Error Analysis: What Problems do Learners Face in the Production of the English Passive Voice?

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This paper deals with a part-specific analysis of grammatical errors in the production of the English passive in writing. The purpose of the study is dual: to explore common error types in forming the passive; and to provide plausible sources of the errors, with special attention to the role of the native language. To this end, this study obtained a large amount of data from Korean EFL university students using an essay writing task. The results show that in forming the passive sentence, errors were made in various ways and that the most common problem was the formation of the be-auxiliary, in particular, the proper use of tense and S-V agreement. Another important finding was that the global errors found in this study were not necessarily those with the greatest frequency. Also corroborated was the general claim that many factors work together to account for errors. In many cases, interlingual and intralingual factors were shown to interact with each other to explain the passive errors made by Korean students. On the basis of the results, suggestions are made for effective and well-formed use of the passive sentence.

[error analysis/grammar/the passive/language transfer/interlanguage]

I. INTRODUCTION

For several decades error analysis has held a fascination for ESL and EFL researchers. Cha (2004) stated that "The underlying motives for error analysis were understanding the process of adult second or foreign language learning by analyzing the systematicity of adult errors" (p. 150). A conventional approach to error analysis has been to judge the grammaticality of the passive sentence as a whole: whether the

passive is grammatical or not; how the passive differs in error frequency from other syntactic structures.

Relatively little attention, however, has been directed to error analysis of specific parts within one particular syntactic structure. This study deals with a part-specific or micro-analysis of passive errors. The main purpose of the study is dual: (a) to judge the grammaticality of each part of the passive sentence to examine whether or not learners correctly form particular parts of the passive; and (b) to identify plausible sources of the errors, with special attention to L1 influence. There are several reasons for choosing the passive construction for this study. First, few or no studies have documented error analysis of the passive. Second, the passive sentence plays a crucial role in cohesive writing (Bardovi-Harlig, 1990), and thus it seems first necessary for learners to produce well-formed passives in order to make writing more cohesive at the discourse level. Third, textbooks used in the secondary school pay great attention to exercises converting the active into the passive and vice versa (Jung, 2005).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of error analysis is to systematically describe errors made by learners of a foreign language. It also provides a psychological explanation - a reliable account of the cause of the errors (Abbott, 1980).

There seems to be a consensus on the procedure for error analysis, as discussed in Ellis (1985) and Brown (2000): 1) collecting data; 2) identifying errors; 3) classifying errors; 4) quantifying errors; 5) determining sources of errors. In collecting data, there has been heavy reliance on written data. In identifying errors, it is important to consider whether sentences are 'overtly idiosyncratic' or 'covertly idiosyncratic' (Ellis, 1985). As for error classification, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) and Kim (1998) suggested that there are six main domains: a noun phrase domain, a verb phrase domain, a clause and sentence domain, a prepositional domain, an adjective phrase domain, and other common error domains. In their taxonomy, errors concerning the passive were included in the verb phrase domain. These six overall domains include several sub-categories: addition, omission, substitution, and ordering. Within each sub-category, levels of language can be considered, such as phonology, grammar or discourse. From another perspective, errors may also be classified as either global or local: Global errors are those that significantly inhibit communication, whereas local errors are those that do not (Burt & Kiparsky, 1974; Brown, 2000). After errors are

classified, they are quantified to determine the number of times each error type occurs. This is based on the assumption that the frequency of errors is proportional to the degree of learning difficulty.

With respect to the sources of errors, Brown (2000) suggested four major factors: a) interlingual transfer; b) intralingual transfer; c) context of learning; d) communication strategies. Interlingual transfer involves the assumption that many errors result from native language interference. On the other hand, intralingual transfer largely involves overgeneralization within the target language itself. Errors can also be made because of misleading explanations by teachers and faulty presentation of structure in textbooks, which Brown (2000) calls the 'context of learning.' In addition, communication strategies employed by learners can themselves become a source of error. While there can be many other sources, an error cannot always be ascribed to any one single source, nor can one claim to know precisely what causes a particular student to make a particular error.

In the Korean EFL context too, error analysis has been an attention-drawing topic for research. Recently, Kim (1998) attempted to analyze errors made by Korean high school students and found that problems with determiners, in particular, articles, were the most common error type, followed by the category of awkward expression, which was in turn followed by incorrect verb complementation. More recently, Cha (2004), in an analysis of university students' writing samples, similarly found that determiners and verbs were the most common error types. These results taken together suggest that errors using determiners and verbs are the types made most frequently by students, not only at the secondary level, but also at the university level.

These two studies, however, involved a macro-analysis of errors, which dealt with errors in various syntactic structures of which the passive was merely one. In other words, the passive was examined in relation to other structures. As important as this approach, is a micro-analysis focusing on the analysis of specific parts within a particular syntactic structure. There have been not many micro-analytic studies of errors in the Korean EFL setting. Ryoo (1992) performed error analysis focusing on Wh-questions using university students. He found that Korean students exhibited psychological learning processes such as overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules and the use of false hypotheses. His study, however, relied on the data obtained from a sentence-level test rather than from an essay writing task. A similar limitation was also observed in Park's (2005) study, which investigated which article usages are particularly difficult for advanced Korean learners in terms of semantic types, semantic environments, and article types. She

found that the environments with 'no article' were considerably difficult. Her study, however, employed a questionnaire and a close test rather than free writing data, which is necessary to accurately measure learners' difficulty.

Jung, Yang, and Yu (2005), using both controlled and free writing tasks, analyzed errors in the use of tense and the subjunctive in college students' compositions. The results showed that in the controlled writing the students used 44.7% of tense and subjunctive forms correctly. The majority of the errors were attributed to intralingual transfer. In the free writing, the accuracy rate was higher, 90.92%, which might be related to the students' avoidance of uncertain expressions.

Not much attention has been, however, paid to the analysis of errors in the formation of the English passive at the syntactic level in the Korean EFL context, though errors in the passive at the discourse level were fully explored in Jung (2005). There is no denial that developing learners' grammatical competence is prerequisite to enhancing their discourse competence. Hence, this study analyzes various error types occurring in the formation of the passive.

There have been views critical of error analysis. As discussed in Brown (2000), one major shortcoming is overemphasis on production data, which means that it disregards the learning process. Another limitation put forward by many researchers (James, 1998; Schachter, 1974) is that error analysis fails to account for the strategy of avoidance. In other words, "the absence of error does not necessarily reflect native-like competence because learners may be avoiding the very structures that pose difficulty for them" (Brown, 2000, p. 219).

Despite these drawbacks, error analysis is of significance for several reasons (Corder, 1967; Laroche, 1983). First, it helps the student to figure out how far towards the goal he has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to learn. Second, it provides the researcher and teacher with evidence of what strategies the learner is employing in his/her discovery of the language. Going further, it helps text designers to develop pedagogical materials more effectively.

III. METHOD

1. Research Questions

In order to explore the purpose of the study, I formulated the following research questions:

1. What type of error do university students make more or less frequently?
2. Are there any differences in error frequency between sophomores with no instructions on the passive, and juniors group with instructions?
3. What causes errors in forming the passive?

2. Participants

The research method employed in this study was basically the same as that used in Jung's (2005) study, which focused on the discourse functional aspect of the passive. Two hundred Korean university students (81 male; 119 female) who were English majors or minors and who were taking English as an elective at two different universities participated in the study. They ranged in age from 20 to 28. Two education levels were considered: the sophomore and junior levels. The participants were divided equally into two groups of one hundred at each level. The basic reason for this division was that the sophomore group had not taken any courses giving instructions on the passive, whereas the junior group had taken one grammar and one writing course at university at the time of the survey. The instructions on the passive were given to the junior group as a part of a whole course rather than as the main focus of the course. In this sense, the division between the two groups involves not simply the degree of education but also the degree of instruction on the passive. Both groups, however, had had instructions on the passive in secondary school in that they had been studying English as a foreign language since middle school.

3. Instrument

The research tool employed in this study was essay writing. The participants were asked to write an argumentative essay about one of two assigned scientific topics — involving either an environmental problem or computer technology — and these written samples were collected. The assignment is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

The Writing Task

Write a two- or three-page argumentative essay about one of the following topics.

1. Discuss the problem of pollution in your country or in the world (for example, air pollution, water pollution). You may include, for example:
    • *why the problem of pollution is serious.*
    • *what causes this problem.*
    • *what the results of this problem could be.*
    • *how this problem could be solved.*
2. Discuss both the positive and negative aspects of high technology, for example, computers. You may consider, for example:
    • *what the situation was like before computers were used.*
    • *how much computers have developed.*
    (Do you think they should be developed further?)
    • *how computers contribute to the quality of human life.*
    • *how other industries are influenced by computers.*
    • *what the limitations of computers are.*

Argumentative writing was chosen because the passive is more likely to be used in an argumentative essay than in an experiential essay. Scientific topics were chosen based on the fact that the passive occurs most often in scientific writing (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999) and the two particular topics chosen are currently hot issues in Korea. This task was conducted as a class assignment.

4. Method of Analysis

I considered all *be + past participle* passives in the students' compositions, but not cases of *be + past participle* functioning as verb plus adjectival complement, as in *I was born in Texas*, or *I am tired*. Grammatical errors in the passive structure were analyzed in terms of their form. In other words, they were judged on the basis of whether or not the passive sentence was well-formed according to grammatical rules. The researcher himself identified all grammatical errors concerning the passive and grouped them into different categories. This analysis was double-checked by a native speaker of English, who was teaching at a university.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overall categories for the analysis included the be-auxiliary, past participles, by-phrases, wrong choice of patient-agent, wrong choice of voice (active or passive),

and wrong choice of lexical items. Only when all of these categories are correctly used can the passive be considered grammatical. The total number of passives used by the students involved 732 sentences. Out of that number, 275 passives (38%) were judged to be grammatically incorrect. A numerical account of errors according to categories is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Grammatical Errors by Categories

Categories	N (%)	N (%)
Be-auxiliary		189 (52.6)
Tense	72 (20.0)	
S-V disagreement	60 (16.7)	
Be-omission/insertion	57 (15.8)	
Past participles		44 (12.2)
By-phrase		45 (12.5)
Wrong prepositions	26 (7.2)	
By-omission	13 (3.6)	
By-transposition	6 (1.6)	
Wrong choice of patient-agent		18 (5.0)
Wrong choice of voice		38 (10.5)
Wrong choice of lexical items		25 (6.9)
Total		359 (100)

As shown in the table, the learners made the greatest number of errors in forming the be-auxiliary of the passive. In this overall category, tense and subject-verb (S-V) disagreement were the areas where these learners most often had problems. This finding does not seem to be in keeping with some previous studies such as Kim (1998) and Cha (2004), both of which showed that errors concerning tense and number agreement were minimal. The agent by-phrase contained fewer errors than did be-forms. This is not surprising, if we consider the fact that the agentless passive is more widely used than the agentive passive (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Another troublesome item was the students' confusion about the choice of the active versus the passive. The wrong choice of voice may result from the students' lack of semantic judgment about whether the subject is affecting or affected.

These errors were compared in terms of education level, as summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Results of the Passive Errors by Education Level

	Sophomores	Juniors	Total
Grammatical errors	139 (41%)	136 (35%)	275(38%)
Total passives used	340	392	732
	$t = 1.669$		$p = .095$

The raw numbers and percentages showed that the sophomores made a slightly higher proportion of errors than did the juniors. In order to test whether this difference was statistically significant, a t-test was performed. The results revealed that the difference failed to reach statistical significance. This result does not lend support to the normal expectation that the lower the students' education level, the more likely they are to make errors and that the students less exposed to instructions on the passive are more likely to make errors. This showed that grammatical instructions given to the juniors did not have a crucial effect on their formation of the passive structure.

In what follows, each category of passive errors is analyzed in detail with relevant examples. This is followed by discussion of the possible sources of the errors. There can be more than one error within each passive sentence. Thus, when I discuss a certain category, I underline the error in question. The informant who made the error is cited at the end of each example.

1. Be-auxiliary

The most common error consisted in the incorrect use of the be-auxiliary (189; 52.6%): misuse of tense, subject-verb disagreement, and be-omission. A large number of errors observed involved misuse of tense (72; 20%). In fact, tense errors were a very persistent error type. Consider the following examples.[1]

(1) *Personal computer *is* introduced in Korea about ten years ago.

(Sophomore #70)

(2) *The earth *was* surrounded by the atmosphere.   (Junior #9)

(3) *Women's hair-spray, a cooling device and waste gas of car are influenced badly earth. In fact, the ozon of earth *is* destroyed by those bad things.

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[1] The learners' writing samples are presented just as they were written without error correction throughout this paper.

(Junior #95)

(4) *And the rain that ours father or mother usually had drunk without any purification turned to acid rain. Our iron bridge and buildings *were* decaied by acid rains or smog. (Junior #29)

A common tense error was the use of the simple present in a past context, as in example (1) or the use of the simple past in a present context, as in (2). Example (3) illustrates the substitution of the simple present for the present progressive, probably due to the fact that Korean does not clearly distinguish these. Similarly, example (4) is another possible case of the interference from the native language. Since Korean does not clearly distinguish the past from the present perfect, the learner might have substituted the past for the present perfect. The difficulty of tense usage is somewhat predictable since the tense systems greatly differ in the native and target languages.

S-V disagreement was also a troublesome case (60; 16.7%) for the Korean learners. Consider the following:

(5) *Before long, if the measures *is* not taken against pollution, our land may be turned into barren land in which nobody could live. (Sophomore #27)

(6) *Function of computers replaced man's part. Then their leisure time *were* given for man more than before. (Sophomore #57)

Most agreement errors were cases in which the singular *is/was* was used where the plural *are/were* is correct, as in example (5); there were only a few cases in which the plural was used where the singular is correct, as in example (6). This may be partially due to the sequence of acquisition. In Korean classrooms, learners are generally taught the singular *be* forms before the plural *be* forms; thus, the forms which were learned earlier might be considered as prototypical by the Korean learners whose mother tongue lacks S-V agreement based on number. The learners, therefore, might have used the supposed representative form without being concerned about S-V agreement. A similar trend was observed in has/have-disagreement, as shown in the following:

(7) *From one day, the clarity of river water *have* been disappeared and the river *have* been polluted enough to give out bad smell. (Junior #19)

(8) *Recently, Most rivers, streams, a strong reservoir and rivers of an industrial complex *has* been extremely polluted. (Junior #15)

Frequent errors occurred in which *have* was used where *has* is correct, as in example (7), but there are only a few examples of *has* where *have* is correct, as in (8). The sequence of acquisition also seems to be of explanatory power in this case, because Korean students generally learn *have* earlier than *has*, and use the former more frequently than the latter. Furthermore, this type of error is highly predictable when the native language is taken into account, because Korean verbs do not have to agree with their subject in person or number, and learners tend to transfer the native language system to the target language. In this respect, S-V disagreement is a case where interlingual and intralingual factors interact with each other.

Interestingly, agreement errors were frequent when there was some constituent appearing between the main subject and the verb:

(9) *Methods of clean, effcient public transfortation *has* been passed requiring treatment of industrial wastes before they are released into the air or water.

(Junior #55)

(10) *As I mentioned above, till now some examples commonly recognized *is* given.   (Sophomore #12)

(11) *In this way, air, water, and soil *is* being polluted......   (Junior #7)

In example (9), the first of-phrase (*of clean, efficient public transportation*) interfered between the main subject and the verb. In example (10) the relative clause (*commonly recognized*) isolated the verb from the main subject. These examples clearly show that an inserted phrase or subordinate clause can also prevent learners from being aware of subject-verb agreement. Also consider the following example:

(12) *In eco-system the number of species *are* reducing and ozon layer destruction is caused mostly by man-made chemicals......   (Sophomore #90)

In this example, the learner lacked the rule that *the number of* takes the singular and *a number of* takes the plural. According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), this is a persistently troublesome case for many ESL learners.

Another interesting error type was omission of the be-auxiliary (53; 14.7%):

(13) *The problem of environment pollution _____ caused by the industrialization.

(Junior #62)

(14) *In our nation, it is education of environmental nature that ____ put emphasis
on in the children.　(Sophomore #77)

No be-auxiliary was added; the past participle form of the main verb was used. The learner seems to have made an erroneous hypothesis that the use of the past participle would be sufficient to form the passive, without considering the necessity of the be-auxiliary. Such an omission might have been influenced from the fact that the be-auxiliary is absent in the Korean passive. Example (14) shows that the learner had trouble in forming the pseudo-passive construction (Riddle & Sheintuch, 1983). Indeed, only a few instances of the pseudo-passive (12 occurrences) were found in the data. This can be viewed as a strategy of avoidance. That is, the learners avoided producing pseudo-passives probably because they knew they would be problematic. This avoidance tendency is similar to the avoidance of relative clauses by Chinese and Japanese students as reported in Schachter (1974) and the avoidance of the English passive by Arabic speakers as in Kleinmann (1977).

In contrast to be-omission, a be-auxiliary was sometimes wrongly inserted (4; 1.1%):

(15) *For example, computer, *is* used by children and young people, is the
representative product of high technology.　(Junior #38)
(16) *Also we drink the water *is* polluted by waste, we get sick.　(Junior #62)

In order to make these passives well-formed, either the be-auxiliary should be omitted or a relative pronoun should be added. The errors in these examples are in line with Jung's (2002) finding that Korean students perceived difficulties with the use of the passive and relative pronouns.

2. Past Participles

There were relatively many passive errors involving past participles (44; 12.2%):

(17) *A quality of life became low and a safety of human life is threaten ___ well.
　(Sophomore #4)
(18) *Accordingly, their cars are *taked* for granted.　(Sophomore #47)
(19) *…..nature can be thought as vast and powerful object, so we can easily think
that it can't be chang*ing* and destroy*ing* by the number of people.

(Junior #61)

This category included omission of the suffix *-ed*, as in (17); wrong use of *-ed* for *-en*, as in (18); wrong use of the present participle form for the past participle, as in (19); and so on. In example (17), the *be*-form is correct, but the past participle form was not added. According to Schachter's (1994) account, this error may be due to the learner's limited hypothesis that to mark the passive, a tensed form of *be* should be added, without considering the past participle. In example (18) the learner was not sure about the correct form of the past participle, although he/she knew that the passive verb should be used. The learner over-generalized the rule for forming the past participle from regular verbs and applied it to the irregular verb. Thus, this error can be ascribed to an intra-lingual factor. Examples like (19) show that some learners did not know the semantic difference between the present and the past participles.

3. By-phrase

Sub-categories of by-phrase errors (45; 12.5%) which occurred in the agentive passive included wrong choice of prepositions for marking the agent, over-generalization of the by-preposition and transposition of the by-phrase.

Let us consider some examples of a wrong choice regarding the preposition in the agentive phrase (26; 7.2%):

(20) *Some of polluted earth and water such as Han river, could be healed *because of* that effort.   (Sophomore #98)

(21) *The pollution of Nak-dong is caused *of* industrial wastewater of containing noxious chemical things.   (Sophomore #26)

Because of in (20) and *of* in (21) were wrongly chosen where *by* is appropriate. The error in example (20) is traceable to the learner's native language structure in that the Korean postposition *-lo* 'because of' can be used interchangeably with *-e uy hay* 'by'. This error type can also be considered as an error of simplification (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1999), resulting from learners' producing simpler linguistic rules than those found in the target language. Richards, Platt and Platt (1999) classified errors of simplification as an intralingual error type. In this respect, the prepositional error in (20) is a case where interlingual and intralingual factors interface.

At times, the preposition *by* was over-generalized, as shown in the following examples.

(22) *The computer is spreaded into plenty of realms of people. Even people were fired *by* the computer.   (Sophomore #72)

(23) *Like the electronic wires on the air, every part of our society is connected with each other so closely *by* PCC.   (Junior #56)

In example (22) *because of* is more appropriate than *by*, while in example (23) *by means of* is more appropriate than *by*. Such an over-generalization may be, in part, due to the learner's erroneous hypothesis that the agent phrase of the passive is always made possible by means of the preposition *by*.

Some learners simply omitted *by* (13; 3.6%), for example, **Our life will be challenged ___ many environmental crisis** (Junior #27). This is a result of incomplete application of rules.

Of more interest is transposition of the by-phrase, in which the by-phrase was correctly formed, but wrongly positioned (6; 1.6%).

(24) *For example, *by* this accident the water have been polluted very bitterly.
                    (Junior #41)

(24') For example, the water was greatly polluted by this accident.

(24") For example, because of this accident the water was greatly polluted.

Example (24) violated normal word order since the by-phrase has been transposed. This error can be remedied either by repositioning the by-phrase, as in (24'), or by changing the preposition *by* to *because of*, as in (24"). This error apparently reflects the grammar of the learner's native language since such a transposition of the by-phrase is perfectly natural in Korean. While the word order of Korean is more flexible than that of English, such flexibility is not operative in the target language. This error type can be considered a global error, since word order problems can cause miscommunication (Cha, 2004).

Markedness theory (Celce-Murcia & Hawkins, 1985; Eckman, 1981) claimed that special and irregular items are more highly marked than regular ones, and that marked items are more difficult to acquire than unmarked ones. However, unexpectedly, a low error rate occurred in the special usage of marking the agent — that is, the case where passive verbs accompany prepositions other than *by* (e.g., *be covered with*, *be*

interested in). There are some reasons for this tendency. First, many Korean teachers tend to place special emphasis on exceptions to the rules that the agent phrase is marked by the preposition *by* in the passive sentence. Second, they present such phrases as idiomatic expressions, asking students simply to memorize them. Third, when they give exams, they pay more attention to exceptions than to the general rule. Furthermore, these phrases are used very frequently once they are learned idiomatically. Among many others, the following expressions are emphasized in Korean classrooms:

(25) *be concerned with*   *be satisfied with*
     be interested in   *be surprised at*
     be covered with   *be filled with*
     be based on   *be made of*

Since these are taught idiomatically, they are stored as a single meaning unit in learners' cognitive structure, which lowers the chance of making such preposition errors.

4. Wrong Use of Patient and Agent

Not many errors were found in the choice of the patient and/or the agent (18; 5%). Consider the following examples.

(26) *So, after 1970's has been seriously raised *public nuisances and environment problems* in our country.   (Sophomore #36)

(27) *It was broken that *the connection with God and Human being*.   (Junior #34)

(28) *In our daily life in the case of the abolished paper which we can come in contact with frequently is used very widely for paper resource.
                                                         (Sophomore #3)

(29) *The nature is important. Therefore, we must preserve and protect ____ that will be passed down to our descendent in the future.   (Junior #97)

Ungrammaticality in examples (26) and (27) is due to the fact that the patients of the passive sentences were wrongly postposed after the main verbs. In example (28) it was hard to identify the patient of the passive sentence. In example (29) the patient of

the passive was deleted. This deletion may have resulted from the learner's wrong perception of the relative pronoun *that* as the patient of the passive. Another possibility is interference from the native language in that zero-anaphora (NP ellipsis) is an important characteristic of Korean (Jung, 1998). The learner did not express the patient probably because it is understood through the linguistic context. However, there were only a few of this type of error in the data analyzed. This finding is compatible with Odlin's (1989) point that zero anaphora is common in the early stages of second language acquisition. This last example is another case where interlingual and intralingual factors interact with each other.

Another error type which can be explained in terms of inter-lingual interference is related to the typology of subjects.

(30) *Seoul is concentrated on 70% of Korean economy.   (Sophomore #84)
(30') 70% of the Korean economy is concentrated in Seoul.

In example (30) the learner chose the wrong subject. An acceptable version of it is (30'), where the patient is *70% of Korean economy*. If example (30) is translated into Korean, the patient is the topic rather than the subject, as shown in the following.

(30") Seoul-un hankwuk keyngce-uy 70%-ka cipcung-toy-eissta.
          Seoul-TOP Korea economy's 70%-SM concentrate-PASS-is
          Literally: 'As for Seoul, 70% of Korean economy is concentrated in it.'

Since not only the subject but also the topic can precede the verb in Korean, the writer of example (30) might have wrongly chosen the topic as the patient of the passive and postposed another noun phrase, the subject, after the verb, since no English sentence can have two subjects. In this sense, this error may be attributed partly to the typological difference of subjects: English is a subject-prominent language, and Korean is both a subject- and topic-prominent language (Li & Thompson, 1976). In the latter case, the topic generally takes precedence over the subject.

In a similar vein, some errors were due to a wrong attempt to reverse the patient and the agent.

(31) *Waste is filled with the city.   (Junior #72)
(32) *The smoke from the car is caused by air pollution.   (Junior #28)

In example (31) the patient is *city*, and the agent, *waste*. In example (32) the patient is *air pollution*, while the agent is *the smoke*. These examples show that the relation between the patient and the agent is wrongly reversed. The learners failed to identify which was an actor and which was a patient. These errors are considered global errors in the sense that reversal of the patient and the agent could bring about misunderstanding and miscommunication.

5. Wrong Choice of Voice

Wrong choice of voice involves using the active form where the passive form is appropriate, or vice versa, from the syntactic perspective. The rate of errors of this type was relatively high (38; 10.5%). Consider some examples:

(33) Computer is spread by present human beings ...... It has some problem *to use* in
     our society.   (Sophomore #74)
(34) We can say that the nature has *been begun* to *destroy*, since human being
     appeared in this planet.   (Sophomore #90)

In example (33) the underlined active verb should be passivized into *being used*. In example (34) the learner passivized the wrong verb: the passive verb *been begun* was used where the active is appropriate, and the active verb *destroy* was used where the passive is grammatically correct. These learners failed to determine whether the subject was the actor or the patient.

On the other hand, there were cases where the passive participle, if not the full passive form, was over-used:

(35) *The first acid rain make the water *acidified* so many fish killed and it make
     the soil acidified.   (Sophomore #21)
(36) *All sorts of pollution make nature *demolished*.   (Sophomore #40)
(35') First, acid rain *acidifies* water and many fish are dying because of the acid rain.
     The acid rain also acidifies the soil.

The causative passive was redundantly used. The active is more appropriate, as in (35'). Such a redundant use of the causative passive appears to reflect the rules of the native language in that the causative passive is acceptable in Korean in such a context.

Like the wrong choice of patient and agent, the wrong choice of voice is also considered a global error in that it makes the overall sentence organization abnormal.

6. Wrong Choice of Lexical Items

The last category of error found in the study was learners' wrong choice of lexical items, mostly verb choice (25; 6.9%), as shown in the following examples.

(37) Especially, drinking the dangerous and poisonous water, man is *injured* fatally.
(Junior #44)
(38) So that some of polluted earth and water such as Han river, could be *healed* because of that effect.   (Sophomore #98)
(39) Expert recommend the organization of 'strike team' to be *fielded* immediately upon reports of sea pollution.   (Junior #14)

In the first example, *harmed* is more appropriate than *injured*. In the next example, the verb *healed* should be replaced by *cleaned up*. In the last example, the verb *fielded* should be replaced by *sent out* or *dispatched*. In these examples, the learners failed to understand the subtle difference between verbs with similar meanings. In particular, the last example manifests the Korean student's strong tendency to use difficult vocabulary, which he or she thought would make himself or herself appear more proficient. Indeed, learners' effort to use difficult and complex structures to show their high level of competence was reported in Jung (2002). As is the case with difficult structures, the writer of example (39) seems to have chosen the difficult word to mark his/her great lexical competence.

The majority of lexical errors appear to be due to incomplete knowledge of the finer shades of meaning distinctions which lexical items have. Learners tended to rely on a word of similar meaning to the target word. This is in a sense similar to what Brown (2000) calls 'errors due to communication strategies' in that strategies learners use to enhance getting their messages across can themselves become a source of error. For instance, if we go back to example (37), the writer who failed to make meaning distinctions between *injure* and *harm*, relied on an incorrect approximation of the word *injure* as a strategy to convey the intended meaning.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The analysis so far has shown that in forming the passive, errors were made in various ways. The most common problem was the formation of the be-auxiliary, in particular, the incorrect use of tense and failures in S-V agreement. This finding is not congruent with some of the previous studies (Cha, 2004; Kim, 1998), which showed that learners made relatively few errors in the use of tense and number agreement. The mismatch between the previous and present studies may be in part due to the fact that the previous studies investigated tense and agreement as compared with other syntactic categories, whereas the present study dealt with tense and agreement occurring only in the passive structure. On the other hand, the categories of wrong choice of patient and agent, wrong choice of voice, and wrong choice of lexical items manifested a smaller proportion of errors than the be-auxiliary category or that involving past participles. The former types of error can be viewed as global errors in that they can significantly inhibit communication, whereas errors in tense and number disagreement are local errors, which do not usually have a serious effect on communication.

In order to cope with these problems, it is important that the teacher should pay due attention to error treatment, as Cha (2004) also pointed out. An effective treatment would be to prioritize global errors and errors of the greatest frequency. However, the results of the present study have revealed that learners made global errors less frequently than local errors in forming passive sentences and that the most frequently occurring errors were not global errors. In this case, the question arises as to whether top priority should be placed on global errors or errors with the greatest frequency. It may be desirable for the teacher to pay more attention to global errors than errors with the greatest frequency since "the frequency count does not necessarily reflect the degree of difficulty that students face" (Kim, 1998). This position is in part supported by Chaudron's (1988) point that global errors should be corrected much earlier than local errors since they may give rise to communicative misunderstanding between writers/speakers and readers/listeners. In order to reduce errors concerning wrong choice of patient and agent and wrong choice of voice, students should be guided to raise their awareness of the element which is acting and that which is the recipient of the action (i.e., the patient). One way to do this is to give students opportunities to think and judge whether the subject is acting or is affected wherever relevant examples are encountered in discourse contexts. Only when learners capture the role of noun phrases as actually used in sentences or in discourse can they learn not only

correctly to form passive sentences but also to make effective choices between the active and the passive.

When the education level was taken into account, the sophomore group made a slightly higher proportion of errors than did the junior group, but the difference revealed no statistical significance. As pointed out earlier, the division of these two groups is of significance since the junior group had taken courses involving instructions on the passive at the university, whereas the sophomore group had not. This indicates that the instructions given to the junior group were neither fully sufficient nor effective for learning to form the passive. Therefore, teachers should be more aware of step-by-step instructions and practice on passive sentences. In fact, much energy has been devoted in the Korean EFL classroom to the conversion of the active into the passive and vice versa. However, this sentence-level conversion activity is not of great help in overcoming the tense problem that, for example, the learners had in this study, because tense cannot be adequately determined at the sentence level, but only at the discourse level. In this regard, the use of the essay writing task employed in this study was a more reasonable tool than would have been the use of a sentence-level test in analyzing the passive. This in turn suggests that there is a need for emphasizing the teaching of grammar in the writing class. Indeed, this position is in line with Soh's (1999) claim that "some practical methods to incorporate grammar into communicative process oriented approach to writing can be used in a composition class" (p. 86).

It has also been shown that many factors worked together to explain the possible causes of the passive errors: inter-lingual interference, overgeneralization, simplifications, avoidance, erroneous hypotheses, and so forth. Of importance is that there is more than one possible factor in accounting for even a single error. Nevertheless, the inter-lingual factor was of particular importance as an explanatory tool, since it was reflected in many errors in the passive used by the Korean students. This indicates the importance of the role of the native language in diagnosing the passive errors made by Korean students. This should not be taken to mean, however, that native language interference explains all kinds of errors, but rather to mean that different errors can be explained in different ways.

One limitation of this study was that it often appealed to intuition or hypothetical assumptions in explaining the sources of errors. In fact, this is true not only for the present study, but also for many other studies on error analysis. This limitation needs to be remedied in the future.

The approach used in this study was to analyze the grammaticality of each part of the passive sentence: whether particular parts of the passive were correctly formed. This part-specific analysis has an advantage over the traditional approach in diagnosing a variety of error types, since it can focus on those parts which cause more problems than do others within a particular syntactic structure. This approach is expected to increase the accuracy of the passive form, which will in turn enhance grammatical competence.

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Examples in English: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: University

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