



## Errors in Writing Paragraph of Non-English Majors at Tay Do University

Wa Thái Như Phương

Foreign Language Faculty, Tay Do University, Vietnam

### ABSTRACT

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Most non-English major students faced many problems with writing skills, especially writing paragraphs. This study was carried out to find out the mistakes that make it difficult to write paragraphs for non-English major students at Tay Do University. In this research, the participants were 6 freshmen majored in Tourism at Tay Do University. The investigation was assessed through an interview. The results showed that non-English major students encountered 3 basic errors when writing paragraphs: grammatical errors, layout errors and vocabulary errors. From the research results, a number of measures have been proposed for students to overcome and practice.

### Keywords:

Errors in writing paragraph, Paragraph writing, Errors in writing

### INTRODUCTION

English is the most used language in the world. A lot of good learning materials from educational institutions and major universities are written in English. Learning English helps you access an endless source of knowledge. Moreover, before the integration of the world along with the penetration into the Vietnamese market of foreign companies, the importance of English is even more expressed. If you know English, you will be easily arranged to work with foreign partners, international fields and very easy to advance in your career.

Writing is an important skill in language learning for students. Because writing skills require a writer to have a large amount of knowledge and flexible language skills to be able to write a good essay. Writing in the right genre and writing well is always the desire of all learners. However, students still face many difficulties when learning this skill, especially non-English major students.

The purpose of the study was to investigate mistakes when writing paragraph of English non-majored freshmen at Tay Do University.

### Research question

This study was conducted in order to answer the following research question:

What are the errors that first-year non-English majored students encounter in writing paragraphs at Tay Do University?

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### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Definitions of writing

Writing is simply understood as the act of placing letters, symbols, numbers, words, ideas on paper according to the rules and structure of the language (or on the computer screen). Writing is usually to emphasize or explain ideas. A good article is one that is clear, grammatically correct, using the form of presentation, readers can easily understand correctly and accurately the ideas and purposes of the writer.

#### Definitions of paragraph

A paragraph is the direct unit that makes up text, conventionally starting from a capital letter to a break and usually expressing a relatively complete idea. Paragraphs are usually made up of many sentences. In simple terms, a paragraph is a group of closely related sentences about a certain topic. According to Rajatanun (1988:95) said that “*a paragraph is a unit of writing which expresses one central idea and consists of two kinds of sentences: a topic sentence and a number of supporting statements*”. A paragraph may have a concluding sentence, which restates the main idea in a different way. According to Reid (1994:42) “*the concluding sentence summarizes the material, offers a solution to the problem, predicts a situation, makes a recommendation, or states a conclusion*”.

#### Errors in writing paragraphs

When writing paragraphs, we often encounter the following basic errors: layout error, grammar error and vocabulary error.

#### Layout error

##### Missing topic sentence

In a standard paragraph, there is usually a topic sentence. A topic sentence should have two parts: the topic and the main

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idea. Usually, the topic sentence is the opening sentence to be written. Once we have a topic sentence, we just need to ask ourselves questions related to the topic sentence and then answer them ourselves. The answers to the above questions will be used as supporting sentences. Once there are supporting sentences, the writer just needs to put them together to have a complete paragraph.

### *Writing too long sentences*

You can confuse the reader by writing long complex sentences and they are not segmented with punctuation. It is difficult for the reader to grasp the exact information you want to convey. When writing, you should use punctuation marks such as: period (.), comma (,), question mark (?), exclamation point (!) to be able to separate content into small ideas, paragraphs with content so that readers can capture information effectively.

### **Grammar error**

Grammar is the most important factor for the success of the writing. Your writing can be adversely affected if you make some grammatical errors.

#### *Using too much tense*

One of the common problems of English learners is the use of too many tenses in the same text, including past, present and future tenses. In a sentence, if the verb tense is constantly changing, it will be difficult for the reader.

#### *Sentences without a subject*

For example: “With one dollar can buy a bowl of Pho in Vietnam”

This sentence begins with the prepositional phrase “with one dollar” and then goes to the verb “can buy” without the subject appearing. Because a prepositional phrase cannot function as a subject in a sentence, the above sentence is incorrect because it lacks a subject.

To handle errors in the above sentence, we add the subject “you” or “people” before the main verb. Thus, “With one dollar you (or people) can buy a bowl of Pho in Vietnam” is the question.

#### *Sentence missing main verb*

Example: “After listening to his joke, she laughed out loud”

This sentence has two verbs ending -ing, “listening” and “laughing”. However, both of these verbs are not the main verbs of the sentence. A complete sentence always requires the verb in the infinitive without “to” to be conjugated in the appropriate tense and persona. For the first part, “after” is not a problem because we still have the structure “after + V-ing”. However, for the second part, the sentence needs a main verb after the subject “she”.

The way to overcome the error of the above sentence is that we just need to change the ending -ing into the infinitive without “to” and conjugate the person, then it is appropriate. So the correct sentence would be “After listening to his joke, she laughed out loud”.

### **Vocabulary error**

Vocabulary is also a prerequisite to help you get high marks for writing in English.

#### *Use synonyms*

In English, there are many pairs of words; groups of words with similar meanings. They are used interchangeably to avoid repeating mistakes in sentences. However, when using it, the user needs to determine whether it is suitable for the context of the paragraph, of the sentence.

#### *Using the wrong type of word in a sentence*

In the sentence structure, each type of word has a definite position. Therefore, when determining which type of word to use, you need to know the position to choose the appropriate word type.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

In this study, the participants were first-year non-English major students of Tay Do University. There were six students from Tourism major 16. Both men and woman participated in the study. Their age ranged from 18 to 19. Especially, most of them had poor English writing skills. So it was confirmed that they encountered lots of difficulties with learning writing. When this research was carried out, they were studying English writing with the course book “Interaction 1-Writing”.

### **Instrument**

Interview was used as an instrument in this study. The researcher interviewed the first-year non-English majors of Tay Do University with 6 open-ended questions. The purpose of the interview was to collect information about students’ attitudes towards writing paragraphs, their habits of practicing writing, and their mistakes in writing paragraphs.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Students’ attitudes towards writing English paragraphs***

Results of interviews with 6 first-year Tourism students of Tay Do University for two opposing opinions. The first opinion thinks that writing paragraphs is easy and the second is the exact opposite of the first because it is very difficult to write paragraphs. The two comments were specifically approved by the following two responses:

*“I think it's easy to write paragraphs. Because it's just a short summary of the opinion”. (Male, English translation)*

*“I think writing paragraphs is difficult. Because it requires a complete paragraph structure and summarizing in a concise but complete and understandable way”. (Female, English translation)*

### ***Students’ practice of writing English paragraphs***

Through interviews, 6 freshmen majoring in Tourism of Tay Do University gave two opposing opinions to the question about practicing paragraph writing. Some students spend a lot of time practicing writing while the others don’t focus on writing practice:

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*"I spend about 1 hour a day learning the paragraph structure for each topic and another hour practicing writing paragraphs with different topics". (Male, English translation)*

*"I don't spend time practicing writing, but instead I read many different passages to accumulate ideas". (Female, English translation)*

### **Errors in grammar when writing paragraphs**

Interview results on the question "What are the grammatical errors you often make? And what causes them?" showed that 6 freshmen majoring in Tourism at Tay Do University encountered similar errors. Through 6 answers, students often made 2 basic grammatical mistakes: using too many tenses and writing sentences without a subject.

*"I often use many tenses in a paragraph. The reason is that I do not understand the structure and usage of different tenses". (Male, English translation)*

*"I often lack subjects when I write paragraphs. Because I am confused about using preposition shackles instead of subject". (Female, English translation)*

### **Errors in layout when writing paragraphs**

The results of interviews with 6 freshmen majoring in Tourism of Tay Do University showed that their answers were divided into two opinions. Most students make mistakes in layout when writing paragraphs. But some students do not make this mistake.

*"Yes. I always write a topic sentence when writing paragraphs". (Male, English translation)*

*"No. I don't write a topic sentence when writing paragraphs". (Female, English translation)*

*"Not necessarily. Sometimes I write the topic sentence and sometimes I don't". (Female, English translation)*

### **Errors in vocabulary when writing paragraphs**

The results of interview with 6 freshmen students majoring in Tourism of Tay Do University showed that the students had the mistakes in vocabulary.

*"Yes. Because I can't remember the meaning of the word and I don't know how to use it properly". (Male, English translation)*

*"Yes. I can't distinguish the type of word so it leads to using the wrong word when writing paragraphs". (Female, English translation)*

## **CONCLUSION**

After collecting the important information gathered from the responses of the first-year tourism students, the researcher eventually found non-English majors who had difficulties in writing English paragraphs including layout errors, grammatical errors, and vocabulary errors.

Through the research results, the researcher found that it is not easy for Vietnamese non-specialized students to write English paragraphs. Therefore, the researcher would like to offer some implications for the teaching and learning of paragraph writing for both teachers and non-English major students at Tay Do University. As for teaching, it is hoped that teachers will help their students focus on paragraph layout, especially how to write topic sentences. Teachers need to point out the causes that affect the quality of students' paragraph writing such as grammar errors and vocabulary errors. In addition, they will help students recognize and correct mistakes in the process write paragraph. Moreover, teachers can support students by explaining the basics of background knowledge so that students have a clear understanding of the topic to be written about and students practice paragraph writing skills through the topics. For learning, the researcher suggests that students read more material by good paragraph writers. As a result, they not only expand their knowledge but also increase their vocabulary and writing ability. Besides, they should look for videos related to writing English paragraphs so that you can learn more strategies and apply these ways to practice in your writing. Finally, students should practice writing by themselves every day to improve their writing skills

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