



AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE COMMON ERRORS OF WORD FORM USED IN WRITING OF THE FRESHMEN: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

English has been used all across the world, including in Vietnam. From middle school to high school and even university, Vietnamese students have numerous opportunities to engage with English grammar, but there is still a significant gap between their understanding and the correct application of English grammar. In fact, Grammar has a significant impact on the writing skills of Vietnamese students in general, and especially the first-year students of English majors who were not much exposed to writing in high school, so they are not yet used to writing at a higher level. The majority of errors in their writings are due to the influence of their mother tongue and a lack of frequent practice and their misuse of word forms, as a matter of fact, the expected results have not been satisfactory. Based on the general insight into the writing competence of the freshmen, the study titled “An investigation into the common errors of word forms made in the writings of the freshmen: A case study” was done with the English-major students. A close survey was deliberately done with 142 paragraphs written by the first-year students to investigate the common errors of word forms made in their writings. From what was collected, the study subsequently offered some suggestions for helping the students improve their writing skills.

Keywords: error, word form, writing, freshmen, case study

1. Introduction

Along with the development of the modern era of modernization, English is widely applied in all areas of human life around the globe. As an international language, English not only helps learners to expand their knowledge in all fields by absorbing information

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from many English-speaking countries in the world, but also contributes to bringing Vietnam to approach and integrate with the international community. Therefore, learning and using English is essential for most people, especially the younger generation. However, acquiring a foreign language takes a long time and is full of challenges; learners always cope with various difficulties, and writing is one of the major challenges. When it comes to English in general, most of the students in high schools were only taught at the most basic level, focusing on memorizing vocabulary and grammatical structures rather than applying them to writing effectively. This resulted in students making a variety of mistakes in their academic writing (their use of word forms is what is discussed in this article). Even the teaching methods in college do little to help students improve their writing skills as these methods were used under the assumption that students have already learned and applied grammar well in English writing prior to getting into college, and any effort to help the weaker students catch up with others on the fundamentals were deemed as insignificant when the students themselves were not willing to practise writing and try hard.

Being able to write correctly is undoubtedly a crucial skill to acquire, and there are many reasons why the correct use of word form is mandatory in a student's writing with two requirements in particular. The first is one's own expansion of vocabulary with the capacity of words and the capability to utilize such number to attain advanced word collocation, with the second being the clarity of meaning which entails one's own ability to express the meaning of without causing confusion. From here, two questions are presented that are in need of an answer:

- 1) What are the common errors in the academic writing of freshmen?
- 2) What should be done to deal with these common errors?

Based on what was discussed, this article aims to investigate the context of learning writing and then propose solutions that students, especially freshmen majoring in English studies can use to avoid making such errors in their future writings. In addition, the findings of this article can also be used as a reference for the adjustment of teaching methods.

2. Literature Review

Learning and mastering a language is assessed through the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among them, writing skills are focused and play an important role. The students start learning to communicate through written form as they begin to interact with others at the school level. Writing skills are more complicated than any other skill, even native English learners may find themselves struggling with them. The criteria for good writing include coherent ideas, correct grammatical structures, and comprehensible language. According to Kellogg (2008), writing skills were highly appreciated because writing helps to i) reinforce the grammatical speaking structure, ii) enhance the students' vocabulary, iii) and assist other language skills such as reading,

listening. Moreover, writing skills also greatly assist college and university students in completing projects, essays, graduation theses, or scientific research papers. However, in order to become proficient in writing, which requires various sentence structures, correct word choice, and word forms, there are many challenges that learners have to overcome, of which using the using word form is regarded as the most common challenge.

2.1. Learning Writing in Vietnam

According to Nguyen (2014), mistakes in tense, vocabulary, synonyms, word type, grammatical structure, expression, punctuation, and spelling are common errors found in over 100 articles written by freshmen. In his/her study on writing errors of first-year English students and some suggestions for correction, Pham (2015) states that the errors in English written expression of first-year students majoring in English at Industrial University are due to a lack of vocabulary and mastering common grammar rules in English. As stated by Pham (2017), the research on common errors in English writing by students majoring in Business English indicates that students of the Faculty of English often make the following writing errors: verbs, nouns, tenses, word orders, articles, prepositions, punctuation, spellings, expression, literary style, structure and off-topic. The causes of these errors are due to students having little practice in writing, a small pool of vocabulary, poor grammar, limited understanding of social knowledge, teaching methods, and teachers' inappropriate mistake correction. The research conducted by Pham (2018) has focused on analyzing errors made by Vietnamese students when writing academic essays. In this study, out of a total of 80 academic essays surveyed, there are 14 groups of errors caused by the influence of Vietnamese. According to the survey results, errors in sentence structure are the majority with 18,4%. This was followed by errors in word choice, singular/plural nouns, and verb form with percentages of 15,10%; 13,64%, and 9,64% respectively. Nguyen et al. (2019) have found that the data collected from 226 articles clearly show the influence of the mother tongue, the misuse of language structures, and the lack of linking between linguistic and social knowledge. The results of the article are highly suitable for referential use to research teaching processes and learning writing skills. As reported by Le (2018), the students of the University of Transport often make mistakes when writing letters such as errors in verb tense, vocabulary, using wrong words, sentence structure, grammar, expressions, word-for-word translation, single-sentence, and other errors namely punctuation, and spelling. Huynh and Trinh (2010) have examined the mistakes that students of non - English majors often make in writing skills are: verb tenses, sentence structure, unintelligible ideas, word-to-word translation, word repetition in a short paragraph, punctuation; and other errors such as errors in using words with similar meanings, word types, and spelling.

Thus, from previous studies, it can be seen that most students cannot distinguish the types of words in English, leading to errors in using the wrong word type, affecting the sentence structure in writing. Word category is considered the basic unit constituting

a complete essay. Therefore, students need to be aware of the importance of word types in order to use them effectively and help them become better at English.

2.2. Learning Writing English in Foreign Contexts

Several foreign studies have concluded that most students often make mistakes with tenses, sentence structure, or wrong word order in sentences. A study on writing errors of Jordanian students conducted by Khuwaileh et al. (2000) illustrates that these students make the most mistakes in verb tenses. Besides, in her study of 26 essays by university students in Taiwan, Lin (2002) found that the four most common mistakes made by these students were sentence structure (30,43%), incorrect verb forms (21,01%), phrases (15,94%) and misuse of words (15,94%). Also, according to Murad (2013), the results of 32 essays written by Arabic students studying English showed that these students made 10 common mistakes, including verb tenses, word order, singular and plural forms, subject-verb agreement, double negation, spelling, capitalization, articles, sentence segments, and prepositions. In general, most errors in students' English writing are due to translation errors from their mother tongue and their own carelessness, in which the former of the two is considered the main cause.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research Methodology

This study aims to investigate the common errors of word form in the academic writings of freshmen. The research approach also encourages the investigator on how to deal with the research findings. In this case study, qualitative data was used to analyze and research, and produce results. This type of data was collected through the paragraph writings that students have done in class and statistics according to a list of errors. The research approach also encourages the investigator on how to deal with the research findings. There are three main parts to this methodology. The first part illustrates the methods of data collection. The second part gives information about methods of data analysis. And the last part provides a scientific research evaluation. The aim of this section is to point out how the investigation was conducted throughout the study period. The purpose of using qualitative data is to accurately and objectively report the frequency of errors in the placement of words in student writings. The purpose of using qualitative data is to accurately and objectively report the frequency of errors in the placement of words in student writings. Moreover, this study also shows common mistakes when writing based on actual student writing of the first-year students majoring in English Studies, High Quality Program, the academic year of 2021-2022 of Can Tho University.

According to the syllabus given by the school, with 3 credits and 90 practical lessons, after completing this course, students will be able to analyze the topic, develop an outline, write an academic paragraph for their opinion, discuss and apply their writing skills to international exams such as IELTS, FCE, and so on... In addition, students have

an understanding of content related to life, school, and social festival. Students also build writing skills, and expand vocabulary, knowledge, and critical thinking skills to increasingly improve their writing skills.

Therefore, this study is based on 142 student essays (all first-year students, English Language major, High Quality Program, Can Tho University) to find the frequency of errors, and thereby suggest solutions to help them be more confident in their writing skills.

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

The subject of the research is a first-year English major, High Quality Program at Can Tho University. 142 student writings from 4 core English classes were collected. In particular, these writings are randomly selected from 4 different classes.

In the study, word form errors were statistically recorded in a standardized error summary table. This method is beneficial when the researcher has a complete list of common errors so that the researcher can easily gather relevant and accurate information. This method also helps researchers easily collect and analyze clearly and accurately. The information about the author of these writings is also committed to confidentiality and is used for the sole purpose of research.

3.3 Methods of Data Analysis

The student writings were collected from the teachers of the Department of Foreign Languages, which includes 142 essays written by students of 4 different classes. The essays covered a wide range of topics, such as describing chart types, discussing a controversial issue, and presenting opinions and thoughts. After that, the researchers analyzed and classified errors in students' writing based on a table of common errors. Next, the researchers looked at the frequency of the common errors to find out the causes and solutions to develop students' writing skills. The final step was reviewing the effectiveness of the proposed solutions to draw out the ones that really work and give some other suggestions.

The following are the common errors in the students' writings:

- Confusion between adverbs and verbs,
- Confusion between verbs to be and regular verbs,
- Misplacement of adjectives and nouns,
- Misplacement when there is 'enough',
- Confusion between adjectives and verbs,
- Misuse of words with adverbs of frequency,
- Confusion between adjectives and nouns,
- Confusion between adjectives and adverbs,
- Create new compound nouns.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Results obtained from actual student writings are highlighted. The objective of this study is to study the common mistakes of word forms in academic writing. Our results confirm that there are common word form mistakes that make writing English difficult: confusion between adverbs and verbs, confusion between verbs to be and regular verbs, misplacement of adjectives and nouns, misplacement when there is 'enough', confusion between adjectives and verbs, misuse of words with adverbs of frequency, confusion between adjectives and nouns, confusion between adjectives and adverbs, create new compound nouns.

Another purpose of this study is to suggest possibly effective solutions to limit students' writing errors as much as possible. In addition, this study can also act as a tool to improve students' self-study skills, as it lists the most common mistakes and offers solutions. The results obtained are summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Results from Errors Analysis of Freshmen's Paragraphs

Errors	Quantity (count on 142 writings)	Rate (%)
Confusion between adverbs and verbs	2	1,41
Confusion between verbs to be and regular verbs	2	1,41
Misplacement of adjectives and nouns	2	1,41
Misplacement when there is 'enough'	3	2,11
Confusion between adjectives and verbs	4	2,81
Misuse of words with adverbs of frequency	6	4,23
Confusion between adjectives and nouns	7	4,99
Confusion between adjectives and adverbs	11	7,75
Create new compound nouns	29	20,42

Some examples of errors are as follows:

- **Closurance schools** have hindered the process of fully absorbing knowledge of students' learning. => **School closures** have hindered the process of fully absorbing knowledge of students' learning. (Create new compound nouns)
- These apps will restrict children under 18 to access adult websites and other obscene materials including violence or **pornographic**. => These apps will restrict children under 18 to access adult websites and other obscene materials including violence or **pornography**. (Misplacement of adjectives and nouns).
- It was **fluctuated** sharply from June to September in 2014. => It was **fluctuate** sharply from June to September in 2014 (Confusion between adjectives and adverbs).
- They **do not wise** to select what is suitable for them. => They **are not wise** to select what is suitable for them. (Confusion between verbs to be and regular verbs).

Based on what was founded, it can be concluded that the problems that challenge students in their writing ability include a lack of understanding of word types and their functions, poor use of grammar, and limited source of vocabulary.

4.2. Discussion

Analysis of errors in word types helps the researchers answer Question 1: What are the common errors in the academic writing of freshmen?

After analyzing the research results, three of the most frequent errors were confusion between adjectives and nouns (4,99%), confusion between adjectives and adverbs (7,75%), create new compound nouns (20,42%).

Some examples of the errors mentioned above are as follows:

- **Bully behaviors** have an increasing trend and are very complicated. => **Bullying behaviors** have an increasing trend and are very complicated. (Create new compound nouns).
- The number of books borrowed from four village libraries in 2004 has changed **different**. => The number of books borrowed from four village libraries in 2004 has changed **differently**. (Confusion between adjectives and adverbs).
- The chart shows the **different** of libraries in the books that were borrowed in 2014. => The chart shows the **difference** of libraries in the books that were borrowed in 2014. (Confusion between adjectives and nouns).

According to Aminu Saleh & Bulus Wayar (2016), this can be explained for two reasons. First, the main reason is the influence of the mother tongue makes it difficult for students to write English. Often, the students transfer the features of Vietnamese to English, resulting in words or sentences with the wrong meanings. Second, the students use what they have already learned about the language but use it in different contexts, causing errors. Third, many students have limited word sources, and lack the knowledge of word collocation or some sentence structures. In addition, some other causes of these errors are that students do not frequently practice writing, so they are not able to write fluently and accurately; also, they find it challenging to express what they mean. Moreover, some careless students do not double-check after finishing their writing. Even worse, especially when many students mechanically translate sentences from Vietnamese to English without carefully checking how word choice is appropriate. Furthermore, teachers have mostly instructed the mixed-level classes with the same curriculum, which means that all students at different levels have to take the same class, leading to weak students easily falling behind or not keeping up with other students in the class. Finally, students do not have the proper method of learning writing and cultivating knowledge, nor are they aware of which mistakes they often make to have solutions to limit them, thereby making it difficult to improve their writing skills.

5. Recommendations

The recommendation of the researchers helps to answer Question 2: What should be done to deal with these common errors?

As teachers have pointed out, in fact, students are, very interested in developing their English writing skills. However, some students have difficulty in finding effective learning methods, so they sometimes feel dissatisfied with the score of this skill. In general, because there is no suitable method for themselves, each person needs to have a self-training process suitable to each student's ability, in order to raise their awareness of the importance of learning. the importance of writing competence in an academic setting. In addition, to improve their writing, students are encouraged to practice writing regularly, study in groups, do extra grammar exercises, and consult with teachers.

According to Geiser and Studley (2001), the ability to write is considered a good indicator of the increase in the quality of higher education. However, mastering this skill and avoiding mistakes in word usage is very difficult. In addition, this problem also becomes more difficult when students have to express opinions in a language other than their mother tongue. From the collected data, in the learning process, writing skill is the goal for students to strive for more, and writing skill is also a means to participate in other courses. A student who writes well in English can work in other countries around the world. Overall, the ability to write well in English will help students impress employers, affirm their abilities, get promotion opportunities, understand other cultures and get many benefits.

Through the actual teaching process and students' writing in class, some collected materials are valuable resources to support English majors studying in the first year of a high-quality program. at school in developing writing skills.

Regarding recommendations, instructors can also provide additional materials and websites to help students test their abilities and identify weaknesses in their written English. In addition to the main documents that need to be supplemented with resources so that the good students can develop further, the weak students need to be encouraged by the teacher to keep up with their classmates. And students should also consult the teacher for the most accurate comments. Teachers need to have a clear understanding of weak students so that they can talk to the teacher privately about their problems. Moreover, in order to improve class efficiency and encourage students to participate in learning, teachers need to flexibly deploy different activities in line with the program's content but not make the class time cramped, boring, bored. Some typical activities can be applied such as (i) Freehand writing can be done in the first 5-10 minutes of the class so that students can confidently write and promote their creativity and imagination; (ii) Vocabulary sharing & structure reinforcement can be done as a pre-writing discussion activity by students to help them discuss, introduce and share together; (iii) Group writing helps teachers reduce lecture load and grading while improving the quality and fluency of students' writing in groups. Also, peer review helps students evaluate each

other's work after completion, from which students recognize and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the writing and gradually self-assess their own writing to be able to make more progress. In addition, each student needs to have a regular self-study process, be aware of the weak points in his or her handwriting, and have the determination to improve their writing skills. Furthermore, doing daily grammar and thinking skills exercises will help students consolidate their knowledge, thereby increasing their confidence when writing academic articles or paragraphs.

Students also need to enhance effective vocabulary and grammar learning. Since vocabulary plays an important role in enabling students to use a foreign language, mastering the rules of grammar will help learners communicate ideas, feelings, and thoughts accurately and effectively, whether oral or written. In the process of practicing writing and correcting, mastering the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar will help students quickly find and correct mistakes, thereby helping students' effective writing skills gradually improve.

Second, to develop effective writing skills, students need to expand reading comprehension activities. By reading and understanding various materials, such as documents or newspapers, in English, students can both improve their vocabulary and grammar knowledge and learn more about expressing their ideas. At the same time, through reading, learners' understanding of related fields is also expanded, so students will not have to spend a lot of time finding ideas for their writing.

Third, students must also improve their sense of self-discipline and critical thinking. In order to write a sentence, a paragraph, or an essay in accordance with the requirements, students must have an investment of time, and at the same time must have a self-disciplined and positive learning attitude. A well-reviewed article is the product of a process: brainstorming, organizing ideas, writing drafts, and editing. To be able to write well, students need to fully understand and apply these steps. This can take a while in the beginning, but once they've mastered the steps, it all becomes a good habit and helps students develop their writing skills much more effectively.

Self-study groups of 5-6 people are also encouraged to develop. These study groups both help students consolidate their knowledge and share useful experiences to avoid spelling mistakes. The more confident English majors are, the less difficult it is to write, the more they write, the higher their English level is. Finally, students should use reliable sources, regularly hone their writing skills, and build themselves a suitable learning path to improve their writing ability to achieve the desired results.

It is worth mentioning that facilities play an important role in promoting the learning process of students. Most of the classes are overcrowded (more than 40 people), so it is not easy to manage the class and students to participate in the learning process. If possible, each class should have 20 to 30 students to achieve learning goals so that teachers can keep a close eye on each student. In addition, in each self-study room, the School of Foreign Languages needs to supplement some English books, English writing

practice materials, graduation theses, scientific research articles, and reference books. This gives students the opportunity to learn, refer to and apply them to their writing.

6. Conclusion

After analyzing the research findings, it could be concluded that the problems which challenge the students in writing include confusion between adverbs and verbs, confusion between verbs to be and regular verbs, misplacement of adjectives and nouns, misplacement when there is 'enough', confusion between adjectives and verbs, misuse of words with adverbs of frequency, confusion between adjectives and nouns, confusion between adjectives and adverbs, create new compound nouns. Besides, it has been found that the students also face some psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, shyness, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation, these really hinder the students' writing proficiency. English-majored students must seek out or create more opportunities to practice speaking English more often as practice makes perfect. When students are brave enough to overcome their inhibitions to start speaking English, they will feel more confident and use English more often. The process of learning to write must be regular for a long time, the school can teach some extra lessons to practice and increase the writing ability of students, especially in the first years of university. This will create a good foundation for each student.

From the collected data, in the learning process, writing skill is the goal for students to strive for more, and writing skill is also a means to participate in other courses. A student who writes well in English can work in other countries around the world. Overall, the ability to write well in English will help students impress employers, affirm their abilities, get promotion opportunities, understand other cultures and get many benefits.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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