase that constitutes about 40% of total erroneous forms while the percentage of erroneous forms in the category of adjective phrase (i.e., 2.7%) was lowest. Looking at individual descriptive levels of each category, articles in the category of noun phrase caused the largest number of erroneous forms (i.e., 75 out of 260), so must have led the subjects to experience the greatest difficulty since they omitted either definite or indefinite articles on many occasions where they were obligatory. This finding is no surprise at all in light of much evidence showing that correct, accurate use of articles poses one thorny area to most learners of English (Lee, 2002; Richards, 1971; Shim, 2006). Two other descriptive levels in the category of verb phrase, tense and subject-verb agreement, were ranked second and third by accounting for about 25% of total erroneous forms together, which means that though both of them may be seen as simple and straightforward in terms of their functions in grammar, they were sure to be tricky to handle particularly in face-to-face interactions like chatting in which spontaneous use of language is common, and little time to preplan is available. Besides, other descriptive levels such as plural marking, non-finite verb, noun clause and relative clause were also shown to be major barriers to grammatically accurate use of utterances in chatting. Instead of making a given noun plural, the subjects tended to use its singular form while they employed a verb root after preposition where gerund as non-finite verb was required. Also they forgot to use conjunction introducing noun clause beginning with wh-word, and ignored agreement between head noun in matrix clause and verb in relative clause. As an illustration, some examples of erroneous forms produced in each linguistic category during the beginning of semester were given in Appendix B.

TABLE 2

Erroneous Forms in Terms of Surface Structure in the First 4-week Period

Types of surface structure	Frequency	% of total erroneous forms
Omission	95	36.5
Addition	10	3.8
Misinformation	147	56.5
Misordering	8	3.1
Blends	0	0
Total	260	100

Table 2 indicates that 93% of all erroneous forms produced in the first four-week period of chatting can be accounted for by two types of surface structure such as omission and misinformation. Most of the time, the subjects either left out what was needed in making a given utterance grammatical, or employed a wrong form to replace a target one. Their preference for omission over addition as a favorite learning strategy seems natural and understandable in the sense that for various reasons like memory limitations, distractions or shifts of attention as well as lack of knowledge, the subjects must have wanted to make their task (i.e., chatting) simpler and less burdensome while

working hard to get their message across successfully. As one possible explanation for more frequent use of misinformation than omission, despite insufficient grammatical knowledge, the subjects were believed to make the most of grammatical resource available to them in such a way that they tried to come up with whatever forms they could think of, or whatever they felt comfortable with at a specific moment of chatting, but ended up with incorrect, deviated forms.

TABLE 3

Erroneous Forms in Linguistic Categories in the Last 4-week Period

Grammatical categories	Frequency	% of total erroneous forms
A. Noun Phrase		
1. Article	53	27.3
2. Plural marking	5	2.6
3. Singular marking	2	1.0
4. case marking	2	1.0
Sub-total	62	32
B. Verb phrase		
1. Tense	30	15.5
2. Subject-Verb Agreement	37	19.1
3. Non-finite verbs	10	5.2
4. Voice	18	9.3
5. Progressive & Aspect	5	2.6
6. Complement	8	4.1
Sub-total	108	55.7
C. Complex sentences		
1. Noun clauses	9	4.6
2. Relative clauses	10	5.2
Sub-total	19	9.8
D. Adjective phrase		
1. Comparative & Superlative	4	2.1
2. Complement	4	2.1
Sub-total		
E. Prepositional phrase		
1. No preposition	1	0.5
Subtotal	1	0.5
Total	194	100

Table 3 shows the overall distribution of erroneous forms used during chatting in the last four-week period. It is noticeable that two categories such as noun phrase and verb phrase caused more than two thirds of the entire erroneous forms (i.e., 87.7%), which is comparable to 85% of total erroneous forms produced in the first four-week period (see Table 1). This implies that despite a decrease in the total occurrence of erroneous forms over the course of a one-semester period (i.e., 206 -> 194), the subjects did not make substantial progress in improvements of their grammatical ability to use language forms accurately in various categories including noun phrase and verb phrase between the beginning and the end of semester. A brief look at descriptive levels of these two

categories shows that articles, tense, and subject-verb agreement caused the highest occurrence of erroneous forms in this period, and hence, must have been the areas of greatest difficulty for correct, accurate use of English. As in the beginning stages of chatting, the subjects still did not use articles in many cases where they were obligatory, did not show consistency in the use of tense in their utterances, and were unable to express their knowledge of subject-verb agreement in a systematic, confident way.

There were still a few other grammatical levels that contributed a lot to the occurrence of erroneous forms at the semester-ending chatting. They include voice and complement in the category of verb phrase, and noun clause and relative clause in the category of complex sentence. Here the subjects seemed to fail to have a solid understanding of how to use voice, and chose a wrong voice by using active where passive was right or vice-versa. In addition, they were unable to find out appropriate preposition as complement fitting into a specific phrasal verb in sentence. As in the semester-beginning chatting, they also had considerable difficulty using noun clause and relative clause correctly in this period of chatting, which indicates that both grammatical levels were quite difficult and complex to master for communicative purposes (see Appendix B for some examples of erroneous forms used in the semester-ending chatting).

TABLE 4
Erroneous Forms in Terms of Surface Structure in the Last 4-week Period

Types of surface structure	Frequency	% of total erroneous forms
Omission	61	31.4
Addition	3	1.5
Misinformation	128	66
Misordering	2	1.0
Blends	0	0
Total	194	100

According to Table 4, nearly all erroneous forms (i.e., about 97%) produced in the last four-week period of chatting were involved in either omission or misinformation. In particular, misinformation accounted for two out of three cases of erroneous forms (i.e., 66%), which suggests that the subjects must have relied on wrong, non-target forms, or misused target forms probably because of their lack of knowledge of L2 grammar. This finding is reminiscent of Table 2 in which the subjects showed a similar tendency to depend on both misinformation and omission in their chatting during the first four-week period. From this it follows that the overall pattern of use of erroneous forms in terms of surface structure did not differ greatly between the semester-beginning chatting and the semester-ending chatting.

2. Comparison of Grammatical Accuracy between the Two Time Periods

In order to find out similarities and differences in grammatical accuracy of chatting between the beginning and the end of semester, a comparison of erroneous forms of three grammatical categories was made. The three categories such as noun phrase, verb phrase and complex sentence were chosen since they were found to constitute 91.5% and 97.5% of all erroneous forms used in two different time periods of chatting, respectively. Particularly, instead of looking into all linguistic levels in the three categories, for an in-depth comparison, two linguistic levels in the categories of noun phase and complex sentence, and four linguistic levels of the category of verb phrase were selected as seen in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5

Comparison of Erroneous Forms in 8 Linguistic Levels between Two Time Periods (Raw Score)

	article	plural	tense	agr	non-fi V	voice	nc	rc
Beginning	75	20	39	25	17	15	9	9
End	53	5	30	37	10	18	8	10

cf) agr=subject-verb agreement, non-fi V=non-finite verb, nc=noun clause, rc=relative clause

A statistical analysis was done by using a chi-square test of homogeneity, and showed no statistically significant difference in the occurrence of erroneous forms of eight selected linguistic levels between the two different time periods of chatting (i.e., $X^2 = 42$, $p < .227$), which means that no big change occurred in the overall grammatical ability of the subjects across one semester. Nonetheless, a careful look at Table 5 brings up several things of interest. First of all, more erroneous forms were used in such linguistic levels as subject-verb agreement and voice at the end of semester than at the beginning, which suggests that degree of grammatical accuracy in these linguistic levels was lowered as compared to that at the beginning of semester. In contrast, the opposite seems to be true to linguistic levels like article, plural, tense and non-finite verb in which there existed a sharp decrease in the number of erroneous forms toward the end of semester. Particularly, use of articles and plural marking were two great contributors in reducing erroneous forms during this period. However, given the fact that use of article is known to be one of the difficult areas to master for many learners of English, the lower occurrence of erroneous forms in article at the end of semester was likely to be possible by chance. Among the rest of linguistic levels, plural seems to be the only linguistic level to make notable differences in increasing degree of grammatical accuracy between the two time periods of chatting. Though it is difficult and complicated to determine factors that

played a central role in causing the differences in the occurrence of erroneous forms of selected linguistic levels between the two time periods of chatting, it would be worth considering which specific factors or reasons made great contributions to such differences, and further guessing the possibility of selected linguistic levels' becoming fossilized in a future task of L2.

3. Possibility of Becoming Fossilized in Selected Linguistic Levels

One simple way to make a guess at which of the eight selected linguistic levels would have higher or lower possibility of being fossilized is to compare the number of erroneous forms used at the beginning of semester with that at the end of semester (see Table 5). If there is an increase or almost no change in total occurrence of erroneous forms between the two time periods in a given linguistic level, it can be assumed that the subjects' ability to use language forms accurately in that linguistic level was unimproved or even deteriorated. Based on this rule of thumb, in Table 5, grammatical accuracy in linguistic levels such as subject-verb agreement, voice and relative clause was weakened, and may continue to be worsened unless sufficient, appropriate feedback on them is provided, which therefore, can result in a higher possibility of fossilization in the future. As stated earlier, within these linguistic levels, the subjects ignored the addition of suffix 's' to verb for subject-verb agreement, were unable to choose a right voice according to the overall meaning of utterance and context, and showed limitations in knowledge about relativization in light of choice of relative pronoun, agreement of head noun with verb in relative clause and case marking on relative pronoun.

Meanwhile, in other linguistic levels like articles, plural marking, tense and non-finite verb, the occurrence of erroneous forms was decreased, and this can be understood as a positive signal of improvement of grammatical accuracy. Except for use of articles that poses considerable difficulty for most L2 learners, plural marking, tense and non-finite verb can be seen as simple and straightforward in terms of their meaningful, transparent grammatical function in the production and process of sentence since they merely require learners to make a simple distinction between singularity and plurality, choose a right time frame from present, past and future tense, and use gerund after preposition. For this reason, only if careful, appropriate attention is given to them, grammatical accuracy of these linguistic levels is expected to be easily promoted and enhanced. Indeed, given a better performance by the subjects within these linguistic levels at the end of semester, it is likely that something helpful and beneficial to accurate use of forms in these linguistic levels must have taken place or been given to the subjects at some point in time toward the semester though it is very difficult to know what

something was. Or it is also likely that the subjects by themselves were able to raise their awareness of using accurate, correct forms of these levels for some reason as time passed toward the end of semester. So a sharp decrease in the occurrence of erroneous forms in these linguistic levels may be understood as a green light of a gradual increase in the subjects' grammatical knowledge and accuracy of them, and hence, suggests relatively lower possibility of their becoming fossilized in a later use of L2 even though there may be some fluctuations between grammatical and ungrammatical use of forms in these linguistic levels as one typical characteristic of interlanguage system. If proper feedback is offered by people around the subjects (e.g., teacher, peers and English native speakers) in a systematic, consistent manner, it may be the case that most erroneous forms in these levels will be changed to correct ones, and eventually disappear from interlanguage. Finally, given a very small decrease in the occurrence of erroneous forms in noun clause (i.e., 9 -> 8), it seems that very little improvement in grammatical accuracy of this level was made throughout the semester, which implies that correct use of noun clause was challenging and difficult to the subjects, and together with relative clause, noun clause in the category of complex sentence is likely to continue to produce ungrammatical forms, and lead them to stay in the subjects' L2 system for the time being with a high possibility of fossilization if no appropriate corrective treatment is ever provided.

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to examine grammatical accuracy of various language forms appearing in chatting, and make a guess at the possibility of their becoming fossilized in a future use of L2. To this end, a study was conducted in which college students were engaged in chatting on the Internet for a one-semester period, and chatting scripts were analyzed with a focus on ungrammatical, erroneous forms. The findings of the study indicated that erroneous forms were produced across various linguistic categories (Lee, 2002; Richards, 1971; Shim, 2006), and that eight grammatical levels accounted for about more than 90% of total erroneous forms used throughout the semester. It was also found that there was an increase in the number of erroneous forms in such grammatical levels as subject-verb agreement, voice and relative clause between the beginning and the end of semester while the opposite was true to grammatical levels like article, plural marking, tense and non-finite verb. This finding except article was taken to further guess that erroneous forms in the first three grammatical levels would have a much higher possibility of becoming fossilized in future than those in the second three grammatical levels when all other variables hold constant.

There is much danger in making such a wild guess at the possibility of fossilization of erroneous, deviated forms in interlanguage. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult and tricky to make an accurate prediction on which ungrammatical forms in learner language would become fossilized on the basis of data from cross-sectional research or longitudinal research with a rather short period of data collection. The reason for this is because in order for a given form to be considered fossilized, not only should it be seen as erroneous and incorrect at a time when it is produced, but it will still have to be so after a certain period of time, for example, five or seven years later. So any comprehensive study on fossilization should require a long-range, data-collection term, and in this sense, a six-month period of data collection in the present study is not long enough to make a reasonable, meaningful guess at the possibility of fossilization in the subjects' L2 system. If possible, it would be highly desirable to compare erroneous forms found in this study with those to be produced by the same subjects in future research, say three or five years later, which will allow a researcher to check whether erroneous forms produced in this study will still remain the same, and to reach a successful conclusion about fossilization of certain erroneous forms with confidence. Another weakness of the study lies in gender discrepancy. Since female students dominated a sample, and since females have been known to differ from males in speech behavior (Adamson & Regan, 1991; Romaine, 2003), it might be the case that such a gender bias had a negative effect on the overall findings of the study. In addition, since chatting in the study was done on line in a written mode, it is questionable whether or not what was written during chatting is able to fully reflect what would be said in oral face-to-face interactions.

In spite of these weaknesses of the study, it demonstrated clearly that suffering from a lack of ability to use English grammatically accurately for communicative purposes, the Korean college subjects employed various erroneous, deviated forms, many of which are simple and straightforward in light of role and function in sentence, and thus can be expected to be easy to deal with by the subjects with more than 7 years of L2 learning. Though they are not likely to interfere with communication seriously, their continuous occurrence in interactions may create unfavorable reactions, and give a negative image of the subjects to communication partners (Wolfram, 1973, in Hendrickson, 1987). If such is the case, it is only through heightening awareness of grammatical accuracy and paying constant attention to correct use of L2 that both teacher and students can claim for their public self-image, and save it from unfavorable, negative reactions given by communication partners while keeping in mind the fact that their focus on grammatical accuracy should not hinder an attempt at communication whatsoever (Brown, 2007; Kim, 2007).

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Appendix A

Definition and examples of surface structure categories (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) taken from data

1. Omission (absence of a target form)
ex) omission of article: You are very good student.
omission of verb: Did you good time on Teacher's Day?
omission of 'there & be': How many students in your class?
2. Addition (presence of a form not appearing in a target form)
ex) I will *be* very miss him.

I ate about 1 *hours* ago with E. K.

3. Misinformation (use of a wrong form)

ex) I remember that my parents *give* me a big bear doll in Children's day last May.

Chinese moves are exciting because people *is* fighting by flying.

4. Misordering (incorrect placement of a form)

ex) You *carefully and slowly* have in your time.

5. Blends (inclusion of more than one form due to learner uncertainty on a target form)

ex) no example in data

Appendix B

Some examples of erroneous forms from data

1. Erroneous forms produced in 8 linguistic levels during the beginning of semester

1) Article

We are not child any more!

I try to look for good termed man.

2) Plural marking

There are *many photo* …

These days our school crowed *so many student.*

3) Tense

I didn't decide on where I *go*, but she *recommend* Canada for sight-seeing.

I heard that she really wanted to be a woman and *live* as a woman not as a guy.

4) Subject-verb agreement

I was wondering what mooneric *mean* when I knew your e-mail address.

How *is* your students doing?

5) Non-finite verb

I visited her *after finished* my class.

How about exchange our tools?

6) Voice

You *satisfied* my parcel.

My professors *were allowed me* to work.

7) Noun clause

Do you remember *I did to you last night?*

Don't you know *that mean?*

8) Relative clause

I know that *witches are who use the magic.*

I hate *the bad smell and smoke which make* people feel bad and hard to breathe.

2. Erroneous forms produced in 8 linguistic levels during the end of semester

1) Article

He is king of Home Run in Korea.

It was really good story and I like true story movie.
2) Plural marking
Do you have some good *idea* to solve these *problem* if you were a problem?
Yes, I already examined *three subject.*
3) Tense
I heard that he *want* to transfer for MLB.
We fought many times, but we *try to* understand together.
4) Subject-verb agreement
There *are lots of traffic jam* on the high way.
Every woman not all woman *have* a same thought like me and you …
5) Non-finite verb
Wear contact lenses are very inconvenient.
What about come true your long desire this spring …
6) Voice
Strict and fearful teachers *are remain* our memory for a long time.
I hope *that this class would finish early …*
7) Noun clause
Do you know *when is her wedding day?*
So I can't say *whether is good or not.*
8) Relative clause
Do you remember *the exam that took?*
Is there *anyone was taken by your trick?*

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Secondary

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Received in October, 2008
Reviewed in November, 2008
Revised version received in December, 2008