

A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS ON THE USE OF PLURAL NOUNS IN THE WRITTEN TASK OF GRADE 4 THAI PUPILS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find out the common mistakes EFL pupils made when using plural nouns in their written tasks. The written tasks of the fourth-grade English class at Watdonkaiitua School in Phetchaburi, Thailand served as the source of the data. The researchers chose sixteen writings from Thai fourth-graders. Ten nouns in their singular forms were included in the written output, and the pupils were instructed to modify the nouns to their plural forms. The pupils' written task required them to create a narrative utilizing the provided nouns in their plural forms.

In this study, the researchers used the corpus linguistics method. The written outputs were analyzed by the researcher to find errors on the plural noun usage of the participants in their written tasks and determine the most and the least frequent plural noun usage mistakes. The results were recorded using a table through a simple frequency count. Then, the plural noun mistakes were ranked from the most to the least frequent plural noun usage mistake. The results from this study showed that the pupils mostly add 's' to form the plural nouns of regular or irregular nouns. The finding from this study also demonstrates that the least mistaken terms are kisses and sheeps whereas hoofs is the most frequent plural noun usage mistake.

Keyword: *Plural Nouns, Thai Learners*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

English is one of the most important languages that is taught and acquired all over the world. Because it connects the world, it is regarded as a global or international language. English is used internationally for relationships in communication, education, commerce, technology, politics, and other fields.

Individuals in this era of globalization are expected to have sufficient knowledge and good abilities, particularly in English, in order to communicate with individuals from other nations.

Thailand is one of the countries to join this globalization, they started to implement more English classes and hire foreign teachers to teach English in most of the government, private and international schools. In fact, English is an essential subject in Thai schools, which means that it is part of the curriculum for every student. The Thai government places a strong emphasis on English language education, recognizing its importance as a global language and its potential to open up opportunities for Thai students in the global job market, and its overall benefits for the Thai economy. In addition to traditional classroom instruction, many schools in Thailand also offer extracurricular English language programs, such as English camps and language exchanges. These programs provide

students with additional opportunities to practice their English skills and improve their proficiency. (Do People Speak English in Thailand? 2022)

In Thailand, English is most commonly taught for communication or only focuses on speaking specially for the students who study in the regular program. However, for the students in the English Program they are taught the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The students find writing the most difficult skill together with grammar. Nevertheless, the Thai teachers and foreign teachers try to always emphasize the importance of writing and grammar in English language learning.

Teachers clarify that grammar is the various ways that words can be combined to form sentences. It is one of the components of the English language that is vital to how language is used. Students will master the language's structure as they study grammar, enabling them to appropriately create and integrate words into coherent sentences through spoken and or written forms.

The eight (8) parts of speech—the noun, verb, adjective, pronoun, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection—were taught to the students in English grammar. The noun is one of the parts of speech that will be covered. It is considered an important word in a sentence. An example of a noun is the name of a person, thing, place, animal, or idea. There are seven (7) kinds of nouns such as: Proper noun, Common Noun, Collective noun, Abstract noun, Concrete noun, Countable and Uncountable noun. The plural form of the noun is introduced to the students as they learn about it, which forces us to discuss the number. The system of numbers contrasts the singular and plural.

In Thai language, nouns are not classified to be countable and uncountable and there is no plural form. As a result, many students still do not comprehend the guidelines for using plural nouns correctly and they find it difficult to form them in the plural form in English. As is common knowledge, adding morpheme -s to the single form of an English noun to make it multiple, as in pen-pens, is the general rule. This criterion, though, only applies to common plural nouns such as tooth, mouse, child, etc. These are irregular plurals, which means we must completely alter the single noun instead of simply adding a -s to make it plural. The rule is complicated and will make the students confused and make many errors in their learning.

The purpose of this study is to know the common plural noun errors that pupils commit in their English writing tasks. It is essential for the pupils to recognize or study the rules in forming the plural form of nouns first because it relates to the other grammar at a high level. By studying the plural form, they would know the words before nouns or quantifiers in English correctly. In the Thai classroom, structure should be taught at the beginning of the lesson as it will be the first stage to use the correct language.

Statement of the Problem

In light of the aforementioned context, the researchers are curious to examine the plural noun usage mistakes made by Thai fourth graders. Specifically, the study sought the answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the plural noun usage mistakes of Grade 4 pupils in their written tasks?
- 2) Which are the most and the least frequent plural noun usage mistakes of grade 4 pupils in their writing tasks?

Review of Related Literature

According to Pullum (2005), a noun is a grammatically distinct category of words which includes those denoting all kinds of physical objects, such as persons, animals and inanimate objects. Furthermore, nouns are regarded as the important part in a sentence. In addition, it may function as the chief or head word in many structures of modification. In English language, “nouns typically inflect for number (singular or plural) and case (plain or genitive) (Rodney Huddleston, 2005)

According to (Djauhari, 1988) nouns can be classified into three categorizations namely: kinds, types, and numbers. Numbers of nouns is the noun that is decided from the quantity of nouns. This is divided into two kinds, singular noun and plural noun.

1. Definition of Plural Form

In the English language, nouns are inflected for grammatical numbers, the singular and the plural. The singular nouns are which indicate someone is speaking of one or single thing. Plural nouns are words which indicate someone is speaking of more than one certain number of things.

There are two types of plural forms: regular and irregular. The regular plural is a plural form by adding “s” in general and has a certain formula while the irregular plural does not have an exact rule which makes students difficult to master.

According to Azar (1999) in her book titled Understanding and Using English Grammar, there are many ways of forming the plural nouns:

A. Regular nouns

1. The plural of most nouns is formed by adding final -s

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
song	songs

2. Final -es is added to noun that end in -sh, -ch, -z, and -x

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
box	boxes

3. The plural of words that end in a consonant +y is spelled -ies

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
baby	babies

4. Some nouns that ends in -o add -es to form the plural

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
echo	echoes
hero	heroes
potato	potatoes

5. Some nouns that ends in -o add -s to form the plural

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
photo	photos
piano	pianos
zoo	zoos

6. Some nouns that ends in -o add either -s or -es to form the plural (with-es being the more useful plural form)

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
zero	zeros/zeroses
volcano	volcano/volcanoes

7. Some nouns that end in -f or -fe are changed to -ves to form the plural.

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
thief	thieves
knife	knives

8. Some nouns that ends in -f simply add -s to form the plural

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
belief	beliefs
roof	roofs

B. Irregular nouns

1. Some nouns have the same singular and plural form:

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
deer	deer
fish	fish
sheep	sheep

2. Irregular plural noun. Plural forms that do not end in -s

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
man	men
woman	women
child	children
ox	oxen
foot	feet

3. Some nouns that English has borrowed from other languages have foreign plural

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
criterion	criteria

phenomenon	phenomena
thesis	theses
curriculum	curricula
syllabus	syllabi/syllabuses
appendix	appendices/appendixes
formula	formulae/formulas
fungus	fungi

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, the corpus-linguistic design was used. Corpus linguistics is a methodology that involves computer-based empirical analyses (both quantitative and qualitative) of language use by employing large, electronically available collections of naturally occurring spoken and written texts, so-called corpora. (English Linguistics, 2021)

In addition to this definition, Biber et al .(1998) mentioned that the corpus approach has four major characteristics: 1. It is empirical, analyzing the actual patterns of language use in natural texts.2. It utilizes a large and principled collection of natural text as the basis for analysis.3. It makes extensive use of computers for analysis.4. It depends on both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques.

This design was most suitable for this study because it identified and analyzed the errors in the usage of plural nouns since this strategy uses the collection of spoken and written texts.

Source of Data

In an English Program school in Thailand, pupils are taught the four major skills in English communication. In writing class, pupils are taught different types of writing such as expository, descriptive, persuasive and narrative writing. The pupils are also encouraged to be imaginative and creative in their writing tasks. In most of the written tasks, pupils are asked to write and at the same time use the target grammar focus of the lesson.

The data used in this study were from the written outputs of the grade 4 Thai students in their writing class during the 2nd semester of the academic school year 2022. The writing task was for the pupils to write the plural forms of the 10 nouns given and to write a story using the plural form of the nouns. The 16 written outputs were analyzed by the researcher to identify the most and the least frequent plural noun usage mistakes of grade 4 pupils in their writing tasks.

Data Analysis

In this study the researcher used frequency count to determine the plural noun usage errors. Frequency is the ideal tool to analyze the data in this study because frequency count is an attempt to discover the number of occurrences of particular units in particular contexts of language use, principally words in texts. Such counts have usually been undertaken to provide a statistical basis for word lists used in the teaching of subjects like shorthand and English as a foreign language (EFL). ("FREQUENCY COUNT. " Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language, 2023)

Furthermore, the researcher also used simple ranking to analyze the most and the least frequent plural noun usage mistakes of grade 4 pupils in their writing tasks. Ranking is a question response format a researcher is interested in establishing some type of priority among set of objects, whether they be policies, attributes, organizations, individuals, or some other topic or property of interest. (Oldendick, n.d.) Ranking is the appropriate tool used because the researcher was able to examine the most and the least common plural nouns mistake in this study.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the study.

It was obtained that from the regular and irregular nouns given in the writing task the pupils mostly added the morpheme 's' to form the plural forms of the nouns given in the writing task. In addition, most of the pupils are more familiar with forming the plural form of the regular nouns rather than the irregular nouns.

Table 1: This table shows the plural noun errors in pupil's writing outputs

Writing Samples	<i>hooves</i>	<i>fish</i>	<i>mice</i>	<i>sheep</i>	<i>children</i>	<i>woman</i>	<i>kisses</i>	<i>teeth</i>	<i>feet</i>	<i>people</i>
Paper 1	1				1	1				
Paper 2								1		
Paper 3										1
Paper 4	1		1			1				
Paper 5										
Paper 6	1	1								
Paper 7	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Paper 8		1	1						1	1
Paper 9	1									
Paper 10	1		1							
Paper 11	1		1		1	1	1	1	1	1
Paper 12			1							
Paper 13										
Paper 14										
Paper 15	1									
Paper 16	1	1		1						
Total	9	4	6	2	3	4	2	3	3	4

The word hooves has the most errors, as can be seen in the table above. Nine mistakes overall for hoof (hooves), six mistakes for mouse (mice), four mistakes each for woman, fish, and people, three mistakes each for kids, teeth, and feet, and lastly two mistakes each for sheep and kisses.

Table 2: This table shows the rank of the common plural noun errors

Mistakes	FC	Rank
Hoofs	9	1 st
Fishes	4	3 rd
Mouses	6	2 nd
Sheeps	2	5 th
Childs	3	4 th
womans	4	3 rd
Kisss	2	5 th
Tooths	3	4 th
Foots	3	4 th
Persons	4	3 rd

The table above clearly shows that the most common plural noun usage mistake is hoofs, whereas kisses and sheep are the least common mistakes.

CONCLUSION

The researchers concluded after evaluating the data analysis results that Thai fourth-graders are more aware of adding a "s" to construct plural forms of nouns. In the writing task, nine students formed the plural form of the noun hoof incorrectly by adding the morpheme "s" rather than eliminating the "f" and adding the "ves." The researcher believes that this error was made as a result of the students' unfamiliarity with the word "hoof." However, because the pupils use these terms more frequently, the words "kiss" and "sheep" are the least common mistakes from the study. Based on the result of the study, the researcher suggests some solutions to improve the incorrect answer that have been done by the Thai grade 4 pupils; EFL teachers have to teach plural nouns with various types of method and strategy such as through games and interactive learning. EFL teachers should also apply the appropriate method in teaching and learning process to make the students easier to understand.

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