

I. Introduction

This paper explores the possibilities of applying the strategies developed by Mina Shaughnessy¹ and David Bartholomae² in the area of error analysis to the compositions of average freshman writers. In her landmark book, Errors and Expectations, Shaughnessy seeks out the reasons for errors made by Basic Writing students. She does this, in part, by applying the concepts of second language learning to the written word of those students whose spoken language is a dialect of non-standard English. After identifying the points at which the non-standard dialect interferes with the ability to write error-free prose, Shaughnessy categorizes error-producing strategies and assigns causes. Once the students understand the causes of their errors, they can begin a systematic attack on each error-producing strategy in an attempt to move their writing (to borrow the terminology of second language learning) from their native language (their dialect) to the target language (formal written English). The purpose of this study, then, is twofold: first, to categorize the errors made by average freshman writers whose dialect does not obviously interfere with their written English and second, to analyze those errors to see if it is possible to identify the underlying error-producing strategies and to assign cause.

As Barry M. Kroll and John C. Schafer point out in their article, "Error Analysis and the Teaching of Composition,"³ the importance of error analysis is in the cause-assigning aspect. The error analyst looks at the commission of error as a natural part of learning to write. When the error analyst identifies the strategies that students use in producing error, the investigation of error becomes process oriented, a means to identifying what goes on in students' minds while they are writing. It attempts to accomplish, by a different means, what protocol analysis, the important work begun by Linda Flower and John R. Hayes,⁴ attempts to accomplish. But because it is based on product, real essays written by students in actual writing situations, I believe that error analysis has two advantages over protocol analysis. The first is that the artificial environment necessary for data-gathering in protocol analysis (students' verbalizations of thought processes in a laboratory) is eliminated. Neither the verbalizations

nor the laboratory are a normal part of writing. The second advantage of error analysis is that it deals only with the error producing strategies and not with the entire writing process; thus, it identifies only what goes wrong in the writing process, those areas in which we, as teachers, want to intervene.

But a study of error is not without problems. In order to analyze the causes of error, we need first to identify it in students' writing. Ideally the data-base from which we draw our inferences should be a large one. In order to begin to collect that data-base and to begin to formulate "the standard terminology and shared methodology"⁵ in error analysis that Kroll and Schafer advocate, I have initiated this study. Although it is based on a quantitative method, it is far from scientific. Too many uncontrolled variables prevent the gathered data from having any real statistical significance. (These uncontrolled variables will be described more fully in the Methodology section of this paper.) It is hoped, however, that the data will begin to identify the problem areas of average students in somewhat the same way that Shaughnessy and Bartholomae identify problem areas of Basic Writing students.

II. Background

A survey of research on written composition shows that very little has been done in the area of categorizing and analyzing error. Research in composition evaluation, which, one might logically expect, should contain some categorization of what we find wrong with the themes we evaluate, has not focused on that topic at all. Instead, what we find here are studies of another sort, concentrating mainly on correlations or lack of correlations between objective tests and written essays on the one hand⁶ or on correlations among readers' opinions of the same essays on the other.⁷ The focus of research in composition evaluation seems always to have been on how to make the subjective process more objective, not by objectifying or classifying the errors on the written page, but by standardizing the subjectivity of the readers. Thus we have articles describing the lack of consensus among readers about the criteria of a good composition;⁸ articles describing suggested criteria to keep in mind when evaluating papers;⁹ and even articles that reproduce actual student themes, corrected by actual teachers of English, often with an analysis of what corrections seem most pedagogically valuable,¹⁰ this last type presumably in an attempt to have us all use the "marked-model" approach in moving toward a uniform method for evaluating themes. The presumption that subjectivity can be standardized is not unlikely. Diederich et al. show that "English teachers had a higher median intercorrelation (.44) with one another [on agreement of grades assigned to 300 papers] than did any of the other occupational groups."¹¹ The study explains the correlation this way: "[the] findings suggest that the English teachers, perhaps because of their appropriate training, have succeeded in grading the papers more reliably than the other groups." At least part of the "appropriate training" can be considered to be agreement on English standards. The study cites the average correlation figure for "selected College Board readers, who have been trained to judge papers on a particular assignment by the same standards," as .70 "on that assignment."¹³ Seventy percent of the participants have, indeed, standardized their subjectivity.

While evaluation research may prove fruitless as a means of building a method of error analysis for average students, I do not mean to imply that I believe the effort to identify the components of good writing is worthless, nor do I think it worthless to identify strategies for standardizing evaluation processes for group testing situations. What I do feel, however, is that instead of trying to measure

each theme against a mythologically ideal theme and dispensing a measured amount of red ink when the actual is found lacking, we should begin to collect data about what a group of actual themes contains or does not contain to make it acceptable or not acceptable to readers.

There are a few research studies that do just the type of frequency counts that I am purposing although few of them were done for the purpose of identifying the characteristics (both good and bad) of average writers. Most were undertaken for the purpose of proving the validity of a specific pedagogical practice. Thus Dudenhefer's "experiment" (in which he counted frequency of error per 100 words and t-unit length in two groups of student papers to see if withholding the grade until after the errors had been pointed out and corrected would effect either factor, that is, reduce the number of errors or increase the t-unit length)¹⁴ would probably have been more effective if he had been able to define which errors had been reduced and assign possible causes as to why revising for improved grades would be a likely factor in reducing these kinds of errors.

Two other studies, one done by Buxton in 1958¹⁵ to test the effects of writing frequency and another by Harris in 1962¹⁶ to test the value of formal grammar instruction, employ a tabulation of error in an effort to explore the efficacy of one pedagogical practice over others. Neither of these studies attempts to analyse the causes of error in the examined samples of writing, but both are valuable for the methods employed in categorizing and counting the errors. Although the Buxton study only reports error as one statistic, that is, total number of all errors per 1000 words, his categorization and sub-categorization of error are well thought out and might prove helpful to others attempting a tabulation of these characteristics in sample writings.

The Harris study, on the other hand, is extremely helpful in providing a model for tabulating errors of an exact nature as well as for tabulating the frequency of use of certain kinds of clauses. Given enough resources of time and personnel, his method of tabulation could be applied to a broad sample of writing from average freshman students, both in the areas he employs and in other areas determined to be in need of investigation (for example, errors of diction or frequency of use of cohesive words and phrases), to collect a broad base of data concerning the presence or absence of these characteristics. Harris applied them to two samples of 229 essays each, but because he did not adjust his data according to the total number of words per essay, the results are reported only as the number of essays containing each error.

Both of these studies are summarized in Richard Braddock et al., Research in Written Composition. In addition to the summaries of valuable composition research, the authors of this book also include very practical suggestions on new directions in the area of research utilizing frequency counts and error analysis. They strongly urge two things: a consideration of rhetorical constructions and a more imaginative approach towards what to count. About rhetorical constructions the authors say:

A fundamental difficulty with most frequency counts is that they are simply counts of grammatical and mechanical "errors," omitting attention to purpose and main idea, supporting material, organization, and style....It is obvious that soundly based counts are needed of the frequency of various grammatical, word, and mechanical usages; but even more urgently needed are similar analyses of rhetorical constructions.¹⁷

The need for imagination is emphasized by pointing out that

[t]he tendency in any frequency count is to find what one is looking for. More investigators need to initiate frequency studies with fresh questions in mind.¹⁸

The authors cite some examples of the imaginative type of research that they have in mind: a psychological and a linguistical study, both of which assess the maturity of the writer by conducting frequency counts, one of abstract words and the other of subordinating elements; and a psychological study which correlates the frequency of the use of the passive voice to submissive personality. While none of these studies seems particularly helpful in the task of identifying, categorizing, and analyzing error in freshman writing, the comments of the authors do serve to remind the researcher in error analysis that the purpose of the inquiry will often necessitate an examination of what is actually written as well as an examination of what is missing from the written page.

A study at Dartmouth in 1960 is the only example I found of the type of compilation of statistics that I am advocating in composition research. As part of a study funded by the Carnegie Corporation to examine the effectiveness of the freshman English course at Dartmouth, roughly 380,000 words of freshman writing from 495 papers of 165 students were analyzed by means of a computer count of teacher's comments on the papers. These comments were assigned by readers to the appropriate category and sub-category of error that the comment seemed to be addressing. While "a certain amount of pure speculation was inevitable in this process [the attempt was made] to try to identify the exact difficulty that the teacher had in mind and to classify it accordingly."¹⁹ The tabulation by sub-category of error is not presented in the published summary of the study although the sub-categories are listed and reproduced.

There are two major weaknesses in the study when it is viewed in the light of its usefulness to the error analysis of average students' writing. The first is that the study is actually a study of teachers' comments and not a study of students' errors, and the second is that in spite of all the raw data available to them, the researchers only drew seven major conclusions about the writing they examined. The conclusions themselves are weak. While the researchers sometimes make observations about the causes that might underlie the errors they observe, they have not, with any consistency, addressed this vital area. For example, one conclusion merely stated that there was a consistent and gradual decline in the number of errors throughout the semester. No speculation is given about the rate of decline or the difference in the rate of decline between one category of error and another or about why the course may have been successful in reducing one type of error more than another.

Two of the remaining six conclusions are not about the students' writing at all but about the way in which the teachers commented on it. Thus we have the observation that there were relatively few errors in "Focus and Structure" and "Paragraphs" because "errors...in these matters are harder to detect and identify than are mistakes in, for example, sentence rhetoric or diction" and although teachers "may sense the presence" of such errors, they do not always "take the time to identify them precisely."²⁰ The second conclusion states that "the most frequent reasons mentioned by teachers for giving low grades . . . are errors . . . in 'Focus and Structure' and in 'Material.'"²¹ What the researchers are commenting on here is the importance that the teachers in the sample attribute to those categories when assigning grades not on the relative importance of these errors to the quality of student writing.

Of the four remaining conclusions, one deals exclusively with a speculation about the superiority of Dartmouth College freshmen in the area of mechanics and attributes the cause to the admission policies of the college and the ease with which mechanical errors can be corrected in students of above average intelligence!

Only three of the seven conclusions from the Dartmouth College study seem helpful in identifying the causes underlying the average freshman's writing errors. The first one concerns the high rate of diction errors made by the students (10.09 errors per 1000 words as opposed to 1.17 per 1000 words in grammar or 4.79 in punctuation and mechanics). The researchers note that, of the 2,931 diction errors, 981 were wrong or inexact words and 726 were errors in wordiness. They attribute the cause of these errors to the hypotheses that

students in their first year of college are rapidly expanding their vocabularies; and as they try to extend their control over more and more words, they are certain to make more mistakes for a time.²²

This assumption is given support by certain research in second language acquisition which concludes that error is necessary to growth in language.²³

The second useful conclusion of the Dartmouth study addresses itself to spelling errors. While the researchers conclude that the curriculum need not address spelling instruction, their observation that most of these errors were concentrated in the papers of relatively few students and that 231 of the errors were due to carelessness may indicate that some individual help given to those who need it (Shaughnessy's spelling error chart, for example)²⁴ and some attention to teaching proofreading would go a long way to help eradicate spelling problems.

The final conclusion to be considered concerns itself with an overview of the types of error found in the papers examined in the Dartmouth study. The researchers note that "except for spelling and the purely conventional uses of punctuation, none of the categories [of error can be corrected by] a simple matter of memorizing rules or forms." They conclude that the errors the students make result "from an inefficient approach to the subject or from an ineffective presentation of it." Since both these defects involve thinking and thought processes, the researchers recommend "acquaint[ing] the student with the principles of orderly thinking and effective expression."²⁵ I agree with the researchers' opinion that clear thinking is a necessary tool for good writing; we should at this point, however begin to speculate about which principles of orderly thinking are exhibited as lacking in an examination of the errors of freshmen writers.

For all its shortcomings, however, the Dartmouth College study is, in my opinion, the most representative of the type of analysis which will allow composition teachers to intervene at the point of error by identifying the point of error in a specific sample of student writers.

Two other studies (Fisher and Higgins) quantify error, but both deal with the remedial rather than the average writer and thus have limited applicability to the problems of the average writer. The first study, John Fisher's Linguistics in Remedial English, was undertaken to quantify "types of syntax and morphology errors that the author assumed could most effectively be taught by an oral pattern practice method."²⁶ Of the twelve categories of error examined by Fisher, only two (faulty parallelism and preposition and sentence group modification) are syntactical errors. The other ten are mechanical and grammatical errors such as run-on sentences and lack of pronoun agreement. Errors in punctuation, capitalization, and other mechanics not readily adaptable to correction by oral intervention were not considered in the study. Also not considered were

Research which attempts to identify the errors of average writers as a group with the purpose of identifying the causes of those errors has not received a great deal of attention. It is, I think, a valid field of study as long as we continue to teach our students to write in a classroom setting. Conference teaching dictates identification of an individual student's errors addressed individually, but private tutoring is a costly and time-consuming method of instruction. Since its usefulness is limited when dealing with groups of students during a fourteen-week semester, it is time we found out what errors can best be addressed and in what manner during the forty-two hours we meet with our students as a group.

III. Methodology

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the kinds of errors made by an average freshman writer in a non-remedial or non-basic composition class. The secondary purpose is to speculate on the possible causes for the occurrence of those errors. In order to begin categorizing error, each of 436 freshman themes was examined for its primary error, that is, the error which most affected its readability. After the initial reading, the paper was placed in one of four categories according to the primary error found there. The four categories were: 1) lack of content or ideas, 2) lack of organization or cohesion, 3) lack of good sentence structure or diction, and 4) lack of good mechanics. These categories were taxonomically considered; for example, if a paper contained poor organization and no cohesive elements, as well as a definite lack of anything to say, its primary error was considered to be the latter one, and it was categorized as primarily lacking in content and ideas. After the initial examination, each paper was considered again to identify within the broader category the types of sub-errors which caused it to be placed there.

The 436 themes were written by 109 freshmen (4 themes each) at the University of Delaware during a one semester course (E-110 Critical Reading and Writing) designed to teach expository writing skills. These 109 students were in six sections taught by four different teachers (three sections were taught by the same teacher during two different semesters). Each section contained approximately 22 students, but a student's themes were not considered in this study if all four of his themes for the assignments chosen for consideration were not available.

While I acknowledge the need to control a myriad of variables, in order to obtain a broad sample of themes for analysis some of the controls suggested by Braddock in his book, Research in Written Composition³⁰ had to be sacrificed. The uncontrolled variables fall into three main categories: variations in teachers and teaching styles, variations in assignments, and variations in class scheduling. While all of the teachers included in the study were using the same basic syllabus and text books, there was no control over the introduction of additional materials from other text books into the classroom. In addition, because no schedule of lessons was strictly followed, there was no possibility of correlation between improvement in a particular category of error and what had recently been taught to the class.

The assignments chosen for consideration were the diagnostic and the final, administered at the beginning and the end of the course, and a comparison/contrast essay (administered about six weeks into the semester), and a definition essay (given a week and a half later). In spite of this attempt at uniformity

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The assignments chosen for consideration were the diagnostic and the final, administered at the beginning and the end of the course, and a comparison/contrast essay (administered about six weeks into the semester), and a definition essay (given a week and a half later). In spite of this attempt at uniformity in assignment choice, the uncontrolled variables here were many. While most of the assignments were in-class essays, two of the sections were assigned the

comparison/contrast essay as an out-of-class essay. All of the diagnostic and final essays were in-class and spontaneous, but the other essays varied from section to section in the amount of time between the announcement of the topic and the actual writing. In some of the assignments the announced topic was mandatory; in others the students were given a choice between two, or in some cases, among three topics. And finally, while the form was prescribed in the definition and the comparison/contrast essays in all sections, the topic was not the same in any of these sections. Only one section of the six had the form prescribed for the diagnostic exam (compare your home life to dorm life), and only one of the six finals prescribed form (argue for the grade you feel you should receive in this course). All of these variables in lead time, topic assignment, and form prescription could, and probably did, alter the effectiveness of the students' writing. None of these variables, however, were compensated for in any way in this study.

One other uncontrolled variable in this study was the scheduling of the classes. Two of the six sections considered in the study were on a Tuesday/Thursday schedule. The themes written in these two sections were written in an hour and a half instead of in the one hour time limit given to the students in the other four sections. This, too, would alter the effectiveness of the students' writing and prevent any generalizations about what kind of errors are made under what conditions.

The categories of the writing samples into four broad groups resulted in the following tabulation:

	1	2	3	4
	Content/ Ideas	Organiza- tion/Cohes- ion	Syntax/ Diction	Mechanics
Theme				
I diagnostic	35	43	16	15
II comparison/ contrast	46	43	16	4
III definition	42	48	16	3
IV final	49	39	16	5
TOTAL	172	173	64	27

IV. Conclusions

Before examining the essays within each category to analyze the specific problems found there, some observations about the implications of this broad categorization are necessary. The assignment of a relatively few essays to category 3, 14.7%, and to category 4, 6.2%, indicates that neither syntactic and diction problems nor mechanical problems undermine to any great extent the written expression of average freshmen writers. Far more serious are the problems that average writers have in their inability to find something worth saying in a given topic (39.7% of the essays) and their inability to organize

their ideas when there is evidence of insightful thought (39.4% of the essays). In the samples examined, these two problems dominated and were about as equally culpable in their effect on written expression.

None of the writing problems categorized showed a marked improvement from the first theme to the fourth except perhaps category 4, Mechanics (15 essays in the diagnostic to 5 in the final). The improvement in this category may indicate that a periodic review of grammar and punctuation basics (which was part of the syllabus used) will improve the writing of some average writers. The relative stability of the other categories may indicate that our current pedagogical practices are not addressing the problems of these writers effectively.

An examination of the 172 essays judged to be primarily flawed for lack of content or ideas reveals some of the problems that cause this error. The problems fall into five basic categories: failure to address the issue raised (50), failure to use a conclusion to tie together seemingly random ideas (36), failure to be specific (34), failure to take a stand or make a judgment (33), and failure to say more than the obvious (19). Some examples may be helpful to illustrate these problems. Three of the six sections had for the assigned diagnostic essay the task of choosing three items symbolic of life in America with the instructions to write about why the items are symbolic. Of the 53 essays written in response to this assignment, 17 were judged as belonging in Category 1. Of the 17, 9 writers did not choose items that were obviously symbolic and did not include in their essays any indication of why the items could be symbolic. These 9 failed to address the issue of the assignment perhaps because they did not understand the meaning of the word symbolic, perhaps because they did not understand the assignment itself, or perhaps because they were not able to assess life in the United States and then find symbols for the way they viewed that life. In the same group of 17, 6 writers made the error of failing to tie their thoughts together by means of an effective conclusion. In these cases, the writers were able to choose items that were most apparently symbolic and even able to indicate in some cases and in a limited way the reasons the symbolism was significant. The failure here was centered around the writer's inability to tie together in a conclusion the reasons his choices are indicative of life in America or how his symbols are related to one another. The cause of this difficulty seemed to stem from the writer's assumption that the reader would know from what he had already written the connections that were probably apparent to him.

Failure to be specific was not a problem with the above assignment (although one writer was not able to choose three specific items), but it did cause a great deal of difficulty in many other assignments in the sample. In the comparison/contrast assignments many writers were unable to say specifically what was different or alike between the two or among the three things they were to compare. (The inability to verbalize the significance of those similarities and differences was considered to be either a failure to address the issue or a failure to tie together ideas with a conclusion.) Of the 42 comparison/contrast essays judged deficient in ideas and content, 38 were written for assignments calling for comparisons of printed texts. Ten of these essays did not cite the texts at all, perhaps indicating that the writers do not know how to anchor generalizations in specific examples or do not see the value of doing so as a writing technique. Six others who did quote the text of the assignment did not generalize from, or draw parallels between, the examples cited. Presumably these writers either thought that the generalizations were more apparent than they were and therefore were not

in need of being stated, or they do not see that generalizations are a necessary part of drawing conclusions.

The fourth area of difficulty was failure to make a judgment. Two assignments in particular seemed to lend themselves to fence sitting on the part of the writers. Both asked for opinions, one of humorous greeting cards and the other of the depiction of death in the news media. Of the 28 essays belonging to these assignments and judged lacking in content, 17 failed to take a stand on the issue. While it is possible that some of these writers had no opinion on the subject in question (no writer stated that he had no opinion, however), it is also possible that the writers were afraid of giving the wrong answer as if this were a test question in a sociology course. Because the writer did not know his reader's (teacher's) opinion, he avoided expressing his opinion. The other 11 writers in this group either stated, at different points in their essays, agreement with both sides of the issue or took a stand on one side of the issue and offered proofs to support a diametrically opposed viewpoint. One possible explanation is that these writers were attempting to be balanced in giving both sides of the issue but did not have the necessary vocabulary or syntactic strategies for insuring that the favored viewpoint received dominant emphasis.

Failure to say more than the obvious was not really a problem in one particular assignment (14 were randomly scattered throughout the assignments) except that of the 19 essays in this sub-group, 5 were written on the differences between life at home and dorm living. It is possible that what is obvious to the more experienced reader was not so obvious to the inexperienced writers; it is possible that some of the writers of these 19 essays were having a bad day (everybody draws a blank once in a while); or it is possible that these writers are just not inclined to look below the surface of anything they encounter.

Category 2, lack of organization and cohesion, is as damaging to the readability of the themes of average writers as is lack of content. The problems of the 173 essays in this category fell into four main groups: failure to use correctly cohesive techniques and transitional words (64), failure to use paragraphs correctly (53), failure to give direction to the essay with a strong introduction (35), and failure to maintain a balance among the parts of the essay (21).

Of the 64 essays that exhibited weaknesses in the area of cohesive elements, 31, or almost half, had no cohesive elements at all. Sentences were strung together without seeming connection to one another, and paragraphs, which were otherwise unified by thought, were not connected to each other by use of such common phrases as "on the other hand" or "a second point to consider" or "finally." Twenty-one of the 64 did use some of these techniques both within the paragraphs and between them but did not use them extensively enough especially in areas where paragraphs were not obviously unified without them. Twelve of the 64 misused transitional words including: the repetitious use of the same word, such as in "then I would choose...then I would put in...then I would add...etc." (from an essay on the choice of three items), the use of pronouns with vague antecedents, the use of such words as "next" when there wasn't any obvious first, and the use of "thus" and "therefore" where the conclusions were not properly set up in the beginning of the sentence. Aside from the obvious cause of problems in this area, that is, that the average freshman does not know how to use cohesion or is not familiar enough with its use to handle it effectively, two other causes could be that the writer does not understand the need to guide the reader from one idea to another when the connection seems obvious enough to him and that the writer does not formulate his entire argument before he begins to write and so cannot use the cohesive techniques that would lead the reader from step to step within that argument.

Of the 173 essays judged to be in category 2, 53 writers failed to use paragraphing to give organization to their essays. Whether the writer chose to write with no paragraphing at all, with arbitrary breaks into what resembled paragraphs every third of a page or so, or with one sentence (three line) paragraphs, the fact was still the same. These 53 writers did not organize their topic before going on to a second and then to a third. As a result, their essays were a jumble of disjointed, half-formed, half-developed points which, if they had been gathered together in two or three places (pedagogically called paragraphs), would have added up to some significant statements about their topics. The cause for this, like one of the causes for lack of cohesive techniques, is probably that the writer has not collected his thoughts before engaging pen to paper. One other likely cause is that the writer, having only half assimilated lessons about the unity, development, and nature of the paragraph, does not really understand that one idea equals one paragraph.

Just as lack of a conclusion was seen as a cause for essays being weak in content and ideas, so here we see that the lack of a strong introduction can contribute to the lack of organization in an essay. Of the 35 essays judged deficient on this point, 27 had no introduction at all, and the other 8 had introductions which were mere restatements of the topics assigned. By jumping into the first point of the argument (and sometimes jumping to the second point before the first is fully developed), the writer has given the reader no directions as to the path his essay will take. It is again, I think, a case of the average freshman writer not understanding the needs of the reader and again a case of the writer not having thought out the direction of his path before he begins to write.

A final 21 of the 173 essays in category 2 were weak because of a failure to maintain a balance among the parts of the essay. This was especially damaging in the comparison/contrast essays when the writer failed to deal effectively with both or all three of the texts to be considered. The need to plan the whole essay before beginning to write and to limit what is written on one aspect by the amount of time left to write about the corresponding aspect seem to be the problems to be conquered here.

As I noted in the beginning of the conclusions section of this essay, syntactic and diction problems and mechanical problems did not greatly effect the readability of the essays of the average freshman writer of this study. I will limit my remarks on these two categories to saying that the really bad syntactical and diction errors in this study were concentrated in the papers of relatively few students who seemed to associate convoluted sentences and big words (used inaccurately) with their own conception of what English teachers want in an essay written for a freshman English class. These students can probably most profit from individual conferences in which the English teacher assures them that their conceptions are false.

I would like to make two general conclusions about the findings of this study. The first is that many of the problems associated with category 1, lack of content and ideas, seem to stem from a lack of understanding of the assignment. I feel therefore that time spent in the classroom teaching the students to analyze what is being asked of them and what is expected in reply would not be time wasted. My second conclusion has to do with category 2, lack of organization and cohesion. Many of the problems in this area seem to stem from two causes: first, the writers fail to take into account the needs of the reader and second, they fail to plan ahead their whole essay before they begin to write. Both of these weaknesses need to be addressed and stressed in our classroom practices.

Many of the hypotheses formulated in this paper about the causes of error made by average freshmen could be tested by further examination of writing samples. For example, an assessment of the extent of a student's understanding of a particular assignment could be made by means of an objective test, and the score correlated to the quality of the writing in an essay written in response to that same assignment. Or, students' writing could be examined through draft after draft to see if, as the purpose or plan of the essay becomes clearer, the number of cohesive devices and transitional words increase. This second suggestion, revision analysis, is already receiving some attention by researchers in the field of composition theory.³¹ I have no doubt that revision analysis, the most recent and promising trend in error analysis, will receive even more attention as the availability of personal computers combine with the development of such software programs as Compare II to allow students to compare successive drafts of their own writing. If personal computers are ever utilized on a wide spread basis, revision-comparing programs, as well as programs like RSVP which allow teachers to respond to students' writing through the computer,³² could become invaluable tools in the compilation of data about what kinds of error our average freshman writers make.

What I've done in this paper is to begin to speculate on the causes for the errors found in the papers of average freshman writers. It is only speculation. And it is only a beginning. More research, of the imaginative kind advocated by Braddock, is what is needed now.

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NOTES

¹Mina Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

²David Bartholmae, "The Study of Error," CCC, 31 (Oct., 1980), 253-69.

³Barry M. Kroll and John C. Schafer, "Error-Analysis and the Teaching of Composition," CCC, 29 (Oct., 1978), 242-48.

⁴Linda Flower and John R. Hayes have done several studies of the writing process through protocol analysis. Their first findings are reported in two essays in Lee Gregg and Edwin Steinberg, eds., Cognitive Processes in Writing: An Interdisciplinary Approach (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980), pp.3-30 and 31-50.

⁵Kroll and Schafer, p. 248.

⁶Fred I. Godshalk, Frances Swineford and William E. Coffman, The Measurement of Writing Ability (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1966).

⁷Paul B. Diederich, John W. French and SydeLL T. Carlton, Factors in the Judgments of Writing Ability (Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1961).

⁸Two articles describing lack of consensus are: Gary Sloan, "The Wacky World of Theme Marking," CCC, 28 (Dec., 1977), 370-73 and Paul F. Schumann, "What Criteria Do You Use in Grading Compositions?" English Journal, 57 (Nov., 1968), 1163-65.

⁹Paul B. Diederich, "How to Measure Growth in Writing Ability," English Journal, 55 (April, 1966), 435-49 and T.A. Koclanes, "Can We Evaluate Compositions?" English Journal, 50 (April, 1961), 252-57 are two examples.

¹⁰Several examples of "marked-model" articles are reprinted in A Guide for Evaluating Student Compositions, ed. Sister M. Judine (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1965). Among them are: "Joint Statement on Freshman English in College and High School Preparation," Departments of English, Indiana College, pp. 23-28; "Evaluating a Theme," Michigan Newsletter, pp. 75-86; "Two Types of Grading," Kentucky English Bulletin, pp. 138-46; and "California Essay Scale," California Association of Teachers of English, pp. 147-58.

¹¹Diederich et al., p. 13.

¹²Diederich et al., pp. 13-14.

¹³Diederich et al., app. J.

¹⁴John Paul Dudenhefer, "An Experiment in Grading Papers," CCC, 27 (Dec., 1976), 406-7.

¹⁵Earl W. Buxton, "An Experiment to Test the Effects of Writing Frequency and Guided Practice upon Students' Skill in Written Expression" (Unpublished Diss. Stanford University, 1958) is fully summarized with comments in Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones and Lowell Schoer, Research in Written Composition (Champaign, Ill.: NCTE, 1963), pp. 58-70.

¹⁶Roland J. Harris, "An Experimental Inquiry into the Functions and Value of Formal Grammar in the Teaching of English" (Unpublished Diss. University of London, 1962) is fully summarized in Braddock, pp. 70-82.

¹⁷Braddock, p. 18.

¹⁸Braddock, p. 18.

¹⁹Albert R. Kitzhaber, Theme, Theories and Therapy (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), p. 42.

²⁰Kitzhaber, p. 48.

²¹Kitzhaber, p. 50.

²²Kitzhaber, p. 47.

²³Heidi C. Dulay and Marina K. Burt, "You Can't Learn Without Goofing," and S.P. Corder, "The Significance of Learners' Error," in Error Analysis, ed. Jack C. Richards (London: Longman, 1974), pp. 95-123 and 19-27.

²⁴Shaughnessy, pp. 175-77.

²⁵Kitzhaber, p. 49.

²⁶John C. Fisher, Linguistics in Remedial English (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), p. 47.

²⁷Fisher, p. 26.

²⁸John A. Higgins, "Remedial Students' Needs Versus Emphasis in Text-Work-books," CCC, 24 (May, 1973), p. 188.

²⁹Higgins, p. 190.

³⁰Braddock, pp. 25-26.

³¹Three articles which deal with revision analyses are: Stephen P. Witte, "Topical Structure and Revision: An Exploratory Study," CCC, 34 (Oct., 1983), 313-34; Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte, "Analyzing Revision," CCC, 32 (Dec., 1981), 400-14; and Mimi Schwartz, "Revision Profiles: Patterns and Implications," CE, 45 (Oct., 1983), 549-58.

³²For a description of the capabilities of the RSVP program see Lorne Katler and Kamala Anandam, "A Partnership of Teacher and Computer in Teaching Writing," CCC, 34 (Oct., 1983), 361-67.