



Common English Written Errors Made by English Majored Sophomores at Tay Do University, Viet Nam

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ABSTRACT

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Writing is seen as one of the four central skills of English that contributes to the success of language learners. Hence, to improve the writing skill, English majored students have to face some difficulties in the learning process. As a result, this research titled “**Common English written errors made by English majored sophomores at Tay Do University**” is conducted to identify sophomores’ writing problems in English learning and to suggest ways of solving those problems. The study is conducted at Tay Do University. The research method used is the descriptive research method. A sample of 90 English language sophomores (from 3 English classes 14A, 14B, 14C) is selected using a simple random sampling procedure. They will be asked to fill in a questionnaire. The aim is to identify the problems and mistakes that students can get in English writing. The findings of the research will be analyzed to figure out some ubiquitous errors in writing related to vocabulary, grammatical structures, and background knowledge.

Keywords:

English written errors, second-year students, university

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale

In today's society, not only for the advanced students but also for the exact purpose of other students or officials, employees, even traders who use communication language as a second language, the English language is becoming more and more familiar.

All the necessary English skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but not everyone focuses on learning all four skills well, often focusing on listening and speaking, avoiding practicing the remaining skills, especially writing skills. When graduating from college, the ability to write is essential to writing a successful CV. As part of success, many high-paying positions include blogging, filing, and publishing. Others will also recognize that the grammar used is correct.

Writing is a language that is a complex system residing in our brain, allowing us to produce and interpret utterances and involves making an utterance visible. Our cultural tradition does not make this distinction.

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We sometimes hear statements such as Hebrew has no vowels; this statement is roughly true for the Hebrew writing system, but it is not true for the Hebrew language. Readers should constantly check that they are not confusing language and writing.

It can be seen that the script is a system of symbols to record language for the form of a text, the description of language through the use of symbols or symbols. For the historical development of human society, writing played a huge role. Moreover, the script is a means of recording information, without writing there can be no books, inventions and ancestral achievements cannot be passed on. The written language was expressed and used from the past to the present, but more and more the importance of writing is not paid attention to and the training and improvement of writing skills have been forgotten. Especially most visible in college students with specialized English language subjects.

Not all students learn the ability to compose, but from the simplest structures to more nuances, they are also prone to making mistakes. Even after a few years of Tay Do University's English majors and continuing to study at English colleges or centers with private courses still face some problems with paragraphs or essays when learning a foreign language.

Many students are still afraid of talking about their problems to teachers, which also negatively affects their learning results.

Therefore, the research paper “**common English written errors made by second-year students of English major at Tay Do University**” is implemented with the above purpose. This is considered a report that will analyze problems in the literary segment so that students can identify suitable and successful solutions.

1.2. The significance of the study

The research is conducted to help students find out some difficulties in writing English, particularly English major sophomores at Tay Do University. Besides, they also find out their problems for making some helpful solutions or update some study methods to improve their writing skills.

1.3. The organization of the study

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Research aims - research questions - hypothesis.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

Chapter 5: Expected outcomes

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definitions of writing

The concepts of writing have been discussed by numerous researchers in the area with different perspectives. It resulted in a considerable amount of definitions describing the term, some of which were mentioned below.

Writing is a medium of human communication that represents language and emotion with signs and symbols. It is an important and complex language skill that everyone must learn. Furthermore, Byrne (1988) & Heaton (1990) has defined “*writing as a complex process that requires students to master the grammatical devices, conceptual thinking, and judgmental elements. The best reason is that the role of writing skills as written production should be communicative and successful in entertaining readers*”.

Moreover, the definitions of writing are variously stated by some experts. According to Meyers (2005), “*Writing is partly a talent, but it’s mostly a skill, and any skill is improved with practice.*” Besides, Elbow (1973) and Brown (2001) say that writing is a two-step process. “*The first process is figuring out the meaning and the second is putting the meaning into language. Writing represents what we think. It is because the writing process reflects things, which stay in the mind.*”

Additionally, time management is an essential element for writing skills. According to Chakraverty & Gautum (2000), writing is defined as “*a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic and to analyze and classify any background knowledge. Then, the writers need a suitable language to structure these ideas in the form of coherent discourse.*”. Another definition of writing is proposed by Nation (2009:112) who states that writing is an activity that can usefully be prepared for work in other skills of listening, speaking, and reading.

Moreover, Hedge (1988:11) stated that the idea of time needs to be given attention because writing activities by nature have different stages which need ample time. Learners need time for gathering ideas, organizing their ideas, writing a draft, proofreading, and re-writing.

To sum up, writing is a form of communication that allows students to put their feelings and ideas on paper, organize their knowledge and beliefs into convincing arguments, and convey meaning through well-constructed text.

2.2. The importance of writing

Writing is important because it’s used extensively in higher education and the workplace. If students don’t know how to express themselves in writing, they won’t be able to communicate well with professors, employers, peers, or just about anyone else. Much of professional communication is done in writing: proposals, memos, reports, applications, preliminary interviews, e-mails, and more are part of the daily life of a college student or successful graduate.

In addition, writing skill is seen as a central part that is widely used in English majors at university. It supports and ensures students develop at all levels of English skills such as grammar, vocabulary, phonology, or discourse, and so on. Therefore, if students cannot express their writing skills, they will not communicate in the written language with anyone else.

Equally important, it is one of the elementary skills which one acquires in the seminal years. Unfortunately, this area is not being given due importance. The term writing has been defined by the Oxford dictionary as the activity or skill of marking coherent words on paper and composing text.

Similarly, writing not only important to have a high sense of self-awareness but also can be developed through practice, observation, and reflection of your way of thinking in order to convey ideas and perspectives to others. Writing errors aren't always bad. They can be useful in the future when you need to improve your work or if you want to improve something.

Regularly, a person is judged by the quality of writing. Be it a school, college, workplace, or society, writing has become a vital measure to assess one’s knowledge, and intellectuality. When we encounter a person with a primitive personality, we immediately get the impression that he is careful, responsible, and sincere. Similarly, if the article is flawless, we tend to make a good impression on the writer. Linda H. Mason and Jessica L. Hagaman stated, “*Writing is considered one of the most critical skills needed for success in school and the workplace in modern society.*”

Of any kind the occupation you choose, you simply have to know how to write if you want to be successful. Filling out a job application, creating a resume, and even writing performance reviews and other documents are a part of almost every job out there. If you cannot write, you’ll mess up even the simplest writing task, which can affect whether

you get or even keep a good job. Writing requires organizing and in business situations. It's important to remember that writing is just as important as speaking. It is a process, not an end product and you comfortable expect your readers to understand what you're saying which is needed in conversations with others.

Consequently, it is important to write a formal letter and express your business needs. A complicated fumbling letter to a new client won't make any sense until and unless you communicate the information. Effective communication is a must for a business and the habit of writing will solve the problem. Writing will help you express and hone your business speeches, which will allow you to communicate effectively with colleagues and handle commands or direct your employees in the right way.

Therefore, besides reading, speaking, and listening, writing nowadays has an irreplaceable position in English teaching methods for teachers as well as in training English majored students' English skills. With this purpose in mind to be successful in writing, it is considered that learners have to go through a hard learning process. First of all, they need to recognize the objectives in their writing, then planning carefully a logical structure or outline of this. At the same time, analyzing the sources in the writing and impacting them are required.

2.3. Some common English written errors

Language learners have several problems in their attempts to write in the second language. As verbs take different forms depending on the tense and subjects they are used with, they create problems for second language writing students. Students have problems with vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge.

2.3.1. Vocabulary

Vocabulary does not only play an important role in this whole world but also as the indispensable ability for learning to read, speak, and especially in writing which is one of the areas of knowledge of languages as well as plays a large role for the student in the reception of the language (Cameron, 2001). Harmon, Wood, & Keser, (2009) as well as Linse (2005) who learn to develop vocabulary are an important aspect of their language development.

Researchers have been studying the important role of vocabulary in writing essays for over twenty years. Most people agree that lack of vocabulary is the main problem which of learners in writing skill. Thornbury (2002, p.33) stated, "*Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.*". Students often lack the necessary vocabulary when they are engaged in authentic communicative situations such as writing essays.

Good writing or composition should consist of an appropriate and varied range of vocabulary used along with proper grammar and a varied range of sentence structures. When the writer practices, the choice of vocabulary would always cause difficulty for delivering the reader about the

purpose and content of the writing. Zughoul & Husain (1985) considered that lack of lexical variety was also a remarkable problem that students face in writing their papers. They did not add any information to the text because of lacking words to express their ideas.

Lack of vocabulary is also an obstacle in expressing ideas and makes the text not fully conveyed. Therefore, using appropriate words in appropriate contexts in writing in English is a problem for students. Exemplify students usually use words that are too sublime and professional in their small essays to impress their readers or teachers, then it leads to a problem of diction unsuitably.

Although vocabulary is an important factor, there are still some students still making mistakes in lack of knowledge of vocabulary in particular and language learners in general. Every day learning a few words and applying them to life activities is also one of the ways to help memorize words faster and longer.

2.3.2. Background knowledge

Most students who learn writing in English often do not have enough words and language structures to express their ideas while writing. Lack of background knowledge also affects a lot of psychology. Consequently, they often have to change words and sentence structures that they do not know by what they have learned. Thus, this has caused a lack of knowledge.

A person's background knowledge often called prior knowledge, is a collection of "abstracted residue" (Schallert, 2002, p. 557) that has been formed from all of life's experiences. Background knowledge is an essential component in learning because it helps us make sense of new ideas and experiences. As Sternberg (1985) explains: "What seems to be critical is not the sheer amount of experience but rather what one has been able to learn from and do with experience" (p. 307).

According to Bland (2003), "*Background knowledge consists of many aspects in practical life such as culture, society, custom, etc...*" Hence, if students have poor background knowledge, they cannot build a good structure of English writing to attract readers. This means that for the topics assigned, many students still cannot prepare the outline or structure very well with opening, body, or closing in their essays.

2.3.3. Grammatical structure

Besides vocabulary and background knowledge, grammar is also a massive difficulty in the writing process of students. Grammar is viewed as previous knowledge that someone has experienced, perceived as their way.

The highest number of errors was made in grammar. Grammatical errors included errors of different word classes, subject-verb agreement, and forms of singular and plural, for example, 'these applications give a proper protocol to communicate others', 'these channels provide numerous

numbers of information', 'every day the situation goes bad to bad' and 'their personality impress by everyone.

Another research was done by James (2005:2) with the idea, "Grammar is a study of the structure of the language and describes the way of putting words together to make meaningful sentences." In reality, students usually make grammatical errors in their writing such as tense, word order, and pronunciation. They do not even know how to write sentences correctly, so it leads to unclear meaning and content in their essays.

In conclusion, the grammatical structure is not an easy process, students have to meet some difficulties that are factors that come from subjectivity as well as objectivity.

2.4. Previous studies

Previously, many researchers had some related studies in English-writing problems as well as difficulties that hindered English-majored students in writing. However, the topics are not completely the same and the participants may be from different levels. The related studies below may give the supporting shreds of evidence for this research.

Furthermore, many researchers have emphasized the difficulties in writing. First, Dr. Ibrahim Mohamed Alfaki (2015) in "*Factors Contributing To Students' Difficulties In Academic Writing Class: Students' Perceptions*" has conducted a study to identify the errors and mistakes made by the students. The research method used was the descriptive research method. A sample of 20 English language students was selected using a simple random sampling procedure. They were instructed to write a composition of about 250-300 words on "*A description of my own hometown/village*". Writing is complicated and difficult for most people who learn a second language and native language because of particular psychological, linguistic, and cognitive factors. It means that writing problems are not only faced by second language students but also native language students. Moreover, the students' compositions were reviewed twice by 10 English language instructors. The findings reveal that those university students have various writing problems: language problems at the levels of morphology and syntax; usage errors, and mechanical mistakes, that is, spelling, punctuation and capitalization, lack of several writing development skills, cognitive problems, and graph motor problems.

According to Greenhalgh (1992, cited in Tony 2001) in "*Land Mark Essays: On ESL Writing, New*", the most frequent advice students receive about their work progress comes from ESL teachers of writing. The writing task is challenging because many practical and theoretical issues are included. The ethical issues of rights and responsibilities also arise in texts. Researchers recommend that students should be supported by teachers to take control of their writing.

As far as the result, a responsible teacher would be a reactive reader, a person who helps students recognize and resolve writing problems. Yu (2008), contended that there are

different aspects of writing, such as controlled composition model, built-in three or five-paragraph model, basic organizational and informative assumptions, the simplified writing assignment, the assumption that supposed work without the help of each student or only with the instructor for comprehensive feedback, usage of grammar and handbooks or even lectures, and the linear composition model based on "outlining, writing, and editing".

The research "*Difficulties In Writing Essays Of English Majored Sophomores At Tay Do University*" was written by Hiep Thanh Nga Nguyen, Thu Uyen Pham, Thi Minh Uyen Phan especially discusses the problems that students always meet in writing. The authors said that it is not easy to write an essay because many mistakes can be made. Moreover, it also shares how to avoid as well as help students can easily overcome the problems.

The last one is the study conducted by Thai Cong Dan, Vuong Minh Duc, and Phu Thi Hong Chau. The survey was "*An Investigation into Common Mistakes in Paragraph Writing of the First-Year English-Majored Students: A Case Study in Can Tho University, Vietnam*". The present study focuses on ubiquitous mistakes in writing paragraphs of the first-year students majoring in English at Can Tho University, in the academic year 2013-2014.

Despite the growing amount of research supporting the use of writing skills for improving learning (e.g. Kharma,1986; Norish, 1993; Abu, 2001; Davie, 1998:25; Raimes, 1983:25), many teachers are still uncertain about how effective it is. Therefore, in this study, the researchers investigate whether university students' writing skills could improve with other skills in learning English.

3. RESEARCH AIMS – RESEARCH QUESTIONS – HYPOTHESIS

3.1. Research aims

This research aimed to investigate problems in writing essays of English major sophomores at Tay Do University. Thanks to recognizing their problems, they are able to find out some possible solutions for themselves.

3.2 Research questions

To reach the aims mentioned above, the research supposes the research questions as follow:

- a) *What are some difficulties in writing essays of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University?*
- b) *How can English majored sophomores overcome their obstacles?*

3.3 Research Hypothesis

According to most English majored sophomores at Tay Do University, writing is the most difficult skill although they have learned this subject after two last semesters as well as in high school. Through chapter 2, literature review, and the research question, it is hypothesized that English majored sophomores at Tay Do University usually face difficulties in writing essays such as vocabulary, content, grammar.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Design

The quantitative research is carried out to find out the worries that English majored sophomores have faced in writing essays. The reliability and the validity of the research results are based on the instruments. To achieve the above-mentioned purposes, English majored sophomores are chosen as the sample to the survey. The data from the participants will be collected through the questionnaire for students.

4.2. Participants

The participants of this study are 90 English majored sophomores who are studying in three classes English 14A, 14B, and 14C (with 21 students for each class) at Tay Do University. They come from different provinces and their ages range from 19 to 20, some of them are 19 or 21 years old. Besides, most of them have learned English since grade 6, so their English level is immediate. They speak Vietnamese as their mother tongue and English is a second language to them. All of them will be given the questionnaires to collect information about difficulties they have met in writing essays.

4.3. Instruments

The instruments are used in this study are the questionnaires. It is designed for students at the immediate English level. This questionnaire includes two main sections. The first section consists of 6 questions that mentioned students' personal information and some general questions about their writing skills. The second one is a design based on the five-degree scales including "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree" and "Strongly agree". This part consists of 6 questions and 15 statements which are distributing in 3 clusters including grammar, vocabulary, and background knowledge. The questionnaire is classified into the following groups:

From 1 to 6: Participant's information

From 7 to 12: Difficulties in vocabulary

From 13 to 18: Difficulties in background knowledge

From 19 to 26: Difficulties in grammar

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Writing plays an important role in learning a language and working. Most people never consider the difficulty of the writing process. Writing relates to all academic activities, it requires more basic skills than others. This research aims to find out some ubiquitous written errors in writing essays of second-year English majored students at Tay Do University.

First of all, vocabulary is one of the most important factors in writing essays. However, English majored sophomores often get some difficulties in using vocabulary effectively. The shortage of vocabulary knowledge causes misunderstanding and problems in choosing the right words to express the ideas to the students. Therefore, they feel very hard to make use of vocabulary variously.

Background knowledge is the second problem of an essay is essential to determine whether the essay is successful

or not. Students often meet difficulties to elucidate their opinions because of lacking general knowledge such as culture, society, custom, and so on. This is the reason why English majored sophomores cannot organize good ideas, good structure, and good content for an essay to be more attractive to readers.

Thirdly, the grammatical structure is another factor that is seen as a vital element affecting writing essays. Students have faced some ubiquitous grammar such as tenses, word order, pronouns, and parts of speech, and so on. They rarely feel easy to write a sentence with correct grammar. Therefore, they make some inevitable grammatical mistakes in writing essays.

In brief, the researcher hopes that second-year English majored students at Tay Do University can realize their writing errors subjectively and objectively. Thanks to this, they can be aware to change immediately for writing improvement.

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