

A Survey on Some Common Errors in Writing of English-Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University

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ABSTRACT

Today, writing plays an important role in language learning. The purpose of this study is to investigate the mistakes made in writing by English freshmen at Tay Do University. Ten college freshmen were selected to participate in the study. Face-to-face interviews over the internet was used as a tool for this survey. Research results showed that most students faced difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, tenses and influences of their mother tongue. And from the research results, there are also some ideas on how to overcome the errors of writing.

Keyword: *Common errors in writing, Mistakes in writing, Writing errors*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English is the most popular language in the world. As an effective means of international communication, it used as the official language in many fields of life such as economic, sports, science and many others. This lead to an increasing demand of learning English. There are more and more people who learn English and consider it as an inevitable factor in their work and life. In any walk of life in Vietnam, you can find people use English, from the big cities to mountainous areas, from the international conferences to daily conversations, or just few pidgin words with the foreign tourists. People learn and use English with different purposes, but there is a fact that they are trying to learn English with the hope that they can use it effectively.

In Vietnam, English is taught from primary to university students. All students undergo four compulsory skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing skills is an important part of human life. In fact, writing is an effective and popular tool to record several types of document such as history, legal text, science, agreement and so on. Besides, English is a popular language in the world. It is a tool to link many countries in several areas such as business, diplomacy, economy, politicization and culture. Moreover, with the developing of social network, English writing skills is a useful tool to help people connect together through social network. For English majored students, like reading, listening and speaking, writing is also an important skill. It helps them take note all necessary things in their learning. Writing is a skill that draws on the use of strategies to accomplish goals, such as writing report or expressing an extending and depending students' knowledge. Writing skills is also a tool to record some documents such as report, application, CV or research.

However, writing skills are not easy to do well. Students often score poorly on both exams and certificates related to the writing or writing skills in it. When studying English, students often have errors in writing. Some common errors are in grammar, vocabulary, organization, background knowledge and influence mother tongue. With this in mind, we want to promote and improve our writing skills with the subject: "Some common errors in writing of English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University".

Research question

This research was conducted in order to answer a following question:

What are some errors that the English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University face in writing?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of writing

Writing is a means of human communication. Writing "is the process of using symbols (alphabet letters, punctuation, and spaces) to convey thoughts and ideas in a readable form. In a language system, writing is based on many similar structures such as vocabulary, grammar, semantics and signs

According to Henry Roger (2005) "Writing is not language. Language is a complex system residing in our brain which allows us to produce and interpret utterances" and "Writing is not a game played according to rules. Writing is a compulsive, and delectable thing. Writing is its own reward." Henry Miller (1964) Writing involves making an utterance visible. Besides, According to Daniels (1996, p.3) "a system of more or less permanent marks used to represent an utterance" in such a way that it can be recovered more or less exactly without the intervention of the utterer. Toni Morrison (1992) says "Writing is really a way of thinking-not just feeling but thinking about things that are disparate, unresolved, mysterious, problematic or just sweet." Writing is also a means of storing emotional sound information. In brief, writing is a way to produce language that comes from thought, feeling and anything that exists in their mind.

2.2 Difficulties in writing skills

Lack of vocabulary, error of grammar, organization, background knowledge and influence of mother tongue are always the most common for writing skill.

Vocabulary

English is a language with a large vocabulary. Learning and knowing the meaning of words is not easy. In English, there are synonyms sometimes used for different contexts. Therefore, students learn to write English often make mistakes in finding the right words for each context in their writing.

In addition, students "without vocabulary" will not know words what kind of they need to use. So it is easy to write wrong sentence structure, making sentences without meaning. There are many words in English that have similar spelling. Therefore, the confusion between words often occurs when students mistake one word for another because they look similar to the word they want to use. The following words are often confused with each other: "conscience", "conscious" and "conscientious", but if you know how to put words in context and remember them, students can distinguish them more easily, example: He had a clear conscience because he knew he had never committed the crime. (In this sentence, the word "conscience" describes the ability to judge behavior whether it is right or wrong, whether the behavior is good or bad).

Grammar

English grammar helps students write structured and meaningful sentences. Without mastering basic English knowledge, students easily write grammatically wrong sentences and make it difficult for readers to understand. Example: Do you know when he bought the car? Nineteen ninety-two, May (day) nine. I remember he told me he had to pay sixty-five million dollars. In English, the correct English expression is in the order of month, day, and year and can be used to describe numbers, for example, November 17, 1982.

Organization

Most students do not have enough vocabulary and language structures to express their ideas while writing. As a result, they often have to replace words and sentence structures they don't know with what students have learned. This leads to articles that are easily misleading and distracting. Example: How far is Harley from here to your house? It is said that it is more than two thousand, five hundred and sixty kilometers away. When expressing specific units of digits, ten, hundred, thousand and million, use only the singular form, without adding or subtracting, e.g. 2000 reads two thousand, 400 reads four hands. Between tens and hundreds must add a dash and . It is said that it is more than four thousand, five hundred and sixty kilometers away.

Influence of mother tongue

Sometimes this common practice makes your article unclear, misleading readers because some English words when put together will have a completely different meaning. There are some students in the essay describing their mother "She never does anything" to say that their mother is very upset. Meanwhile, the above sentence can be known more complexly as "She is very hard working" or "She never stops working". It is the translation of each Vietnamese word into English that makes the sentence cumbersome, confusing and sometimes funny. Let's look at some examples:

- a) My mother has a fair skin tone. The above sentence should be rewritten as "My mother has beautiful skin."
- b) She always smiles. To express this idea, we will write the following: "She always has a smile on her face."

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The subjects in this research were ten English majored freshmen of Class English at Tay Do University. Their age ranged from 18 to 22. There were two males and four females. When this research was carried out, they had studied writing for one semester.

3.2 Instrument

The researcher interviewed the English freshmen of Tay Do University with 6 open-ended questions. The purpose of the interview was to find out the common errors the students made in writing. In addition, the researcher also wants to know how students' attitudes and views are towards the subject of writing practice.

4. RESULTS

The interview data were analyzed and classified into groups according to the detailed information the students provided in their answers.

4.1 Students' opinions about writing

The results of the interviews with ten English freshmen of Tay Do University showed that they found writing interesting but difficult subject. The followings are some examples from the students' opinions.

"I find it interesting to study writing, but it is really hard for me to become a good writer" (Male, English translation)

"I think writing is a good but complex subject because it gathers all vocabulary, grammar, organization," (Female, English translation)

"I think writing is difficult because it requires a lot of skills." (Female, English translation)

4.2 Students' common errors in writing

All of the students admitted that their common mistakes were mostly in grammar and vocabulary. Poor grammatical knowledge and lack of vocabulary often made them get bad results in writing.

"Yes. I often get confused between tenses and the "ed" structure." (Male, English translation)

"Yes. Because I don't remember every word and I don't know how to use words in the right context." (Female, English translation)

Six over ten students thought that their errors were related to the influence from their mother tongue. According to these students, they often thought in their first language and wrote down what they were thinking in mind, which led them to making errors in their writing papers.

"I know it is not good to think in Vietnamese before starting to write, but it's hard to change this habit." (Female, English translation)

"I think in Vietnamese first, then I use Google to translate them because I don't have enough vocabulary to express my ideas" (Male, English translation)

Moreover, all of the students agreed that improving vocabulary and grammar were the key points to enhance their writing skill.

"I have learned writing for 7 years. I have some experiences for you, you should have a large of vocabulary, strong grammar and don't be afraid to make a mistake."

"I think if you want to write better, you must have enough vocabulary and be good at grammar."

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the important information collected from the English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University, it could be concluded that the common errors the students often made were vocabulary and grammar errors. Besides, the influence of mother tongue was also a problem for some students. Therefore, the researcher would like to suggest some solutions for teaching and learning. For teaching, teachers need to help students in learning and point out

errors in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure in students' writing and for students to correct. The content of the lesson is very important, so teachers need to teach slowly and regularly give exercises so that students have the opportunity to have more exposure to writing to avoid making basic errors. Besides, teachers need to support students in theory so that students have a solid background knowledge to help their writing become better. For learning, to practice writing English, students need to understand sentence structures and common tenses to avoid making basic errors when writing. To practice writing English well requires you to master sentence grammar and good vocabulary and use words in the right context. And students have to write many different essays on many different topics to improve their writing skills. So you should read many books and listen to many videos about writing skills to improve your writing skills.

6. REFERENCES

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