On the Adverbial Relativiser Where and Prepositional Relatives from an Interlanguage Perspective

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Abstract

This interlanguage study, with an emphasis on two different proficiency levels of L2 learners, aims at examining Thai EFL learners’ acquisition of locative adverbial relative clauses and related prepositional relatives. It was revealed that the most frequent problem with which both proficiency groups were confronted pertained to the relative adverb where functioning as a relative pronoun, possibly attributed to overgeneralisation. As regards prepositional relatives, Thai learners in the lower proficiency group had apparently acquired preposition stranding prior to pied-piping, without any use of the latter structure in their interlanguage. Additionally, preposition omission and pronoun retention, which are ungrammatical in English, were also prominent in the learners’ interlanguage relative clauses.

Keywords: relative clause, relative adverb, prepositional relative clause, interlanguage, second language acquisition

Introduction

The English relative clause (ERC) is a complex structure which poses several problems for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). It has also been revealed that even learners of English as a second language (ESL), who live in an environment where English is far more widely used in daily life, e.g., Singapore, create non-standard ERC constructions, especially in colloquial English (Alsaqoff & Lick, 1998). Of all the relative clause types that cause problems for English learners, adverbial relative clauses (ARCs) introduced by the relative adverb where and object-of-preposition relatives (OPREPs) seem to play a significant role in contributing to errors in the interlanguage of EFL learners (e.g., Crompton, 2005). The present study is an investigation of Thai EFL learners’ ARCs beginning with where and OPREPs, focusing on the similarities and differences in the ARC production by high-proficiency and low-proficiency students. The students’ errors were classified and the explanations with regard to the causes were provided.

The next section discusses the relevant literature on the concept of Thai relative clauses (RCs) as well as ERCs, the interlanguage theory, and related previous studies.
Review of Related Literature

English Relative Clauses (ERCs)

Relative clauses (RCs) in English are clauses that modify the preceding noun phrases. Since their functions are like adjectives, i.e., modifying noun phrases, RCs are sometimes known as adjective clauses (Master, 1996). ERCs are introduced by clause markers referred to as relativisers, which are of two major types: 1) relative pronouns—*who, whom, which, whose* and *that*, and 2) relative adverbs—*where, when, and why* (Cowan, 2008; Crystal, 2004).

As regards ERCs introduced by relative pronouns, the relative words *who* and *whom* are used with human head noun phrases (NPs), as in (1) and (2). *Whom*, functioning only as an object within an RC, has a more limited use than *who*, which can be either a subject or an object (Master, 1996). Moreover, as Cowan (2008) notes, *whom* tends to be used in written language.

1. The woman *who helped me* is a nurse.
2. The man *whom I met* had a wooden leg.

(Master, 1996, p. 249)

*Which* and *that* are relative pronouns referring to inanimate or non-human NPs, as in (3). Additionally, *that* can be used for a human antecedent, as in (4).

3. The dress *which/that Sonya was wearing* was very colorful.
4. At the party there were many people *that he did not know*.

(Cowan, 2008, p. 423)

Apart from serving as RC objects as in (3) and (4), *which* and *that* can also occur in an RC subject position, as in (5).

5. The tornado *that/which struck the town* destroyed several homes.

(Cowan, 2008, p. 422)

The possessive relative pronoun *whose* always co-occurs with a following NP (Swan, 2005). Not only is *whose* typically used to modify a human head NP, as in (6), but it can also refer to an inanimate head NP, as in (7).

6. Last week I met a girl *whose brother works in your law firm*.
7. A crystal is a piece of matter *whose boundaries are naturally formed plane surfaces*.

(Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999, p. 617)

In addition to relative pronouns, ERCs are sometimes introduced by adverbial relativisers or relative adverbs, namely *where, when, and why*. As these three relativisers have an adverbial function, the RCs beginning with them are often called adverbial relative clauses (ARCs). To be specific, *where, when, and why* are used to refer to head NPs denoting a place, a time, or a purpose or reason respectively (Cowan, 2008), as can be seen in (8)–(10).
8. That’s the gas station where I’m working now.
9. How well I remember the day when he was born.
10. I’ve forgotten the reason why the trust fund was established.

(Cowan, 2008, p. 435)

Object-of-Preposition Relative Clauses (OPREPs)

There exist two different constructions of the prepositional relative clause (OPREP) in English: preposition stranding and preposition pied-piping. According to Ross (1967), the preposition-stranding structure, as in (11), consists of a relative pronoun functioning as an object of the preposition appearing at the end of the RC. In (11), the relative pronoun which acts as an object of the preposition about, both of which are essential elements to constitute OPREP.

11. I know the place which you spoke about.

(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 578)

It should be noted that such a preposition-stranding construction is usually found in informal spoken English (Biber et al., 1999). Its formal counterpart, known as the structure of pied-piping, involves fronting the preposition along with the relativiser, as in (12). The resulting RC in (12) bears a semantic resemblance with (11), except that (12) is preferred in a formal or written context (Cowan, 2008).

12. I know the place about which you spoke.

(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 580)

A restriction on the choice of relative pronouns in the pied-piping structure concerns the use of that, which is not allowed immediately after the preposition in this relative-clause construction, as in (13).

13. *I know the place about that you spoke.

(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 580)

Nevertheless, that is possible when the preposition is stranded, as in (14).²

14. I know the place that you spoke about.

(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 580)

Furthermore, the relative pronoun in the preposition-stranding construction can be omitted, as in (15), while such a deletion in pied-piping leads to an ungrammatical structure, as in (16).

15. I know the place ___ you spoke about.
16. *I know the place about ___ you spoke.

(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 580)

The next subsection shows how an ARC indicating a place is derived from OPREP.
Locative Adverbial Relative Clauses

As mentioned earlier, the pied-piping construction exhibits a high degree of formality. Aside from selecting the preposition-stranding counterpart, the degree of formality may also be lessened through an application of relative adverbs, i.e., where, when, and why.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) mention the relative adverb substitution rule the function of which is “to substitute the semantically related relative adverb for the corresponding preposition and relative pronoun combination” (p. 598). For instance, the locative prepositional phrase at which in (17) can be replaced by the adverbial relativiser where, resulting in (18), which is less formal than (17).

17. Sam knows the place at which we are meeting.
18. Sam knows the place where we are meeting.
   (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 598)

The relative pronoun that, which is optional, can replace where, as in (19) on condition that the head NP is the place or a locative expression ending with -where, i.e., everywhere, nowhere, somewhere, and anywhere (Swan, 2005, p. 483).

19. We need a place (that) we can stay for a few days.
   (Swan, 2005, p. 483)

Head Noun Phrase Deletion

It should also be noted that when the head NP and the relative adverb are repetitive, the head NP can be dropped. For example, in (18), the head NP the place and the relative adverb where are repetitive, so it is possible for the head to be deleted, which will result in (20).

20. Sam knows where we are meeting.

The relative-clause construction in (20), which is less formal than that in (18), is referred to as a free relative or a nominal RC, which can exist without a head NP (Baker, 1995).

The next section is concerned with the RC system in Thai, i.e., the native language of the EFL students participating in the current research project.

Thai Relative Clauses

A Thai relative clause is introduced by one of the three relative markers: thii, syng and an (Suktrakul, 1975). The most common relative marker is thii, which can be used in all contexts, whereas syng usually occurs in more formal situations, e.g., formal speech or academic writing. An expresses a more formal tone than the other two, frequently used in highly formal writing, such as religious texts (Sornhiran, 1978). Whereas thii and syng are commonly applicable to animate heads, an is generally used to refer to an inanimate nominal antecedent (Suktrakul, 1975).
21. đêk  thî/sîy/*an chăn liâŋ maa
   child REL I bring up come
   ‘the child that I brought up’
   (Sornhiran, 1978, p. 177)

22. phêt  thî/sîy/*an mîi khâa mahâasān
   diamond REL have value tremendous
   ‘the diamond that has tremendous value’
   (Sornhiran, 1978, p. 177)

   It seems that, according to Sornhiran (1978), *an* is not normally used in an
   informal context, as in (21), where the head being modified, i.e., *đêk* ‘child’, is also
   animate, while all the relative markers are allowed in a formal context, as in (22).

**Grammatical Functions of Thai RCs**

   According to Suktrakul (1975), Thai RCs have four grammatical functions
   listed below:

1. **Modifying a subject**

   23. /S + RC/ + V
       /đêg thî kamlâŋ râb raŋwan/ nâarâg mûag
       child who being get prize lovely very
       ‘The child, who is getting the prize, is very lovely.’
       (Suktrakul, 1975, p. 96)

2. **Modifying a direct object (DO)**

   24. S + V + /DO + RC/
       chăn kin /khanôm thîi khun hâj/ lêew
       I eat sweets which you give already
       ‘I have already eaten the sweets, which you gave me.’
       (Suktrakul, 1975, p. 100)

3. **Modifying an indirect object (IO)**

   25. S + V + DO + /IO + RC/
       khuû ća cêeg raŋwan /nâgrîan thîi rian dii/
       teacher will give prize student who study well
       ‘The teacher will give the prizes to the students who study well.’
       (Suktrakul, 1975, p. 101)

4. **Modifying an object of preposition (OPREP)**

   26. S + V + /P + OPREP + RC/
       nâŋsûy jîu bon /to? thîi jîu tron tûn hûûng/
       book be on table which be at corner-room
       ‘The book is on the table, which is in the corner of the room.’
       (Suktrakul, 1975, p. 102)
Interlanguage

Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis

To clearly understand the concept of interlanguage (IL), it is useful to look at how the term has been coined and developed over time. Before discussing the major characteristics of IL, the notions of Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA) should be taken into consideration. With respect to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), Lado (1957) proposed that language learning was similar to habit formation. Learning a new language was equated with replacing an old, existing habit with a new one. The major goal of contrastive analysts, who compared and contrasted linguistic features in the first language (L1) and the second language (L2), was to predict the area of difficulty with which L2 learners would be confronted in learning L2 or the target language (TL). It was assumed that where L1 and L2 were alike, rarely would difficulty arise; however, where there were differences between the two languages, it was likely that learners would be faced with difficulty and this could lead them to L2 errors. That is, learners’ native language was viewed as the major source of error in L2 learning. Pedagogically speaking, learners were expected to learn the L1-L2 differences in order for them to avoid error production in L2 (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

In the early 1970s criticisms of CAH gained force. First, the error predictability of CA was questioned. Scholars began to discover that some errors predicted by CA did not occur in actuality. By contrast, some types of real errors had never been predicted. In other words, such errors were hypothetical (Ellis, 1985). It was demonstrated that learners’ errors were not solely attributed to the differences between the native language and the target language but could also be due to their creativity in formulating L2 rules without being aware of certain exceptions (Chomsky, 1959). In short, L2 learners in the process of TL development might overgeneralise TL rules, producing ill-formed utterances.

The shortcomings of CA as outlined above gave rise to Error Analysis (EA). Focusing on the actual errors learners make, EA aims at a comparison between the TL form and the errors occurring in IL, in contrast to CA, where the comparison was made with the mother tongue (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

In his seminal article titled The Significance of Learners’ Errors, Corder (1967) clearly distinguishes between mistakes and errors. Mistakes are temporary and not persistent, made due to some performance factors, such as sleepiness, exhaustion, and memory lapses. When pointed out, mistakes can be corrected by learners themselves. On the other hand, errors are likely to occur again and again; they are not recognised by learners as errors. Put differently, errors are systematic. Hence, it is an error rather than a mistake that needs to be rectified for learners.

EA researchers generally follow more or less the same steps. To begin with, they collect language data containing written or oral errors and then identify these errors facing learners. After this, the errors are classified into different types before they are quantified. The next important step is to explain the possible cause(s) of the errors. If the purpose of the EA is pedagogic, errors should also be evaluated, which means the seriousness of each error type has to be assessed so that L2 curriculum
developers will be able to know which types of error should be highlighted in the teaching materials (Ellis, 1985, 2008).

Even though EA proves useful in language pedagogy, certain limitations have been noticed. Bley-Vroman (1983) remarks that EA is guilty of comparative fallacy since it seeks to compare learner language and TL. That is, it accounts for learner language solely in terms of TL norms. In reality, EA proponents ignore the fact that learners create their own unique rule systems in the process of learning an L2. Such entire systems, commonly known as IL rather than merely errors, are worth being analysed (Selinker, 1992).

In connection with the notion of interlanguage, another drawback of EA is that it “fails to provide a complete picture of learner language” (Ellis, 2008, p. 61). Instead of investigating only the produced errors in L2 learning, it is advisable that the whole linguistic system created by learners, i.e., the totality of the learner’s production, be recognised and examined.

Additionally, most of EA studies look at learner language at a single point in time. Little care, in several cases, has been taken to separate out the errors which learners produce at different stages of development. For this reason, EA has not proved very effective in enabling us to understand learners’ development of L2 knowledge over time. To put it another way, as Ellis (2008) suggests, an examination of how learners’ errors change from one stage to another will shed light on the process of L2 acquisition.

Given some of the problems of EA, language researchers have been more and more interested in how learners develop linguistic competence in L2 as their own unique system, i.e., IL.

Interlanguage Analysis

To more fully comprehend the developing linguistic system of learner language, interlanguage analysis was developed (Ellis, 2008). The term interlanguage (IL), coined by Selinker (1972), refers to the systematic knowledge of an L2 which is independent of both learners’ native language and the target language, but is linked to both L1 and L2 by interlingual identifications in the perception of learners (Tarone, 2006).

Central to the concept of IL is the notion of fossilisation, defined as the cessation of L2 learning. Most L2 learners are found not to be capable of fully reaching TL competence, i.e., ultimate attainment, even though their L2 proficiency has been considerably improved (Ellis, 2008). That is, they do not seem to reach the end of the IL continuum, stopping learning TL when their IL contains some rules different from those of the TL system (Selinker, 1972, 1992). According to McLaughlin (1987, p. 63), learners in the state of fossilisation cease to “elaborate the interlanguage in some respect, no matter how long there is exposure, new data, or new teaching.” Fossilised structures are often realised as errors when learners have reached a stage in which a target feature does not have the same form as the target language (Ellis, 1985).
In addition, IL, according to Ellis (1985, 2008), reflects two different but related concepts. First, IL refers to the series of interlocking systems which characterise acquisition. In this way, learner language is regarded as an interlanguage continuum. Second, IL refers to “the structured system which the learner constructs at any given stage in his development” (Ellis, 1985, p. 47), i.e., a linguistic system possessed by a learner at a point of time.

Selinker (1972, 1992) states five central cognitive processes responsible for shaping IL:

a. **Native language transfer**: Learners’ L1 has some influence on the IL development. Such transfer can either facilitate or impede L2 learning.

b. **Overgeneralisation of TL rules**: Learners may extend a general L2 rule to the extent not covered by that rule. In other words, they have mastered a general rule but do not yet know all exceptions to the rule.

c. **Transfer of training**: Learners apply a rule which they have learned from teachers or textbooks. This rule application is sometimes successful when the resulting IL rule is identical to the TL rule. However, for some other times, erroneous use could result from previous training provided that the textbook or the instruction contains incorrect information.

d. **Strategies of L2 learning**: Strategies are consciously applied in a bid to master TL. For example, learners may use mnemonics to help them memorise target vocabulary. While learning strategies are frequently effective, they can sometimes lead to errors if learners are confused over their own created strategies.

e. **Strategies of L2 communication**: When learners find that the linguistic item necessary for their communication in TL is unavailable, they may resort to various strategies of communication in order to get the meaning across. As a result, the linguistic forms produced in such attempts may become permanent in the learners’ IL system.

These above cognitive processes account for how learners’ IL develops. Accordingly, an investigation of these processes enables IL researchers to see a clearer overall picture of learner language. The following section discusses relevant previous studies on the use of the relative marker *where* in learners’ IL.

**Relevant Research on the Relative Adverb Where in Learner Language**

There are a number of studies examining the use of *where* by EFL and ESL learners. Newbrook (1998) demonstrates an unusual use of *where* in relative clauses in Hong Kong English. In this variety of English, *where* is commonly used to refer to an abstract head, in addition to a locative one, as in (27), where the relative adverb *where* refers to the abstract head NP *a theory*. However, considering most varieties, the use of *in which*, as in (28), is more preferable.

27. This is a theory *where* transformations are used.

28. This is a theory *in which* transformations are used.

(Newbrook, 1998, p. 51)
Newbrook notes that although this particular use of *where* can also be seen in mainstream varieties, e.g., Australian English, and North American English, *where* being employed in this fashion is prevalent in Hong Kong English.

Another study concerning ERCs in Hong Kong English is Chan (2004). Chan discovered syntactic transfer in the interlanguage of 710 Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners at different proficiency levels. Having analysed the data drawn from self-reporting in an individual interview, a translation task, and a grammaticality judgment test, Chan found that differences between L1 Chinese and L2 English were apparently a major cause of the learners’ syntactic errors, including RC errors. Since RCs in Chinese are head-final, i.e., preceding the head NP, the Hong Kong learners, especially lower-intermediate ones, were found to avoid using RCs in the translation task, probably for fear of error production. That is, in the translation task, about 90% of the participants had trouble with the sentence *Here is the place where I work*. Approximately 7% of the subjects failed to accurately translate this into English RCs; moreover, up to 83% seemed to avoid using RCs, turning to calquing structures which correspond to their familiar syntactic constructions in L1. Examples of non-RC translation are *Here was my job/doing/work* and *I (am) work place is here* (Chan, 2004, p. 64).

Likewise, Chang (2004) reveals evidence of L1 transfer in English RC learning, collecting the RC data from a composition and a multiple-choice RC test. The participants recruited were 237 first-year undergraduate Taiwanese EFL learners majoring in English. As in the study of Chan (2004), Chang’s composition data revealed infrequent use of RCs in L2 English, probably because of the L1-L2 differences in head directions of RCs. With regard to the locative adverbial relativiser *where*, the compositions displayed the existence of resumptive pronouns, as in (29).

29. *I want to join the piano club where I could learn and enjoy it.*
   (Chang, 2004, p. 12)

In (29), the resumptive pronoun *it* is unnecessary and ungrammatical as it is redundant with the relative adverb *where*. Chang claims that the use of resumptive pronouns should be influenced by the learners’ L1 RCs, which allow resumptive pronouns in all relativised positions except the subject one (Yip & Matthews, 1991).

In addition to the composition data, the learners’ errors caused by L1 influence were seen in the multiple-choice test as well. The Taiwanese learners probably did not consider the presence of preposition in L2 English RCs obligatory, which resulted in an ill-formed construction in TL. For instance, in (30), 55.9% of the participants chose *where*, perhaps since they associated this relative marker with the locative head NP *the address*, without awareness of the fact that the preposition *to* requires a wh-word relative pronoun referring to a non-human antecedent, i.e., *which*.
30. “Is this the address to _____ you want the package sent?”
   “Yes.”
   A. where (55.9%)  B. that (16.7%)
   C. which (32.8%)  D. whom (7.3%)

   (Chang, 2004, p.14)

Crompton (2005) reports on considerable overuse of *where* in different kinds of clauses, including RCs, based on the written data from the Brunei Learner Corpus (BLC) made up of approximately 150,000 words. The study showed that *where* as a relativiser occurred with the highest frequency (around 60%). Of all the RCs beginning with *where*, about 38.66% turned out to be incorrect (46 out of 119 tokens). A common type of errors concerned the relative adverb *where* being used in place of a pied-piping construction of a preposition and a relativiser to refer to a non-locative antecedent, as in (31)–(32).

31. *It is not only the Blacks, but it includes all races *where* in recent decades, the wives headed the households. [among which/whom]
32. *All members must report to the central authority, the head of Department in this case *where* the final decisions will be reached and the syllabus adopted. [by whom]

   (Crompton, 2005, p. 164)

Crompton attributes such misuse of *where* to a lack of awareness of pied-piping constructions, which is confirmed by the corpus-informed evidence indicating non-occurrence of pied-piped relativisers, e.g., *on which, from which, and to which*, in the BLC, except for *in which*, the most common appearing far less frequently than in a native-English speaker corpus, e.g., the Longman Corpus of Spoken and Written English or LSWE (Biber et al., 1999).

The study also discovered errors caused by resumptive pronouns, which are redundant with the relative adverb *where*. In (33), the resumptive pronoun *them* refers to the head NP *Japanese and Korean companies*, whereas the noun phrase *the family* in (34) redundantly co-occurs with *where* to refer to the Brunei’s family.

33. *This is proven by Japanese and Korean companies *where* team work is vital to *them.*
34. *The same change in pattern of marriage also occurs in the Brunei’s family, *where* the husband’s domination in *the family* is diminishing.*

   (Crompton, 2005, p. 165)

While Crompton (2005) does not explicitly state any reason why the Malay-speaking learners came up with resumptives, Braidi (1999) posits that resumptive pronouns occur universally in second language learners’ RCs regardless of their L1s. In a similar vein, Ramat (2000) suggests that resumptive pronouns are common in L2 RCs irrespective of learners’ native language and are often employed by learners to enable interlocutors to identify the head NP being referred to, particularly when the distance between the head NP and the gap, i.e., the position where resumptive pronouns occur, is considerable.
Thai is a good example of languages that do not allow pronoun retention, especially in written language (Gass, 1979; Sornhiran, 1978). However, Phoocharoensil (2009) discovered resumptive pronouns and resumptive NPs in Thai EFL learners’ interlanguage ERCs introduced by the relative pronouns that, who, whom, and which.

Apart from the evidence of resumptive pronouns in learner language, such shadow pronouns are also noticed in complex relative clauses in native English speakers’ RCs in some dialects, such as Southwest England (Kortmann, 2006), as in (35), where the pronoun it acts as a copy of the head this.

35. *They sold this and some at Cary and I jumped in and bought this, which I were lucky in a way to get it.  
(Kortmann, 2006, p. 614).

Since RCs introduced by the relative marker where are syntactically related to prepositional relatives or OPREPs, e.g., those beginning with in which, the next subsection primarily concerns relevant past studies on interlanguage OPREPs.

**Relevant Research on the Prepositional Relatives in Learner Language**

In terms of markedness vis-à-vis OPREP acquisition, Bardovi-Harlig (1987), having taken cross-linguistic evidence from European languages into account, postulates that the pied-piping construction is unmarked, whereas the preposition-stranding structure is marked. However, although an unmarked linguistic structure is generally acquired before a more marked one (Ellis, 1985), Bardovi-Harlig (1987) provides counter-evidence against the acquisition order of marked and unmarked features, showing that preposition stranding seems to be acquired prior to the pied-piping counterpart, which is less marked. This is probably because of the salience, i.e., the availability of language data, of preposition stranding over pied-piping, which dominates the role of markedness in second language acquisition of English OPREP.

Having examined current changes in the use of relativisation strategies in British and American English, Mair and Leech (2006), in support of Bardovi-Harlig (1987), reveal that the tendency is to move away from pied-piping and toward stranding. Such corpus-based data have confirmed the fact that preposition stranding has been and will be more salient or prevalent than its pied-piping counterpart.

Moreover, Bardovi-Harlig (1987) also report on null-prep constructions in the learners’ OPREPs. That is, obligatory prepositions in L2 English OPREPs have been omitted, leading to deviant structures in the target language. Similarly, Quintero (1992) also found that before adult Japanese EFL learners acquired either OPREP construction, they first apparently employed the strategy of null-prep. The study also provides support for Bardovi-Harlig’s claim that preposition stranding is more common than pied-piping in the learners’ interlanguage OPREPs, which probably confirms the salience of the stranding structure as L2 input.

Klein (1995) also reveals that language learners exhibit null-prep in L2 RCs because they are perhaps confused over when a preposition should be present in English. In other words, they may be exposed to contradictory evidence of L2 input
for the presence or absence of prepositions (Klein, 1993, p. 46), which possibly causes some confusion for them. As exemplified in Klein’s study, the obligatory preposition *at* in (36a) can be dropped, as in (36b).

36. a. Lucy ate at that time.
   b. Ø what time did Lucy eat?

   (Klein, 1993, p. 46)

In contrast to (36b), the omission of the preposition *at* in (37b) is not grammatical. According to Klein (1995), this error may stem from learners’ overgeneralisation from rare constructions, such as (36b).

37. a. Lucy ate at that restaurant.
   b. Ø what restaurant did Lucy eat?

   (Klein, 1993, p. 46)

In addition to the null-prep constructions, Klein indicates that preposition stranding is the overwhelmingly preferred form as opposed to pied-piping. To be precise, she asked the participants whether they could accept a sentence with null-prep in RCs. If they rejected this, they were expected to correct such a sentence into either the pied-piping or stranding construction. Surprisingly, no token of pied-piping was evidenced at all.

Kao (2001), in an attempt to replicate Klein (1995), remarks that Klein’s findings should be interpreted with special attention as all the relative clauses in the test comprised only the relative marker *that*. Since the participants were required to change a null-prep structure into a grammatical OPREP one, it was likely that they would opt to make a one-step change by adding a preposition at the end of the RC, instead of involving two steps by changing *that* to a wh-relativiser and insert a preposition right before the wh-relative pronoun to form a pied-piping construction. To avoid the drawback in Klein’s study, Kao included wh-relative markers rather than *that* in her RC test. The findings, which are in line with Klein (1995), demonstrated that the Japanese EFL learners also preferred stranding to pied-piping. They even rejected grammatical piping sentences in favor of stranding. Kao attributed the preponderance of stranding to its frequency, i.e., salience, in informal English, supporting the findings of Bardovi-Harlig (1987) and Quintero (1992). According to Kao, since pied-piping is limited to formal or written language, whereas stranding is more prevalent in informal oral language input, it is not uncommon for young learners to be more exposed to preposition stranding than pied-piping. This seems to propel learners to anti-piping in L2 English.

Kao’s study also lends support to several previous research studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 1987; Klein, 1995; Quintero, 1992) where null-prep constructions occur in the interlanguage ERCs of the learners no matter how L2-proficient they are. However, as proficiency levels increase, there appears a gradual decrease in the occurrence of null-prep as learners seem to have acquired preposition stranding or pied-piping. The evidence of null-prep has been ascribed to the learners’ communication strategy application. For some learners, it is possible that communicationally redundant prepositions are inclined to be left out. Put simply, language learners tend to omit a preposition when its meaning is insignificant or can
still be recovered within context (Rastall, 1994). For example, although learners omit the preposition on after the verb depend, as in I depend on him, the meaning of the verb phrase is still understood. The meaning of on is not so important as that of depend. Words, such as a preposition, which play a less crucial role in the message and are hardly semantically processed may be slurred or dropped (Brown, 1977). This is supported by evidence from L1 acquisition research when children produce the null-prep construction for ease of processing (Erickson, 1984).

In addition to the aforementioned communication strategy, the null-prep construction in L2 English sometimes arises from L1 influence. When learners’ native language does not require an obligatory preposition at the end of an RC, they could transfer this absence of preposition from L1 RCs to L1 English RCs. According to Odlin (2003), in several cases, L2 learners are found to omit a preposition in the target language structure due to L1 interference. For instance, OPREP does not exist in Thai (Gass, 1979; Sornhiran, 1978), so this RC type is predicted to cause Thai EFL learners’ difficulty. It is likely that they may transfer such an absence of preposition in Thai to the English OPREP, ungrammatically omitting a preposition where there should be one (Phoocharoensil, 2009).

Additionally, in a study by Sadighi, Parhizgar, and Saadat (2004), which concentrates on the constructions of pied-piping and stranding in the interlanguage grammar of Iranian EFL learners, the participants of three proficiency levels, i.e., high, mid, and low, also omitted prepositions in RCs even though they were aware of the subcategorisation requirements of the verbs being tested. That is to say, despite the fact that the learners evidently understood the importance of the preposition following each of the tested verbs, they accepted RCs in which the preposition was missing. The research also showed that the number of the two OPREP structures gradually increased as the proficiency level rose, with the low and mid learners’ preference to use preposition stranding over pied-piping, presumably due to the salience of the former construction in English (Bardovi-Harlig, 1987; Mair & Leech, 2006). Nevertheless, the data from the high learners indicated more use of pied-piping (30.7%) than stranding (24.8%). It has been claimed that such an abundance of pied-piping may have been influenced by classroom instruction that stressed the prescriptive grammarians’ view of “the supremacy of preposition pied-piping over preposition stranding” (Sadighi et al., 2004, p. 28). The findings of the null-prep as well as the preposition stranding preference give support to Kao (2001) and the other aforementioned studies.

Moreover, a recent article by Xiaoling and Mengduo (2010) reports Chinese college students’ production of resumptive pronouns in OPREPs in a composition task as well as acceptance of pronoun retention in OPREPs in a multiple-choice test. The study has found that the factors contributing to the learners’ resumptive pronoun use are not only L1 transfer but also a strategy used by L2 learners in understanding complex structures such as OPREPs.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The present study aims at supplying answers to the following research questions:
Research Question 1:

What is the use of the adverbial relativiser where and the related OPREP constructions in the interlanguage of high-proficiency and low-proficiency Thai EFL learners?

Research Question 2:

What are the problems with which Thai EFL learners are confronted in regard to their use of the adverbial relativiser where and the related OPREP constructions?

The hypotheses below were formulated in relation to the above research questions:

Hypothesis 1:

High-proficiency Thai EFL learners will produce more pied-piping than low-proficiency learners.

Hypothesis 2:

Thai EFL learners with low proficiency will exhibit more null-prep constructions in English OPREPs and ARCs than high-proficiency ones. Such constructions will decrease when their proficiency rises.

Hypothesis 3:

Thai EFL learners overgeneralise the use of the adverbial relativiser where as if it could function as a noun phrase to refer to a locative head NP. This misuse of where will diminish as the learners’ proficiency increases.

Hypothesis 4:

Thai EFL learners will produce resumptive pronouns and resumptive NPs in English OPREPs and ARCs.

Hypothesis 5:

Thai EFL learners will add prepositions to ARCs.

Research Methodology

Participants

A total of 60 adult male and female Thai undergraduate EFL learners studying at a university in Thailand participated in this study. As the study was aimed at investigating the learners’ interlanguage in a cross-sectional fashion, two groups of learners differing in English proficiency levels based on the O-NET (Ordinary National English Test) scores were required. Each of the proficiency groups comprised 30 participants. The high-proficiency group was recruited from the third-
year students, registering for an English-for-Specific-Purposes course, whose O-NET scores ranged from 70 to 93, whereas the one with low proficiency was drawn from the first-year students, taking an English foundation course, whose O-NET scores were between 30 and 53. The students whose scores were between 54 and 69 were not included because their proficiency level might not be clearly distinct from the high-proficiency group’s as well as the low-proficiency one’s. In addition, the students whose scores were lower than 30 were excluded since their proficiency was probably too low to produce ERCs. Those whose scores were higher than 93 were also excluded because their English proficiency would be too advanced to reflect the interlanguage of Thai EFL learners in general. Both groups participated in this study in the second semester of the Academic Year 2010.

Regarding the context of the study, the participants learned English in a classroom setting where the researcher also served as a teacher to facilitate data collection.

**Elicitation Method**

The research instrument used to elicit the linguistic data of English RCs was a sentence-combination task, in which the participants were asked to join two simple sentences into one complex sentence containing an RC. The task, which lasted approximately 20 minutes, consisted of 10 items. Five of them measured the learners’ ability to use the relative adverb *where* and the other five assessed the use of the relative pronoun *which* or *that* in referring to a locative head NP. These 10 items had been randomised so that the learners would not be able to realise which specific relativisation points were being tested.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Locative Relative Clauses in Thai EFL Learners’ Interlanguage**

**Table 1**

*Distribution of locative RC types in the high-proficiency learners’ interlanguage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locative RC type</th>
<th>RCs introduced by WHERE</th>
<th>Preposition stranding</th>
<th>Pied-piping</th>
<th>Substitution of THAT for WHERE</th>
<th>Null-prep</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>54 (40.60%)</td>
<td>25 (18.79%)</td>
<td>13 (9.77%)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>69.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>19 (14.29%)</td>
<td>4 (3.01%)</td>
<td>1 (0.75%)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9 (6.77%)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>54.89</td>
<td>21.80</td>
<td>10.52</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Distribution of locative RC types in the low-proficiency learners’ interlanguage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locative RC type</th>
<th>RCs introduced by WHERE</th>
<th>Preposition stranding</th>
<th>Pied-piping</th>
<th>Substitution of THAT for WHERE</th>
<th>Null-prep</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>39 (35.78%)</td>
<td>9 (8.26%)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>40 (36.70%)</td>
<td>7 (6.42%)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9 (8.26%)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>55.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>109</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>72.48</td>
<td>14.68</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>8.26%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, the frequency of grammatical locative relative clauses was higher in the high-proficiency group (69.17%) than in the low-proficiency counterpart (44.04%). In particular, it is evident that the high-proficiency learners correctly used the relativiser *where* with a higher frequency (40.60%) than the low-proficiency ones (35.78%). Likewise, the high-proficiency learners correctly produced more preposition stranding constructions (18.79%) than did the low-proficiency learners (8.26%). Moreover, while the high group correctly employed 9.77% of pied-piping, no token of such a structure was seen at all in the low group’s RCs, which accorded with Hypothesis 1. This result apparently confirmed that preposition stranding was more common than pied-piping in EFL learners’ interlanguage ERCs, which is consistent with the aforementioned previous studies (Bardovi-Harlig, 1987; Kao, 2001; Klein, 1995).

With respect to the incorrect locative RCs, the high-proficiency learners obviously produced far fewer ungrammatical RCs beginning with *where* (14.29%) than those with lower proficiency (36.70%). Furthermore, the latter group was found to have more problems with preposition stranding (6.42%) than the former did (3.01%). In addition, the low-proficiency learners used null-prep constructions more frequently (8.26%) than did the learners of high proficiency (6.77%), which bore out Hypothesis 2. This was apparently consistent with previous findings (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 1987; Kao, 2001; Sadighi et al., 2004) that null-prep use seems to decrease as learners’ L2 proficiency increases.

Considering all locative RCs in the two groups, the high proficiency learners appeared to have employed preposition stranding more frequently (21.80%), with a percentage higher than that in the low-proficiency group (14.68%). In a similar way, only high-proficiency learners were able to produce pied-piping (10.52%). On the other hand, the frequency of null-prep was higher in the low-proficiency group (8.26%) than in the high-proficiency one (6.77%). These results apparently confirmed Hypothesis 2, also supporting Sadighi et al. (2004), who have postulated that null-prep constructions are common in low-proficiency learners’ IL and will decline as the proficiency level rises. The decrease in null-prep use seemed to imply the learners’ acquisition of L2 prepositional relatives, i.e., pied-piping and stranding.

It should also be noted that the total number of RCs in each group was different and did not reach the expected number (N = 150 for each group) because some of the participants did not use sentence (b) as the RC as directed (see Appendix);
On the adverbial relativiser where and prepositional relatives

Furthermore, some did not use RCs at all in their production. These undesirable responses were thus disregarded from the data analysis.

**Locative Relative Clauses with a Relative Pronoun**

In addition to the locative ARCs discussed in the previous section, the students’ ability to produce subject-focus RCs using which or that was also measured. In such a context, the relative adverb where is not allowed.

**Table 3**

*Distribution of RCs introduced by an RC-subject relativiser in the high-proficiency learners’ interlanguage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relativiser</th>
<th>WHICH</th>
<th>THAT</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>64 (49.61%)</td>
<td>43 (33.33%)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>82.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>22 (17.06%)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>49.61</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>17.06</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4**

*Distribution of RCs introduced by an RC-subject relativiser in the low-proficiency learners’ interlanguage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relativiser</th>
<th>WHICH</th>
<th>THAT</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td>61 (50%)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>56 (45.90%)</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>4 (3.28%)</td>
<td>1 (0.82%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>53.28</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>45.90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, in (38), from the elicitation task, only the relative pronoun which or that constitutes a grammatical RC construction. The substitution of where for which or that causes ungrammaticality, as in (39), since the relative adverb where cannot serve as the RC subject (Cowan, 2008).

38. We stayed at the hotel which/that is far way from the city center.
39. * We stayed at the hotel where is far way from the city center.

Tables 3 and 4 show that the high-proficiency participants produced 129 locative RCs with a relative marker in the subject position, whereas 122 RCs were found in the low-proficiency learners’ interlanguage. Again, not all the learners used RCs in combining the given sentences, and there appeared some who did not follow the directions, using sentence (b) as an RC. For this reason, these were excluded from the data analysis. As regards grammatical RCs, both high and low proficiency learners were found to produce RCs introduced by which with very close frequencies, i.e., 49.61% and 50%. Additionally, 33.33% of RCs beginning with that were seen in the interlanguage of the high-proficiency learners, while the low-proficiency ones did not accurately produce any.
Overall, it is evident that the correct RCs in the high-proficiency group (82.95%) greatly outnumbered those in the low-proficiency one (50%). This revealed that accuracy or mastery of RC production seemed to increase in accordance with the rising proficiency level.

Considering ungrammatical RCs, both groups used where in the RC-subject position as if it were a relative pronoun, resulting in deviation in L2 English. This result obviously gives support to the first research hypothesis. It came as no surprise to notice 45.90% of incorrect use of where in such a position in the low-proficiency learners’ RCs, in comparison to 17.06% in the RCs used by those with high proficiency. Moreover, the low-proficiency participants were reported to misuse the relative pronouns which (3.28%) and that (0.82%) in this position, the details of which are provided in the next section. By contrast, the learners with a high proficiency level did not commit any errors on these two relative pronouns, probably because they have more experience of or exposure to English RCs than the other group.

Learners’ Problems in Locative Relative Clauses

The Use of WHERE as a Relative Pronoun

As shown in Table 5, the relative adverb where seemed to cause the most serious problems for both groups of Thai EFL learners. To be precise, the high-proficiency learners committed 29.33% of errors by using where as a relative pronoun occupying the subject position within an RC, confirming the second research hypothesis. Of the total number of errors by low-proficiency learners, 36.92% involved the use of where in subject-focus RCs.

Table 5
Frequency of locative RC errors in the interlanguage of the high-proficiency and low-proficiency learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Error</th>
<th>High Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Low Proficiency Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>token</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. WHERE as a relative pronoun</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. preposition addition</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. resumptive pronouns/NPs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. preposition omission (null-prep)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. substitution of THAT for WHERE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. non-adjacency of RC to head NP</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. preposition redundancy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a relative adverb, where cannot act as an RC subject. An application of where in this context, as in (40)–(44), is therefore considered ungrammatical in English.

40. * Daniel was born in this hospital where is in Bangkok.
41. *Catherine wrote her novel about the haunted castle where allows no one to enter.
42. * We stayed at the hotel where is far away from the city center.
43. * My close friend visited a China’s huge dam _where_ can withstand an earthquake of 7.0 on the Richter scale.
44. *He came from that Japanese company _where_ hires only Japanese-speaking employees.

This kind of error might stem from a learning strategy in L2 English RC acquisition, i.e., overgeneralisation (Selinker, 1972), with learners extending the use of _where_ to a subject-focus relative pronoun function. That is, it seemed that when the head NP referred to a place, the learners often introduced the RC with _where_ regardless of its function in the RC. The data demonstrated that the number of errors derived from such misuse of _where_ diminished as learners’ proficiency increased over time, which supported Hypothesis 3. In other words, having become more proficient in and familiar with well-formed RCs in the target language, learners would experience less difficulty in using the relativiser _where_.

*Resumptive Pronouns/NPs*

Resumptive pronouns/NPs were discovered in both proficiency groups in spite of the fact that such resumptive use is never allowed in standard Thai (Gass, 1979; Sornhiran, 1978). The existence of pronoun retention clearly lent support to Hypothesis 4. In the present study, a pronoun or NP redundant with the preceding relativiser was retained in an RC, probably because the learners wanted to identify the head NP having been mentioned earlier (Ramat, 2000), and this indicates universality of resumptives in learner language, irrespective of learners’ L1 (Braidi, 1999).

In the present study, the high-proficiency learners produced 14.67% of pronoun retention, ranked third, in comparison to the whole number of errors. On the other hand, the data drawn from the low-proficiency group indicated 25.38% of resumptive pronoun/NP use, which was ranked second in frequency.

45. * His house is located near a small café _where_ people can get a light meal _here_.
46. * His house is located near a small café _where_ people can get a light meal _at the café_.
47. * The city that we spent our vacation on _that city_ was beautiful.
48. * This is the drawer that I keep my picture in _this_.
49. * This is the drawer that I keep my picture in _this drawer_.
50. * The town that I was born and grew up in _the town_ was destroyed in World War II.
51. * My close friend visited a China’s huge dam which _the dam_ can withstand an earthquake of 7.0 on the Richter scale.

In (45) and (48), the words _here_ and _this_ respectively serve as pronominal reflexes referring to the preceding locative head NPs, i.e., _a small café_ in (45) and _the drawer_ in (48). In contrast, the NPs _the café_ in (46), _that city_ in (47), _this drawer_ in (49), _the town_ in (50), and _the dam_ in (51) are regarded as resumptive NPs having the same reference as the relative markers. That pronoun retention exists in EFL learners’ ERCs gives support to past studies (e.g., Chang, 2004; Crompton, 2005; Phoocharoensil, 2009).
It is worth noting that resumptive NPs probably occurred as a result of the sentence-combination task. These redundant NPs were present in the given simple sentences. When the learners merged the two sentences to constitute an RC, it was likely that they left these NPs untouched, neither deleting them nor changing them into resumptive pronouns.

The analysis also showed that there were double errors in a single RC. For instance, in (52)–(55), the resumptive pronoun *it* and the relative marker *where* are coreferential and thus redundant. In addition to an error originating from resumptive pronouns, the relative adverb *where*, as previously discussed, cannot occur in the subject position of an RC, and a violation of such a rule leads to another error.

52. * Daniel was born in this hospital *where it* is in Bangkok.
53. * Catherine wrote her novel about the haunted castle *where it* allows no one to enter.
54. * We stayed at the hotel *where it* is far away from the city center.
55. * My close friend visited a China’s huge dam *where it* can withstand an earthquake of 7.0 on the Richter scale.

Moreover, resumptive NPs, which repeat the preceding relativisers, were seen as well in double errors, as in (56) –(59) below:

56. * Daniel was born in this hospital *where the hospital* is in Bangkok.
57. * Catherine wrote her novel about the haunted castle *where the castle* allows no one to enter.
58. * We stayed at the hotel *where the hotel* is far away from the city center.
59. (59) * He came from that Japanese company *where the Japanese company* hires only Japanese-speaking employees.

One of the possible reasons, overall, for the learners’ production of resumptives in their interlanguage ERCs may lie in the fact that use of resumptives is a common relativisation strategy in human languages. In fact, cross-linguistically, retention of pronouns within RCs is unmarked since there exist more languages that allow resumptives to form RCs than those which prohibit such pronoun copies (Keenan & Comrie, 1977; Song, 2001). It is therefore not surprising to see Thai learners of English apply such an unmarked strategy to construct L2 RCs, even though pronoun retention is not permissible in either mother tongue or the target language. In other words, resumptive pronouns are universally employed in learner language (Braidi, 1999).

Furthermore, as shown in Table 7, it was worth noticing that resumptive pronouns/NPs occurred more frequently in OPREP RCs than subject RCs. Specifically, the frequency of resumptive occurrence in the high-proficiency group was close in two grammatical positions: 45.45% (5 tokens) in the subject position and 54.55 % (6 tokens) in OPREPs. The difference of pronoun retention frequency in these two RC positions was noticeable in the low-proficiency learners’ ERCs, where only 39.39% (13 tokens) of resumptives were discovered in the subject position, against 60.61% (20 tokens) in OPREPs.
Another interesting point concerning pronoun retention was the difference in frequency between resumptive pronouns and resumptive NPs (Table 7). Considering both learner groups together, resumptive NPs outnumbered resumptive pronouns (84.09% to 15.91%). However, low-proficiency learners seemed to favor resumptive NPs over resumptive pronouns more (70.45% of resumptive NPs versus only 4.55% of resumptive pronouns). The preponderance of resumptive NPs in the learners’ ERCs might result from the limitation of the elicitation task, where all the identical words in sentences (a) and (b) were NPs so that it was easier for them to identify what should be relativised (see Appendix). The learners perhaps directly took these words given in (b), leading to the use of resumptive NPs.

Preposition Addition

Participants also inserted a preposition to the end of an RC where there should be none. In (60), for example, the relative adverb where is equal in meaning to in which, so the addition of the preposition in in the final position of the RC is redundant.

60. * The town where I was born and grew up in was destroyed in World War II.

Each of the further examples in (61)–(63) provided below contains an extra preposition added to the RC.

61. * The city where we spent our vacation in was beautiful.
62. * This is the drawer where I keep my pictures in.
63. * His house is located near a small café where people can get a light meal at.

As Table 5 indicates, the learners at the high proficiency level produced 22.67% of preposition addition, ranked second among all the errors found, whereas those whose proficiency was lower committed only 3.85% of such an error. The problem of preposition addition confirmed Hypothesis 5. This type of error is presumably ascribed to the complexity of English as the target language. As Klein (1993) posited, while a preposition, such as at, is optional in (64), it is not omissible in (65). These two similar constructions in English may be contradictory evidence for the presence/absence of prepositions in the input.

64. Ø what time did Lucy eat?
65. * Ø what restaurant did Lucy eat?

(Klein, 1993, p. 46)
Another potential factor contributing to this particular problem lies in the elicitation task, i.e., the sentence-combination test, in which the preposition, such as in or at, was present at the end of a given simple sentence. It is probable that the learners merged the two simple sentences to form a complex sentence having an RC beginning with where to be compatible with the locative head. In a careless fashion, they probably retained this preposition in the created RC, or it may be the case that some of them were not aware of the ungrammaticality resulting from the co-occurrence of where and a preposition in the final position.

Preposition Omission

The participants, as described earlier, also produced an error by deleting an indispensable preposition within OPREP, causing a null-prep construction, which supported the second hypothesis of this study and corroborated Kao (2001) and Sadighi et al. (2004). According to Table 5, the learners with a high proficiency level seemed to commit 12% of null-prep errors, while those with a low proficiency used 6.92% of this ungrammatical structure. Even though the tokens of the null-prep pattern in both groups were the same (9 tokens), the percentage of this error type in the low-proficiency group was lower, probably because they were also faced with other serious problems, e.g., resumptives, and produced far more errors than the high-proficiency ones did.

66. * This is the drawer that I keep my pictures ___.
67. * This is the drawer which I keep my pictures ___.
68. * This is the drawer I keep my pictures ___.
69. * The city which we spent our vacation ___ was beautiful.
70. * The village which I grew up ___ is very small.
71. * The town which I was born and grew up ___ was destroyed in World War II.

The missing gaps in (66)–(71) require the preposition in. The lack of preposition in OPREPs is perhaps due to some influence from the learners’ native language (Odlin, 2003). Owing to a lack of prepositional relatives in Thai (Gass, 1979), Thai learners may fail to realise an essential role of a gap in generating a grammatical structure in English, ending up with an interim RC construction without an obligatory preposition.

Non-Adjacency of an RC to the Head NP

Another problem which Thai EFL learners encounter is non-adjacency of an RC to the head NP. The present study showed that an RC was sometimes placed in a position far from the modified head NP, as in (72)–(74). Specifically, in (72), the RC where we spent our vacation is not next to the head NP The city. Likewise, the RCs where I grew up in (73) and where I was born and grew up in (74) are obviously distant from their head NPs The village and The town respectively. Precisely, the high-proficiency learners produced 9.33% of this particular type of error, whereas 23.08% could be seen in the low-proficiency group’s ERCs.

72. * The city was beautiful where we spent our vacation.
73. * The village is very small where I grew up.
74. * The town was destroyed in World War II where I was born and grew up.

The use of RCs in this manner does not actually cause serious ungrammaticality since the whole sentences are still comprehensible; however, these RCs are more difficult to process than those occurring adjacent to their heads. It is probable that the participants of the study produced such misplaced RCs as a consequence of the elicitation task, which asked them to combine two simple sentences. The participants were probably not so careful enough to place the RCs in the position immediately after the heads.

**A Substitution of THAT for WHERE**

As discussed in the review of ERCs, the relative pronoun *that* can be used to replace the adverbial relativiser *where* as long as the head NP being referred to is the *place* or a locative expression ending with -*where*, i.e., *everywhere, nowhere, somewhere*, and *anywhere* (Swan, 2005, p. 498). Some of the learners in both proficiency groups, however, appeared to be unaware of this particular restriction, substituting the relative marker *that* for *where* across the board, resulting in non-standard ERC structures, as in (75)–(78).

75. * The city *that* we spent our vacation was beautiful.
76. * The village *that* I grew up is very small.
77. * The town *that* I was born and grew up was destroyed in World War II.
78. * His house is located near a small café *that* people can get a light meal.

It is clearly seen that the head NPs in (75)–(78), i.e., *The city, The village, The town*, and *His house*, are not those specified in the above rule, so the use of *that* in lieu of *where* causes an ungrammatical L2 structure. The findings showed that the high-proficiency learners committed such an error with a higher frequency (10.67%) than low-proficiency learners did (3.85%). This problem may originate from an overgeneralisation of *that*, a multi-purpose relative marker, which can refer to a human as well as non-human antecedent and can occupy either a subject or object position (Master, 1996). To avoid a meticulous, complex selection of the most appropriate relativiser for each grammatical context, Thai learners could take advantage of the multi-functions of *that*, extending its use to locative ARCs. Unfortunately, such a learning strategy is not always applicable or successful when dealing with a locative ARC.

**Preposition Redundancy**

A redundant preposition, found in the high-proficiency data, occurred only 1.33% (1 token). A sentence, as in (79), is incorrect because of the unnecessary final preposition *in*, redundant with the preposition in the pied-piping construction at the beginning of RC. This problem of double prepositions was probably caused by a learner’s confusion over pied-piping in English RCs.

79. * This is the drawer *in which* I keep my pictures *in*. 
Conclusion

The linguistic data collected in the present research study revealed that Thai EFL learners, as predicted, omitted an obligatory preposition within a locative ARC. The null-prep construction as such was present in both proficiency groups’ ARCs. Moreover, the structure of pied-piping was clearly too complicated for low-proficiency learners as none was found in their produced RCs. High-proficiency learners, acquired preposition stranding before those with low proficiency since the former used the construction of OPREP with more frequency and accuracy. Overall, the interlanguage data of Thai EFL learners suggest a developmental sequence in the acquisition of locative English OPREPs. That is, they apparently acquire the null-prep construction prior to preposition stranding and pied-piping respectively.

With regard to the erroneous locative RC use, the learners of both proficiency levels were evidently faced with the usage of *where*, employing this relative adverb as if it were functioning as a noun phrase. In addition, they tended to ungrammatically retain a pronoun or noun phrase inside an RC, which may be indicative of the universal tendency with regard to the use of resumptives. Two other problematic constructions dealt with those involving an extra preposition and null-prep structures. Finally, the non-adjacency of RC to its head was also viewed as another kind of error.

It should, however, also be noted that many of the elicited RC products are clearly artifacts of the research instrument, i.e., a sentence-combination task, and perhaps not likely sentences the participants would produce in their everyday use of English, e.g., a casual conversation or email writing. This is one of the limitations of the research study. In addition, such an untimed elicitation task is primarily aimed at learners’ controlled, explicit grammatical knowledge rather than their automatic, implicit knowledge. Future researchers may bridge this gap by investigating learners’ implicit knowledge of locative English RCs through other data collection methods. Since the present-study focus was on written RC use, further research could also place an emphasis on oral interlanguage RCs.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of the present study should benefit EFL teachers whose major pedagogical goal is to prevent students from error production in locative and OPREP RCs. Even though the current research project centered on an investigation of Thai learners’ RCs, many of the problems were considered universally prevalent, e.g., pronoun retention, and null-prep. Therefore, while preparing lesson plans on RC instruction, EFL teachers can create RC exercises concentrating on the main problems, based on the error types revealed in this study, with which EFL learners in general are often confronted. For instance, now that preposition addition as well as omission seem to be attributed to contradictory evidence for the presence/absence of prepositions in the input, teachers can emphasise to EFL students when a preposition is required in RC formation, e.g., in pied-piping and preposition stranding, and when it must not be present, e.g., in the RC beginning with *where*. Additionally, teachers may also mention other grammatical structures where prepositions can or cannot be deleted, e.g., certain types of questions as discussed earlier, in comparison with RCs.
Notes
1. It should be noted that the wh-word how is not a relative marker as it normally introduces a noun clause rather than an adjective or relative clause (Azar, 2003).
2. The present study deals only with the restrictive OPREP, where the relativiser that is permitted in preposition stranding. For the non-restrictive OPREP counterpart, that is allowed in neither preposition-stranding nor preposition pied-piping constructions (Swan, 2005).
3. For some other researchers, a variety of alternative terms have been used to refer to the same phenomenon, e.g., approximative systems (Nemser, 1971), idiosyncratic dialects and transitional competence (Corder, 1971).
4. The O-NET, as a standardised test measuring integrated English skills, is the National University Entrance Exam of Thailand, which all Thai grade-twelve students have to take after their completion of secondary education. The O-NET total scores are 100 (www.niet.com).

References


Appendix   Sentence combination task

This task is a research instrument which is used to collect linguistic data on interlanguage syntax. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Name_____________________________   Course EL _____

Directions: Combine the sentences, using b. as a relative clause.

1.  a. The city was beautiful.
    b. We spent our vacation in that city.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

2.  a. Daniel was born in this hospital.
    b. The hospital is in Bangkok.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

3.  a. Catherine wrote her novel about the haunted castle.
    b. The castle allows no one to enter.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

4.  a. The village is very small.
    b. I grew up in that village.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

5.  a. This is the drawer.
    b. I keep my pictures in this drawer.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

6.  a. We stayed at the hotel.
    b. The hotel is far away from the city center.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

7.  a. His house is located near a small café.
    b. People can get a light meal at the café.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________
8. a. My close friend visited a China’s huge dam.
   b. The dam can withstand an earthquake of 7.0 on the Richter scale.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

9. a. The town was destroyed in World War II.
    b. I was born and grew up in the town.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

10. a. He came from that Japanese company.
    b. The Japanese company hires only Japanese-speaking employees.

Combined sentence:____________________________________________________

*****End of the test*****