

# **The interference of the mother tongue in the writing skills of the grade 10 students at Tinh Gia 2 upper secondary school \ Ảnh hưởng của tiếng mẹ đói với kỹ năng viết của học sinh lớp 10 tại Trường THPT Tinh Gia 2. M.A Thesis Linguistics: \ Hà Văn Minh**

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## ABSTRACT

The second language (L2) learners' native language has made its permanent home in their mind, resulting in the negative transfer to the learners' own language to the target language (TL).

This study aims at investigating writing grammatical errors that students at Tinh Gia 2 Upper Secondary School (TG2USS) often commit, carefully identifying one of the causes (Mother tongue (MT) interference) of the errors that the students often make and working out suitable adjustments on writing teaching strategies at TG2USS.

The tests of 182 grade 10 students at TG2USS were studied as sources for collecting interference errors. Through the qualitative analyzed data, the findings clarified the five most frequent grammatical errors committed by the students and indicated that the MT interferes with the students' errors more than other causes. Based on the findings, recommendations for dealing with the first language (L1) interference and for enhancing the teaching of EFL writing were put forward. The conclusion supported the systematicity of Vietnamese transfer in English writing paragraphs or essays of students in non-native speaking environment and summarized the possible measures to reduce this interference phenomenon.

## **PART A: INTRODUCTION**

### **1. Rationale for the study**

Writing is seen as one of the most difficult and complex language skill because it requires widely perception and needs good understanding on grammar and structures.

Writing is often required and evaluated as a part of the total assessment of tests in two terms of the academic year of upper secondary school. But there is a fact that students usually have a lot of difficulties in expressing their ideas in their English writing. They often have habit of translating their L1 into the TL. These problems cause a lot of grammatical errors in students' writing works. In other words, the students negatively transfer features of L1 into the TL, and consequently they may encounter difficulties in learning English.

The better understanding of students' errors in EFL writing will help the students recognize the negative effects of the MT interference in L2 acquisition and then avoid errors. It will also help students improve their accurate and fluent writing and their English learning in the future.

All the above-mentioned reasons have inspired the researcher to carry out this study

### **2. Aims of the study**

This study is primarily targeted at helping to improve the grade 10 students' writing skills by reducing the negative interference of the L1 (Vietnamese) on their writing. To achieve this aim, the researcher attempts:

- To find out the most frequent L1 interference errors students committed when doing paragraph writing.
- To identify causes of the students' writing errors – the interference of the L1.
- To give practical recommendations.

### **3. Research questions of the study**

1. *How much does L1 interfere with the students' writing?*
2. *What are the most common L1- related grammatical errors committed by the students in their writing?*

#### **4. Scope of the study**

The study was carried out with 182 grade 10 students of TG2USS in their second term, the academic year 2010-2011. The study only centred on the L1- related grammatical errors committed by students in their final writing test papers and based on the analysis of their writing papers, some suggested solutions were provided.

#### **5. Significance of the study**

The study attempts to bring about some benefits theoretically and practically to the readers and researchers, especially to the secondary school teachers of English.

In terms of theoretical benefits, the study could provide the information on the students' errors in paragraph writing in teaching and learning process.

In terms of practical benefits, the researcher hopes that the study could be the references for teachers of English and the readers as well.

- The result of this study could provide the information and evaluation for the students' knowledge of grammar, so they would avoid the same errors next time.
- It would be useful for the teachers to improve the students' writing skills.

#### **6. Organization of the study**

The study consists of three parts: introduction, development with three chapters and conclusion.

**Part A, INTRODUCTION** presents an overview of the study with the rationale, aims, the research questions and scope of the study. Besides, the significance of the study and organization of the study are presented.

**Part B, DEVELOPMENT** includes three chapters:

Chapter 1 presents literature review relevant to the study.

Chapter 2 consists of research questions, participants of the study, data collection instruments and procedures of data collection.

Chapter 3 displays the major findings of the error analysis and discussions from the collected data analysis. It also provides some suggestions for further teaching

strategies. **Part C: CONCLUSION** presents a summary of the study. It also provides some limitations of the study and suggestions for further study

The **REFERENCES** and **APPENDIXES** are at the end to the study.

## **PART B: DEVELOPMENT**

### **CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **1.1. Written language versus spoken language**

#### **1.2. The interference of L1 in L2**

#### **1.3. Error in foreign language learning process**

##### **1.3.1. Definition of error**

##### **1.3.2. Errors and mistakes**

##### **1.3.3. Classification of errors**

According to James (1998:129), errors can be classified based on three criteria: modality, medium and level. There are three levels of language errors: substance, text and discourse.

Regarding writing errors, according to James (1998:130), only misspelling (substance errors), lexico-grammar (text errors) and inappropriate coherence (discourse errors) are involved. However, due to the limited time and the purpose of the study, misspellings (substance errors) and inappropriate coherence (discourse errors) will not be discussed in this study.

**Text errors:** consists of lexical errors and grammar errors. However, only grammar errors will be discussed in the study.

#### **Grammar errors**

##### **(i) Morphology**

##### **(ii) Syntax errors:** Clause errors, Sentence errors, Intersentence errors (Cohesion)

#### **1.4. Contrastive analysis**

#### **1.5. Error analysis**

### **1.5.1. Concepts of error analysis**

### **1.5.2. Procedures in analyzing errors**

- (i) Collection of a sample of learner language.**
- (ii) Error Identification**
- (iii) Description of errors.**
- (iv) Error Explanation (Tracing errors to their sources).**

## **CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research questions of the study**

- 1) How much does L1 interfere with students' errors?*
- 2) What are the most common L1- related grammatical errors committed by the students in their writing?*

### **2.2. Participants of the study**

The study was carried out with 182 grade 10 students of Tinh Gia 2 Upper Secondary School in their second term, the academic year 2010-2011.

### **2.3. Data collection instruments**

The final test paper is one research instrument.

#### **2.3.1. Introduction to a test in general and description of the final test used in the study**

The final test chosen in this study was a final test of the academic year 2010-2011.

This test was based on the goals of the new English textbook “Tiếng Anh 10”( the standard set) by Hoang Van Van, et. al. The test consisted of four parts: Listening, reading and Language use were ignored because the L1- related grammatical errors in writing paragraph are investigated in this study as the researcher stated in the introduction.

#### **2.3.2. Procedures of data collection**

The procedures of data collection from the test in this study were conducted in accordance with the key procedures of error analysis presented in chapter 1, section 1.5.2.

### **2.4. Coding the writings.**

## CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1. Data analysis and discussion

#### 3.1.1. Data analysis and discussion on the errors from the test papers

##### 3.1.1.1. Identification of errors

##### 3.1.1.2. Description and discussion on the five most frequent types of errors

The table below shows the results of the error classification obtained from the test papers, which illustrate the number of errors and the kinds of errors the students committed in their final test.

Error Types		Error frequency/ No. of errors	Error rate (%)
1	Verbs	685	32.3%
2	Nouns	302	14.2%
3	Lexical errors	280	13.2%
4	Word order	247	11.7%
5	Misspellings	197	9.3%
6	Articles	179	8.4%
7	Preposition	110	5.2%
8	Adverbs	54	2.6%
9	Adjectives	30	1.4%
10	Conjunctions	22	1.0%
11	Pronouns	14	0.7%
<b>Total</b>		2120	100%

Table . Total number of errors from the test papers

Note: *Error rate or percentage of each error = number of errors of each categories/ total number of errors of all categories x 100%.*

Due to the limited time and the aims of the study, the analysis on five typical grammatical error categories will be focused on.

### 3.1.2. Discussion and explanation on the grammatical errors

Both the interlingual (MT) and intralingual transfers are the main possible causes of all errors found in the test papers. Causes of intralingual transfer were not discussed in the study. However, how much MT (Vietnamese) interference in the students' grammatical errors is shown in the table below.

Error categories		Number of errors				
		Error frequency	MT interference		Intralingual interference	
			No	%	No	%
1	Verbs	685	395	24.0	290	17.7
2	Nouns	302	168	10.2	134	8.2
3	Word order	247	247	15.0	0	0
4	Articles	179	84	5.1	95	5.8
5	Preposition	110	53	3.2	57	3.5
6	Adverbs	54	38	2.3	16	1.0
7	Adjectives	30	18	1.1	12	0.7
8	Conjunctions	22	10	0.6	12	0.7
9	Pronouns	14	6	0.4	8	0.5
<b>Total</b>		1643	1019	61.9	624	38.1

Table . Number of grammatical errors from the test papers

(Note: % = number of errors in each cause / total number of grammatical errors )

The above result showed that students at TG2USS had a lot of MT interference with verb use whereas not very much with pronouns.

### 3.2. Major findings

#### 3.2.1. Major findings on how much mother tongue interference in students' errors

Interlingual and intralingual transfers are no doubt to have the greatest effect on error-making.

The difference between English and Vietnamese is seen as one the most influential factors in interlingual transfer. Students at TG2USS like other students at other schools in Thanh Hoa as well as in Vietnam, may often transfer English words into Vietnamese to find equivalents. Consequently, they make errors unconsciously.

From 1643 grammatical errors, Vietnamese language influenced 1019 errors, accounting for 61.9 %. This rate is higher than the one caused by intralingual transfer (624 errors with 38.1%). Of grammatical errors caused by the MT interference, verb errors make students embarrassed the most. 395 errors of this kind with 24.0 % were found in the test papers. The reveal of the cause of errors relating to the use of L1 may help students avoid re-making these errors.

In addition, many intralingual errors are traceable to overgeneration, incomplete application of rules and ignorance of rule restriction. These kinds of errors may be overcome by practising and doing exercises repeatedly.

### **3.2.2. Major findings on the most frequent grammatical errors**

The study yielded a corpus of 2120 errors from four classes (10C1, 10C6, 10C7 and 10 C11) consisting of 182 students. Lexical errors and misspelling errors were not discussed in the study because they did not belong to grammatical errors. Of grammatical errors, verb errors accounted for 32.3% (685 errors), - noun errors 14.2% (302 errors), - word order errors 11.7% (247 errors), - article errors 8.4% (179 errors), - prepositional errors 5.2% (110 errors). The above mentioned errors are the five most frequent grammatical error categories in the test papers.

As usual, learners of English often commit more grammatical errors than lexical ones. And it is not an exception for our students. The result of this study have proved that grammatical points should be considered as language focus together with vocabulary.

### **3.3. Suggestions for further teaching strategies.**

Through this study, a considerable number of errors made by TG2USS students are proved to be the result of their attempt to apply Vietnamese language rules to the English system. From these findings, the researcher suggests some strategies as: Teachers' identifying students' learning difficulties, reducing the negative interference of the MT, dealing with L1 interference errors, encouraging students to use English.

## **PART C: CONCLUSION**

### **1. Conclusion**

This study has covered three parts of a full analysis of errors committed by students at Tinh Gia 2 Upper Secondary School. The study is carried out on various theoretical bases of EA and CA. The models for EA by Corder (1974) and James (1998) are applied in this study; especially, the error classification model by James helps the researcher much in identifying and classifying. Theories of the explanation of errors at the end of chapter 1 lay a foundation on the researcher's statement about the possible causes of errors in the following chapter. The analysis of the test papers has provided some suggestions

Verb errors, noun errors, word order errors, article errors and prepositional errors are the five most frequent grammatical errors in students' writing.

Although the students are often reminded of correctness, appearance of MT interference errors in students' written English is frequent and systematic. This may be taken as a proof of the negative effect of MT interference in foreign language learning process.

This study reveals that various errors made by the students and ranks the most frequent error category, which can serve as an indication for teachers to better understand what errors their students could make and provide suitable instructions thereby. The study proves the great significance to EA as it helps teachers understand more about students' errors and the difficulties they are encountering to get over these errors.

While it is impossible to remove interference errors from the Vietnamese learners' English writing, it is quite logical to think that errors of this source will quantitatively be decreased with the increase of the learners' mastery of the TL. The teacher of EFL writing should, therefore, expose students to lots of real or authentic writing, explain carefully the meanings and usage of new words

and structures, and also teach them the target cultures. To deal with interference errors, the teacher has to adopt the comparative techniques (L1-L2) and provide reinforcement exercises of various types.

By creating a “natural” language teaching environment, the communicative language teaching together with the use of pair work and group work can help promote an effective process of learning the English language, particularly written English.

## **2. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further studies**

Due to the limited time as well as the scope of the study, this study has not covered all errors found in the test papers and every aspect of Vietnamese interference in the English language. In addition, this study just concentrates on words and sentence structures. Hence, more research needs implementing on the organization of ideas. Motivation, language proficiency or gender of the learners may also be used to find out the relationship between errors and their influential factors. Lexical errors and misspelling should be analyzed in detail to have better explanation for the cause.

Moreover, the emphasis of the researcher’s study is on the interference of the L1, which hinders the L2 learning. What is the role of the MT in L2 acquisition? This question may suggest a research topic of great interest.