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An Analysis of Error in written English paragraphs of non-English major students at Thu Dau Mot University: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to investigate the errors in writing of non- English major students at Thu Dau Mot University. This study focused on paragraphs because the researcher has found that diverse errors in students' paragraphs and wants to improve their writing skill. Seventy-four English paragraphs were written by 74 non-English major students coming from different academic majors at Thu Dau Mot University. All of the errors in the paragraphs were identified, synthesized and classified into various categorizations. The findings of the study show that the most frequently committed errors were tense, spellings, singular/plural form, prepositions, word order, fragment. On the basis of these results, many recommendations and pedagogical implications were suggested to help EFL lecturers with some teaching strategies that will reduce problems regarding writing English paragraphs among English learners.

Keywords: *error analysis, paragraph, non-English major students*

1. Introduction

English is one of the most dominant languages in the world. It is widely used in fields such as education, science, business, aviation, commerce, politics...Like speaking, listening and reading, writing skill in English has been considered a difficult skill (Hengwichikul, 2006). In the writing skill, students have to make sentences in a

particular order and join them together in specific ways. However, students have difficulty in trying to produce sentences or to write English paragraphs (Fadi Maher, 2014). Writing reflects on the nature of the language (Rocco & Hatcher, 2011). It requires more technique and allows writers to discover and illustrate their understanding and accomplishment clearly. According to Tesfaye and Tsadik (2015), writing is not only a critical language skill for EFL learner's academic achievement but also a means of developing fluency and accuracy in the areas of other language components like grammar and vocabulary. The written language has nowadays an important social and educational function and its status has a high social prestige (Blanka Klimova, 2013 as cited in Urbanova and Oakland, 2002). Obviously, it is a challenging job for non-English students to write a paragraph in English. Writing a paragraph in a second language without errors is not easy task for many writers. According to Hamed (2018), writing is not a natural skill. It is an instructional one. This means that it demands training, instruction, practice and experience. Foreign languages have been a compulsory subject for students at Thu Dau Mot University for many years. At Thu Dau Mot University, students have to choose one in three languages English, French, or Chinese and study six levels to be qualified for graduating from a specialized course. Most students choose English not for the reason they study well but they have approached it since their high school years. Therefore, the English proficiency among the students is relatively low in spite of learning English for many years especially they are still weak in their writing skills. To help them overcome difficulties and improve their written English during English language courses, the researcher finds out and identifies the types of errors made by non-English students at Thu Dau Mot University and provides teachers and students with the suitable teaching and learning methods.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Paragraph writing

A paragraph is a chain of sentences organized and coherent, and all related to a single topic. Every piece of writing in a well- structured form is known as paragraph. The basic paragraph consists of three parts: Introduction with a topic sentence; Body with supporting details, using facts, arguments, analysis, examples and other information; Conclusion: summarizes the connections between the information discussed in the body of the paragraph and the paragraph's controlling idea.

2.2. Error analysis

Error Analysis has been received a lot of interest by researchers in the field of second language acquisition (Kanyakorn et al., 2017). Here are some definitions of Error Analysis given by some of the scholars.

Error Analysis (EA) is the analysis of learners' errors by comparing what the learners have learned with what they lack. It also deals with giving the explanation of the errors in order to accurately reduce them (James, 1998). According to Corder (1967), EA has two objects: one theoretical and another applied. The theoretical object is to understand what and how a learner learns when he studies an L2. The applied object is to enable the learner to learn more efficiently by using the knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes. Ellis (1996) showed that Error analysis is a working procedure, commonly used by the researcher and the language teacher. This includes data collection, error identification, and explanation of error in the sample, classification of errors based on the causes, and evaluation and assessment about the level of error seriousness.

2.3. Classification of errors

According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), there were six different categories: omission of grammatical morphemes, double marking of semantic features, irregular rules, word forms, disordering, and alternating use of two or more forms.

2.4. Previous study

Many studies were studied error analysis in different educational context in providing insight for teachers, researchers and students as mentioned earlier. For instances, Saadiyah Darus (2009) studied Error Analysis of the Written English Essays of Secondary School Students in Malaysia. The purpose of the study was to determine, identify, classify, describe and analyze the language errors found in the essays of students studying at a secondary school in Malaysia.

In this line of research, Murad Hassan Mohammed Sawalmeh (2013) investigated the errors in a corpus of 32 essays written by 32 Arabic-speaking Saudi learners of English. The aim of paper is to identify and analyze some common errors committed in writing English compositions by the students and through the writer suggested some useful strategies for learners and teachers.

Furthermore, Fadi Maher Saleh Al-Khasawne (2014) researched error analysis in written English paragraph by Jordanian undergraduate students. This study examined 26 English paragraphs written by 26 participants. The findings of the study reveal that the students of Ajloun National University have committed several errors such as: spelling, word order, and subject-verb agreement.

So far, there have not been any works on writing paragraphs of non- English major students at Thu Dau Mot University. The aim of this paper is to find and classify the grammatical errors that the students commit in their writing paragraphs at TDMU. Through, the researcher offers useful suggestions to help students improve their written English.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research question

What types of errors are frequently found in English paragraphs written by non-English students at TDMU?

3.2. Participants

There were two classes with 74 second year non-English major students coming from different academic majors at Thu Dau Mot University. They are taking a level 3 English course at Foreign Language Centre of Thu Dau Mot University.

3.3. Methodology

All of the 74 paragraph writings with the same subject were written within 30 minutes and minimum of 100-120 words. The three steps of error analysis specified by Ellis (1996) for conducting error analysis taking into Corder (1974): collection of sample errors, identification of errors and description of errors, explanation error and error evaluation. The researcher tabulated, analyzed, and described them after assessing and identifying the errors.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher presents and discusses the findings of the study in light of its objectives. First, the errors made by the students are classified; second, the common errors

are identified with illustrative examples; and finally, these errors made by the learners are

corrected by examples. Table 1 shows the types, numbers and percentages of errors committed by the participants in their written work.

TABLE 1. Analysis of errors produced by non- English major students

| Type of Error | Frequency of errors | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Verb Tense | 103 | 39,7% |
| Word Order | 9 | 3,5% |
| Subject/verb Agreement | 6 | 2,3% |
| Verb form | 17 | 6,5% |
| Spelling | 8 | 3,2% |
| Word form | 9 | 3,5% |
| Word choice | 42 | 16,2% |
| Preposition | 43 | 16,6% |
| Article | 12 | 4,7% |
| Fragment sentence | 10 | 3,8 |
| Total | 259 | 100% |

It can be seen the table, types of error are distributed as follows: verb problems were the highest with 103 times (39,7%), preposition 43 times (16,6%), word choice 42 times (16,2%), verb form 17 times (6,5%), articles 12 times (4,7%), Fragment sentence 10 times (3,8%), Word Order and Word form 9 times (3,5%), spelling 8 times (3,2%), and Subject/verb Agreement 6 times (2,3%).

From the research data, it was found that paragraph writings of non- English major students at Thu Dau Mot University made a variety of errors. They tend to translate Vietnamese into English instead of writing in English. Those who learn English as a second language always find this language difficult to understand and write as well. The problem starts when students begin making errors and remain unable to develop errors free use of language in their writing skills. These problems and difficulties go on increasing because most students are unlikely to find out their errors in their writing skills.

To help them overcome the above errors, in this paper, the researcher will show measures by analyzing and correcting the errors in the articles through the following categorized examples in detail as mentioned in the theory.

Here are some typical errors committed by the students in the paragraph writing

4.1. Verb tense

- **Incorrect:** I born in Binh Phuoc.

"To be born" is a passive form and is most commonly used in the past tense. Therefore, this sentence must be rewritten like this:

- Correct: I was born in Binh Phuoc.

- Incorrect: He's also got a good sense of humor and seems to get on well with every body. Hopefully, **I've inherited** some of these traits.

We commonly use "hopefully" in front position to say what we wish for or would like to happen, so the tense after "hopefully" is the simple future. The above sentence should be corrected like this:

- Correct: ... Hopefully, I will inherit some of these traits.

4.2. Word Order

- Incorrect: ...,so **the food there are always fresh and tasty** in my home town.

This sentence should be written following structure:

THERE BE + (A/AN) + N + ADVEBR OF PLACE

The structure tells us about the existence of things.

- Correct: ..., so there is always fresh and tasty food in my hometown.

4.3. Fragment sentence

- Incorrect: Tet is the most important festival of Vietnam. **In Vietnamese culture.** In my opinion, the main reason why it appeared is that Tet is a special occasion for family reunion as well as to celebrate the coming of spring.

Obviously, the phrase “In Vietnamese culture” is not a sentence. Therefore, it should be rewritten like this.

- Correct: Tet is one of the most important festivals in Vietnam because it marks the beginning of a new year and is also an ideal time for family members to reunite.

- Incorrect: I would like to visit An Giang province. **Because An Giang province has a rich history and unique culture.**

“Because” clause is a subordinate clause, so it cannot stand alone. It should be corrected like this:

- Correct: I would like to visit An Giang province, because An Giang province has a rich history and unique culture.

Incorrect: **Long, a friend of mine in high school.** He is a good student and kind.

In this sentence, the appositive phrase is “a friend of mine in high school,” which provides additional information on the subject “Long” This is a nonrestrictive appositive phrase that clarifies the initial noun. It is not necessary to clarify Long is a friend of mine in high school, but it can be helpful information.

Correct: Long, a friend of mine in high school, is a good and kind student.

4.4. Word form

Incorrect: Nowadays, there are a lot of **dangerous** animals and plants because of climate change.

Correct: Nowadays, there are a lot of endangered animals and plants because of climate change.

“Dangerous” is an adjective describing a situation where danger or risk is involved (a situation that is likely to cause harm or injury)

“Endangered” is also an adjective that is used to describe something that is in danger, like endangered animals (animals that are in danger of going extinct)

4.5. Spelling

Most of the spelling errors made by the students were occurred by using incorrect letters, omitting letters, or adding letters as shown in the sample sentences.

Incorrect: **Helo**, evey body. To day I introduce the traditional Vietnamese dish of “Xôi” which...

Correct: Hello, evey body. Today I introduce the traditional Vietnamese dish of “Xôi” which...

Incorrect: Moreover, **It** makes me get full of energy. Lastly, well, **It** is what I enjoy most when playing sports.

Correct: Moreover, it makes me get full of energy. Lastly, well, it is what I enjoy most when playing sports.

4.6. Verb form

- Incorrect: We **will knows** a lot of people having the same interests in playing sports.

- Correct: We will know a lot of people having the same interests in playing sports.

- Incorrect: People have a computer **linking** internet.

- Correct: People have a computer linked internet.

- Incorrect: I like **to play** badminton because it is really a healthy activity

- *Like + V-ing is more common to say you like doing something in general or talk about your hobby.*

- *We sometime use Like + infinitive to talk about habits or choices.*

- *In this sentence, it refers hobby, so it should be corrected like this:*

- Correct: I like playing badminton because it is really a healthy activity

- Incorrect: Vietnam is a country **have** many delicious traditions foods.

- Correct: Vietnam is a country which has many delicious traditions foods.

- Or: Vietnam is a country having many delicious traditions foods.

4.7. Word choice

Incorrect: For example, we **put** clothes on the Shoppe app or **put** food on the Now food app, we will be severed immediately without going to the shop.

PUT: to move something or someone into the stated place, position, or direction.

ORDER: to ask for something to be made, supplied, or delivered, especially in restaurant or shop.

Therefore, the sentence should be corrected like this:

Correct: For example, we can order clothes on the Shoppe app or order food on the Now food app, we will be severed immediately without going to the shop.

4.8. Preposition

- Incorrect: In my free time, I prefer going out to join activities than stay home.

- Correct: In my free time, I prefer going out to join activities than stay at home.

- Incorrect: I am so happy to have a perfect family of laughter and love.

- Correct: I am so happy to have a perfect family with laughter and love.

4.9. Article

- Incorrect: In the addition, sports help us increase in statue and have a excellent body.

There is no article “the” in this phrase, so it should be rewritten like this.

If the word begins with a consonant sound we would use “a”. If the word begins with a vowel sound, use “an”.

- Correct: In addition, sports help us increase in statue and have an excellent body.

- Incorrect: I am student, and I have a part time job after class.

- Correct: I am a student, and I have a part time job after class.

4.10. Subject/verb Agreement

- Incorrect: You **knows**, sports **provides** many benefits for our health.

Obviously, for almost all verbs the first and second person singular and the first, second, and third plural of the present tense are represented by a verb that is identical to the base form of the verb, while the third person singular verb ends in –s.

The sentence should be rewritten like this:

- Correct: You know, sports provide many benefits for our health.

- Incorrect: Addition, it **help** us have a good body.

- Correct: In addition, it helps us have a good body.

From the above results, the research found that the non-English major students at Thu Dau Mot University did the highest errors in verbs with 103 errors (39,7%) and the lowest typical error was Subject and Verb agreement (2,3%). The highest typical error happened because the students haven’t mastered carefully tenses in English and verb forms. From the result this research, teachers need to know the weakness and problems of the students in writing paragraph.

Compared with the research results of (Al-Khasawne, 2014) and (Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019), this study is similar to the research results of (Al-Khasawne, 2014) on errors: Verb tense, Word order, Subject & verb agreement, Spelling, Preposition, Articles, and Fragment sentence. However, the frequency of errors is different as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Research results of Man (2021) vs Al-Khasawne (2014)

| Type of Error | Frequency of errors (Man, 2021) | Frequency of errors (Al-Khasawne, 2014) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Verb Tense | 103 | 43 |
| Word Order | 9 | 44 |
| Subject/verb Agreement | 6 | 52 |
| Spelling | 8 | 39 |
| Word form | 9 | 53 |
| Article | 12 | 57 |
| Fragment sentence | 10 | 27 |

As shown in the table, the students between two countries committed several common errors when writing English paragraphs. In general, the research results on errors of Al-Khasawne (2014) have more times than that of Man (2021) except verb tense (103 times vs 43 times).

Research results of Man (2021) and (Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019) are similar in terms of errors in Verb tense, Word order, Spelling, Word form, Word choice and Fragment sentence. However, the frequency of errors of some errors is quite different as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Research results of Man (2021) vs (Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019)

| Type of Error | Frequency of errors (Man, 2021) | Frequency of errors (Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019) |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Verb Tense | 103 | 39 |
| Word Order | 9 | 24 |
| Spelling | 8 | 16 |
| Word form | 9 | 38 |
| Word choice | 42 | 45 |
| Fragment sentence | 10 | 12 |

Table 3 shows that, the research results on the frequency of Word choice and Fragment sentence errors of Man (2021) and (Ratnaningsih & Azizah, 2019) are quite similar (Word choice 42 times vs 45 times; Fragment sentence 10 times vs 12 times). However, the verb tense results of Man (2021) is much higher than that of Ratnaningsih & Azizah (2019) (103 times vs 39 times). On the contrary, the frequency of errors on word order, spelling and word form of Ratnaningsih & Azizah (2019) are higher than those of Man (2021).

5. Conclusion

Finding some common mistakes made by students helps them improve their learning strategies for English, especially in writing paragraphs. The result shows that that most students have difficulties in writing paragraph in terms of lexical and grammatical errors that occur in negligence include prepositions, articles, personal pronouns, and auxiliary words. The students also had a relatively weak vocabulary and their sentences were sometimes incomprehensible. They committed errors in applying sentence structure rules in the English language. Moreover, syntactic errors occur in negligence, addition, misformation, and disturbance which include noun phrases, auxiliary words, subject-verbs, and determinants. The two main sources of error are interlingual (first language disorder) and intralingual factors. Writing is considered a productive skill and a useful tool for the learning process. This is the most widely used skill in evaluating student performance at almost all levels of education.

The result of the analysis also helps the researcher deeply understand their difficulties in writing paragraph. Thereof, there will be some useful solutions for the writers to avoid committing errors when writing.

6. Suggestions

- Before writing, the teacher needs to give a good explanation simply and clearly to avoid the same errors of the students.
- Teachers should provide students with useful structures and words relating to the topic they are going to write.
- The teacher reminds students to master the types of tenses.
- Teachers always make an evaluation to know the progress of the students' work, which helps the teacher to find the students' problem in writing and also to measure the success of the remedial lesson itself. After having the evaluation, the teacher can focus on the points that cause the students' errors.
- Distinguishing between major and minor errors may be a good guide in choosing what to correct and what can be items to use for grading the students.
- The teacher needs to ask each student to edit their own writing before handing them to the teacher.

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