

Negative transfer of mother tongue to English writing among English Language Teaching students in Vietnam

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Abstract- This paper examined the negative transfer of the mother tongue to English writing, it focused specifically on Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing among third-year students majoring in English Language Teaching (hereafter called ELT students) at The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam (UD-UFLS). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through questionnaires and students' written pieces. The questionnaire explored the ELT students' perceptions of Vietnamese negative transfer and the factors contributing to negative transfer errors in their English writing. Also, the study analyzed the written pieces to identify common errors in lexis, syntax, and discourse. The findings highlighted syntactic interference as the most persistent issue among the three types of errors. Besides, the questionnaire results indicated that although most ELT students were aware of "Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing" and had methods to correct errors, they still struggled with errors. The factors leading to these errors included Vietnamese interference, language differences, limited English competence, and the lack of English environment. Understanding the negative transfer of the mother tongue to English writing can assist students in reducing errors, and the author also suggested solutions to mitigate negative effects of the problems detected.

Index Terms- Negative transfer, mother tongue, English writing, perceptions, errors.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mastering a foreign language is advantageous in the context of globalization and international integration since it enables individuals to communicate, exchange information, and learn from one another all over the world. While there are more than 7,100 languages spoken worldwide, English is recognized as an international language that facilitates communication among people from different regions, and writing is one of the most important means of communication. Therefore, English writing is an important skill to develop. Many learners take courses to improve their English skills, but the negative transfer from their native language often affects their ability to write effectively in English. In the process of learning English writing, learners may rely on their native language as a way of acquiring knowledge and expressing their ideas. However, researches have shown that the strong influence of the national language can hinder the learning of English (Stapa & Abdul Majid, 2006).

According to a study conducted by Khoi (2022), many Vietnamese students are struggling with English writing. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) report (2019) also revealed that Vietnamese candidates had the lowest average band score in writing, with errors in coherence, cohesion, grammar, and lexical choices. One of the major factors leading to these errors is mother tongue interference because students tend to translate from Vietnamese into English (Hoa, 2018). Many students at UD-UFLS have learnt and practised English for a long time, but numerous errors related to mother tongue's negative transfer are still detected in their writing.

With the desire to discover the negative transfer of Vietnamese to English writing and to find out solutions to deal with the problems revealed, the study entitled: "Negative transfer of mother tongue to English writing among English Language Teaching students in Vietnam" was implemented.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies related to the research topic

There have been many published works, studies and journals on negative transfer so far. Lado (1957), Fries (1965) and Ellis (1985), Sajavaara (1986), Jarvis (2000), Odlin (2001), Gass and Selinker (2001), Yang and Zhang (2007) shared the same findings when pointing out that the influence of mother tongue or negative transfer in the process of learning foreign languages is one of the main causes of errors. However, these studies mostly focused on identifying language transfer rather than specifically studying the factors affecting that transfer as well as learners' perceptions of these negative effects. When studying written errors in postgraduate students' compositions, Duskova (1969, p.18) reached the conclusion that "interference from the mother tongue was plainly obvious in errors of word order and sentence construction". Duskov also mentioned that a common example of errors is the placement of a direct object after an adverbial. Krashen (1983) attributed learners' recourse to native language to their lack of particular features in second language, which sometimes leads to the wrong use of language. Krashen also explained that people transferred their thoughts to another language by first expressing ideas in their mother tongue and then translating them into the target language word by word. The above researches affirmed the negative impacts of native language on second language acquisition, but the focuses of these studies were the grammatical points and the medium - mother tongue that learners apply to learn a second language.

The researchers have not gone into comprehensively the underlying causes of negative mother tongue transfer that affects second language acquisition.

Several studies have been conducted in Vietnam on the negative transfer from Vietnamese to written English. Vinh (2000) conducted a survey on Vietnamese learners in a communication course and found that they faced difficulties with negative sentences in English, such as negative word position, negation in requests, and negative implications. The author attributed this to the negative transfer from the learners' mother tongue to English which resulted in unnatural or inaccurate sentences. Mai (2001) focused on identifying the interference errors in such aspects as morphology, semantics, and syntax. However, the study did not analyze students' complete writings but only looked into the level of each individual sentence. Also, the researcher did not investigate the students' perceptions of this issue. Moreover, Ngoc (2009) investigated Vietnamese negative transfer to English passive voice. The author collected data from students' writing in passive voice lessons without informing them beforehand to ensure the reliability of the research. The findings indicated that the differences in the types of languages between Vietnamese (an isolating language) and English (an integrated language) were the main causes of negative transfer errors. Viewing negative transfer in terms of quantities, Le (2017) suggested that Vietnamese students made errors related to the use of plural and singular nouns, articles, and countable and uncountable nouns, because of the differences between the two languages when in Vietnamese, even if a noun is countable or uncountable, it can still be used with quantifying adjectives such as "các, những" (những con vật, những đồ nội thất, các đồ trang sức,...) to express the plural meanings. However, in English, there are some uncountable and irregular nouns which cannot be made plural by adding the suffix "s". In addition, Nghi (2021) studied negative transfer in the use of prepositions by English learners. They found that common errors included prepositions of position, movement, direction, and time. Uyen, Hang and Linh (2022) randomly selected 75 English major students to complete a short writing test and interviewed 20 of them for more detailed information. The study found that the students made negative transfer errors related to grammar and lexicon.

In brief, those studies of Vietnamese negative transfer to English only discussed one particular area of English, but did not concentrate on the Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing in detail within the scope of complete pieces of writing to find out negative transfer error types. ELT students' perceptions of this issue and factors leading to negative transfer errors have also received limited attention. Therefore, this study was an attempt to discover the above-mentioned aspects still unsolved, specifically at UD-UFLS.

Theoretical background

Language transfer

Odlin's definition of transfer is the one that is most frequently used. In his definition, "Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired." (2001, p.134). Yang and Zhang (2007) had another way to call language transfer, mother tongue transfer since they found out that it is the influence from a mother tongue on foreign language and second language acquisition.

In this study, language transfer is considered as the influence from a mother tongue on foreign language acquisition due to the similarities and differences between two languages.

Language transfer as behavioral repertoire

In the field of second language learning, language transfer is cited as "behavioral repertoire" (Fries, 1945 & Lado, 1957) because they assumed that learners have an usual tendency to apply the characteristics of their native language and cultures to another language that they are pursuing. Having the same finding, Corder (1973) also referred "language transfer" to a rise in "behavioral repertoire", a maintained habit of applying what has been learned from one language to another.

Language transfer as advantage and disadvantage

Smith and Kellerman (1986), Faerch and Kasper (1987), Odlin (1989), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) defined language transfer as the process of using prior linguistic or language skills to assist in comprehension or production. Language transfer can have positive or negative impacts on second language acquisition. Positive transfer occurs when both the native language and the target language share similar forms and negative transfer refers to the use of a language pattern or a rule that do not have in the target language, which leads to negative transfer errors.

Negative mother tongue transfer to English writing of Vietnamese students and ELT students

From the working definition above, it can be seen that the negative transfer occurs when the use of a native form produces an error in the speech or writing of a second or a foreign language. For instance, a non-native learner of English writes the sentence "She *tell a story". The sentence should be written as "She tells a story", this error may be the result of negative transfer from his mother tongue to English. Another specific example can be seen in the ways Vietnamese students write English in the following sentences taken from their writings. (The sentence marked (+) is considered naturally accepted and grammatically corrected while the (-) sentence is unnatural or incorrect. Also, the symbol "*" is used to mark errors).

In Vietnamese: *Dẫu* tôi không có nhiều tiền, *nhưng* tôi vẫn mua 1 chiếc điện thoại mới. (+)

In English: *Although* I don't have much money, **but* I still buy a new phone. (-)

Although I don't have much money, I still buy a new phone. (+)

I don't have much money, *but* I still buy a new phone. (+)

It is evident that the first sentence in English cannot be accepted due to using "although" and "but" at the same time in one sentence. In contrast, the structure "*Dẫu* (although) ... *nhưng* (but)" is acceptable in Vietnamese. Hence, the sentence "*Although* I don't have much money, **but* I still buy a new phone" is considered to be wrong in English, but it can be accepted in Vietnamese. The error can result from the first language's negative transfer to another language or more specifically, Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing.

As mentioned above, language transfer can be positive or negative in the learner's second language acquisition process. However, negative sides have gained much more attention from methodologists and teachers until now because it is one of the main causes leading to the inefficiency of English writing and difficulties in approaching and using language.

The errors in writing can be identified at students' different levels. In reality, ELT students have more opportunities to practise writing English, but they cannot avoid making errors. In their writings, students frequently use word-by-word translation to transfer expressions from their native language to English or utilize their own ways to express their thoughts. As a result, those can lead to errors.

Also, the third year is a significant time period when students have gained various necessary skills to apply in writing and this is also the time they have to prepare for the final year with a lot of English writing products such as essays, graduation papers, scientific research reports, etc. Detecting errors caused by negative transfer is of great significance because this can benefit students in terms of reducing errors in English writing, lessening academic pressure as well as improving the quality of English learning.

Concepts of some linguistic aspects

Lexis is defined as "all the words and phrases of a particular language" (Hornby, 2003, p.739). From these definitions, we can conclude that the term "lexis" designates the complete set of all possible words and phrases in a language.

Syntax is the study of the arrangement and relationships between linguistic forms in a language which includes how words and phrases are organized to form sentences (Yule, 1997). From the definition, syntax can be seen as the way words and phrases are put together according to certain structures to form sentences in a language.

According to Brown and Yule (1983) and Cook (1989), discourse is language in use. Candlin (1989) claimed that discourse involves the structures, logical development, and ranges of linguistic resources that make a writing coherent. Furthermore, sentences in writings need to be related to one another in both ideas and functions. In this study, discourse is described as the use of language in writing in order to produce meaning.

Error analysis

Since the 1960s, the Error Analysis (EA) has developed and shown that the influence of mother tongue on student writing is very complex. James (2001) described this method as an approach used to identify errors that have been ignored by students when learning a second language. Jie (2008) also supported the effectiveness of this method in analyzing errors caused by native language influences. It can be seen that this method not only helps researchers realize the effects of their mother tongue when learning a second language, but also helps learners understand the causes of errors, systematize error types and know how to correct them. Thus, EA was resorted to the current study as one of the main research methods.

Error analysis theory

Lexical errors

This study applied the error taxonomy by James (1998) to analyse some common lexical errors made by the Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing. Two main types of lexical errors are formal and semantic features.

- Formal error: James (1998) classified formal errors into three types: formal misselection, misformations, and distortions. The subtypes and examples for each type are stated below:

+ Formal misselection: formal misselection errors are "synforms". Synforms are words having some similar phonemes/graphemes which can lead to errors because of visual and sound similarity. The four major types of these synforms are: the suffix type (Eg. competition/competitiveness), the prefix type (Eg. reserve/ preserve), the vowel-based type (Eg. seat/sit), the consonant-based type (Eg. save/safe).

+ Misformations: these are words that are non-existent in the target language (TL). These errors can originate in the learner's first language (L1) (James, 1998). Thus, they are "intralingual errors." James classified misformation errors into three types: borrowing (L1 words are used in the TL without change), coinage (i.e. a word is invented from L1 by tailoring to the TL's structure), calque (i.e. translation of a word or a phrase from L1 words).

+ Distortions: distortion errors are those with wrong order of letters, redundancy of letters, wrong letters in a word or the unnecessary combination of two words having the same meaning. James divided distortions into five types: omission (interesting instead of interested), overinclusion (dinning room instead of dining room), misselection (spacitouse instead of spacious), misordering (wrong ordering of letters within a word), blending (for example, "*according to her opinion", which arises when two alternative grammatical forms are combined to produce an ungrammatical blend. In this case, "according to her" or "in her opinion" are enough).

- Semantic errors: James highlighted two types of semantic errors: confusion of sense relations and collocation errors.

+ Confusion of sense relations are ones occurring in three situations. Firstly, a general term is used for a specific one and in linguistics, this can be called "superonym for hyponym". For example, instead of using "This flower has a special scent", the sentence is incorrectly written as "This flower has a special *smell". Another case in point is that when the correct sentence is "Economic development has made the country great", some learners write the sentence as "Economic development has made the country *big". The words "smell" and "big" in the two aforementioned examples are too general to be given in the sentences where there is a need for more specific words to clarify the sentences. Secondly, too specific terms are used, this is also called "hyponym for superonym". For instance, there is no need to utilize the word "colonels" in the sentence "The *colonels live in the barrack square", the sentence can be written as "The officers live in the barrack square". Finally, utilizing an incorrect near-synonym from a list of possible ones is another error type of confusion of sense relations. An example is using "a *regretful criminal" instead of "a contrite criminal".

+ Collocational errors are the wrong combination of words. The problem is not which word can substitute for a word, but which word precedes or follows a word. James (1998) classified three collocation's degrees. Firstly, semantically determined word

selection, for example, it is right to say “crooked road” but not “crooked thought” because “thought” cannot be literally crooked. The second one is statistically weighted preferences. It can be said that “The country has suffered a big loss because of the pandemic”, but “The country has suffered a heavy loss because of the pandemic” is preferred. The last one is arbitrary combinations, for example, “have a try” and “make an attempt”. Notwithstanding the synonyms “try” and “attempt”, it is wrong to say “*make a try” or “*have an attempt”. Furthermore, irreversible binomials such as rain “cats and dogs” (not “*dogs and cats”) or “black and white” (not “*white and black”) also belong there.

Syntactic errors

The study utilized Kroes’s error taxonomy (1990) in order to analyse some common errors related to syntax made by the negative transfer of Vietnamese to English writing. Kroes classified syntactic errors into eight types which are errors in number of nouns, the use of articles, verb tenses, the use of verbs, sentence formation, word orders, the use of pronouns and the use of prepositions. They are described as follows:

- Errors in the number of nouns: errors occur when writers use singular or plural forms incorrectly, thereby not matching the intended meaning or the sentence grammar. For instance, a writer make an error by not adding “s/es” to a countable noun to show the plural form (many *flower). Conversely, errors can also occur when writers add “s/es” to an uncountable noun to indicate the plural form (*furnitures).
- Errors in the use of articles: errors occur when there is an article (a, an, the) to be missing in a sentence or clause where there is a need, or the wrong use of the articles “a, an, the” or “no article” (for example, “*a sky” instead of “the sky” or “*the freedom” instead of “freedom”).
- Errors in verb tenses: errors in verb tense occur when there is inconsistent verb usage.
- Other errors in the use of verbs: In addition to “verb tenses” errors, errors can also include other types such as concord (guests *is coming), wrong modal verb (if you *will be cautious enough, you can make it), wrong form after modal verb (He could *stayed here), omission of verb (the homework *also be given), omission of auxiliary verb, wrong form of auxiliary or wrong form after auxiliary verb (She *not likes it), wrong form of infinitive, to infinitive or gerund.
- Errors in sentence formation: errors refer to kinds of grammatically structural errors (reported speech, conditional sentences, passive voice, etc).
- Errors in word orders: errors occur when there is the misordering of words (“a *book cooking” instead of “a cooking book”).
- Errors in the use of pronouns: the wrong use of a word to replace with the name of a person, place, thing or feeling that are already mentioned before, namely, he, she, it, its, they, we, you or the wrong use of relative pronouns are viewed as errors in the use of pronouns.
- Errors in the use of prepositions: errors regarding prepositions are made when there are differences between native language and target language. Therefore, in the writing process, students tend to transfer their use of mother tongue’s preposition to foreign language’s ones. For example, students may use “The family members are discussing *about the problem”.

Discoursal errors

In order to analyse some common errors related to discourse made by the negative transfer of Vietnamese to English writing, the study inherits from the error taxonomy of James (1998). Within discourse level, James classified three different sources leading to discoursal errors including cohesion and coherence, pragmatic and receptive errors.

- Cohesion: Cohesion errors occur when there is a lack of internal clues on how the components of a text are connected together. Cohesion errors are cited as wrong use of all the lexical and grammatical connections that connect one section of a text to another. Most of the cohesion errors involve the “reference” and “conjunctive” types. Regarding “reference”, here is an example, “He passed the exam. *It made his parents happy”. The “it” is a misselection, where “this” is called for. In terms of “conjunctive types”, they can be divided into seven functional subtypes: listing (firstly, to start with, secondly, next, then, likewise, moreover, last of all, etc), summative (in conclusion, therefore, thus, overall, etc), appositive (for example, for instance, such as, specifically, that is to say, etc), resultative (because, since, accordingly, as a consequence, etc), inferential (otherwise, then, etc), contrastive (on the other hand, better still, in other words, anyhow, etc), transitional (meanwhile, incidentally, etc).
- Coherence: Coherence is related primarily to content. Underlying conceptual relationships are much focused. Coherence errors occur when there is breakdown in semantic meaning of the text or the relation between meanings and ideas are not in a sequence. There are three kinds of coherence according to James (1998), topical coherence (the requirement that a text’s elements relate to its general topic or goal. The text loses coherence when there are irrelevant propositions or moves), relational coherence (the demand that the ideas in a discourse are connected to one another, they can be evidence of A, effects of B, examples of C, aspects of D, exceptions to E, oppositions or contrasts to F, etc), sequential coherence (to maximize its communicative dynamism, a text should unveil its information in a stepwise manner: new information should be unpacked in the context of what is already familiar, the result being a chain of given => new => given => new, and so on). In short, when a text is not clear or its content is confusing, there will be coherence errors.
- Pragmatic errors: According to James (1998), pragmatic errors are ones in language usage and they originate in culture-clashes or cultural differences of view concerning what is appropriate social (and sociolinguistic) behaviour in certain settings. Pragmatic errors can be classified into three different categories consisting of taboos, size of the imposition, power and social distance. They are described as follows:
 - + Taboos: These are topics that are “off limits” or offensive in some cultures but not (or to a different degree) in others. Familiar examples are unmentionables like sex, defecation, cancer, AIDS, etc.

+ Size of imposition: This category includes errors occurring when writers use speech acts inappropriately. Speech acts comprise things like requests, apologies, compliments, or refusals. Examples include using an overly direct or impolite request or failing to recognize and respond appropriately to speech acts from others.

+ Power and social distance: power and social distance errors are those occurring when there is a socially inappropriate use of forms of an address, title, or pronoun. For example, if someone addresses a professor by their first name instead of using the appropriate title "Professor," they make a power and social distance error. Another example is in Portugal, where all teachers, from primary to university, are addressed in the full title "Doutor" ("Doctor" in English), even the abbreviation "dr" will give offence. Additionally, using overly formal language in informal letters such as letters to friends and family members can also lead to errors.

- Receptive errors: Receptive errors are those occurring when writers unintentionally use ambiguous language, or provide incomplete information. As a result, receptive errors hinder the recipients' ability to comprehend and interpret the intended message. In addition, receptive errors also occur when writers misinterpret the writing task, resulting in a response that does not address the specific requirements or fails to focus on the given topic. Last but not least, receptive errors can also be wordy ones. When a piece of writing is excessively wordy, it can make the text more difficult to understand and comprehend for the readers because excessive use of unnecessary words or phrases can lead to confusion and lack of clarity.

III. METHODOLOGY

To fulfill the aims of the study, the study has tried to answer the following research questions:

1. What are ELT students' perceptions of Vietnamese negative transfer in English writing?
2. What are ELT students' common types of errors caused by Vietnamese negative transfer in their English writing?
3. What are the factors leading to ELT students' errors of Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing?

The participants of the study were 46 ELT students. English was their first foreign language. Their writings were collected for gathering data.

Error samples were detected in the process of analysing ELT students' writings. The writer read and analysed all the writings carefully. Each phrase, sentence or paragraph including errors was a sample for analysing.

The descriptive method and the error analysis (EA) were the two main methods used in this research.

The study utilised the quantitative approach to summarize data and the qualitative approach to make generalization about data's characteristics. In terms of the quantitative approach, to achieve a better understanding of students' perceptions of Vietnamese negative transfer and a panorama of the correlation between the mother tongue and English writing as well as factors leading to errors in ELT students' writings, the writer employed a questionnaire adapted from Zahra Akbari (2016) and Cailing (2017). Applying the bright points related to students' perceptions of English learning problems as well as native language transfer in English writing of the two questionnaires developed by these two researchers, the writer made some appropriate modifications to form the questionnaire that suited the research purposes. This questionnaire included 5 sets of inquiries for this study. The first set (statements 1 and 2) aimed to investigate whether students knew the notion of "Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing". The second one (statements 3 to 5) hoped to know from which sources students knew "Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing". The third one (statements from 6 to 10) was created to determine the factor leading to negative transfer errors, specifically, students' use of Vietnamese in English writing. The fourth one (statement 11 to 16) wished to find out other factors leading students to make errors caused by Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing. The fifth set (statements 17 to 20) discovered the methods students applied to avoid errors. The questionnaires were distributed to ELT students and then were regained for collecting and analysing data. As for the qualitative approach, ELT students' writings were collected and qualitatively analyzed to find errors. That was, writings were read carefully and double-checked to detect errors based on the provided error analysis theories of Kroes (1990) and James (1998). In the next step, the errors were grouped into different groups and then demonstrated in tables and figures. The final step was that the conclusions of the errors were drawn and discussed.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing through students' writings

The analysis showed that there were 323 errors in 146 pieces of writing collected from ELT students in which there were 14 most common errors that students often made in English writing due to the influence of mother language. They were the number of noun, blending, confusion of sense relation, collocation, article, usage of tense, missing verb "to be" ("to be" deletion), verb form, sentence formation, word order, preposition, cohesion and coherence, pragmatic and receptive errors. Such errors were classified and discussed in three aspects: lexical, syntactic and discoursal errors.

Lexical errors

Typical errors that could be found in 146 pieces of writing about lexis included blending, confusion of sense and collocation errors. The total of these errors was 51 (out of 323 errors of three error groups including lexical, syntactic and discoursal errors), the number of errors of each type would be cited as follows:

In terms of blending (9 errors), this phenomenon occurred when students used unnecessary words. For instance, while the right sentence is "She shows me the paragraph including all the necessary information needed for an interview", one student wrote "She shows me the paragraph including *with all the necessary information needed for an interview". In this case, "including" was enough, there was no need to add "with" after "including", adding "with" made the sentence wrong. In another example, one student wrote "I plan to *go to visit my grandparents this weekend", "go to" is unnecessary in this sentence, "visit my parents" is enough. To explain this type of error, the author referred to Tony (2013) claiming that some people could encounter errors because they thought in Vietnamese and then translated into English. As a result, in these cases, when students wanted to express the idea "gồm với" in which "gồm" is "include" and "với" is "with", they tended to put the two words together to form the phrase "include with" which was considered wrong in English. In terms of "go to visit", in Vietnamese, this phrase could be "đi đến thăm" in which "đi"

is “go”, “đến” is “to” and “thăm” is “visit”, so students tended to write the sentence as “I plan to *go to visit my grandparents this weekend”. To conclude, in some English cases, only one word can be enough to express ideas, but due to the habit of translating from Vietnamese to English, students made errors regarding using redundant words or using unnecessary words.

With regard to confusion of sense relations (23 errors), as mentioned in the section *Lexical errors*, errors of confusion of sense relations occurred when students utilized an incorrect near-synonym from a list of possible ones. This happened because, in Vietnamese, there are many words that can be used interchangeably, but when converted to English, each word has a different meaning. This was also proven when Tan (2021) drew a conclusion in the research “Synonyms in English and common errors made by non-specialist students” conducted through interviews. His conclusion was that the majority of students, when interviewed, thought that synonyms in English could be used interchangeably in many contexts, just like the way they used synonyms in Vietnamese. They simply translated the words from Vietnamese into English and then put them together. They could not distinguish the differences between the English words within a group of synonyms, as well as their nuances of meaning. Therefore, they could not use the correct words in different contexts or combinations. In this research, after analysing the errors caused by Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing, the author could detect some errors. For example, when describing the “impulsive actions” in the sentence “Anger can lead to some impulsive actions which we may regret later”, one student wrote “*aroused actions” instead of “impulsive actions”. This was because, in Vietnamese “aroused” and “impulsive” can have the same meanings of “bộc phát”, “thôi thúc”, “nhất thời” or “gọi lên tức thì”. However, in contrast, each word has a different meaning in different English contexts and cannot be used interchangeably. Specifically, according to *Cambridge dictionary*, while “impulsive” means “showing behaviour in which you do things suddenly without any planning and without considering the effects they may have”, “aroused” means “being influenced by someone or something, usually used when describing someone feeling excited”. The errors occurred when the chosen words were not suitable for the English contexts. In this case, “aroused” was not suitable. More examples were “the *raise in sale” for “the rise in sale” (in this case, “rise” and “raise” have the same meaning in Vietnamese, “tăng lên”, but “rise” is used more often than “raise” when mentioning an increase in something in English), “I plan to *take research on the local cuisine that has been rated as a must-try there” for “I plan to discover the local cuisine that has been rated as a must-try there” (in this case, “take research on” and “discover” have the same meaning as “khám phá” in Vietnamese, but “take research on” is more used in researches and “discover” refers to trying something new in daily life in English), “Yesterday, I got an A *level on the mid-term test” for “Yesterday, I got an A score on the mid-term test” (in this case, “score” is more used than “level” when mentioning the grade that teachers mark students based on a test although both of these two words shared the Vietnamese meanings of “điểm” or “cấp”).

As for collocation (19 errors), collocational errors occur when there is a wrong combination of words in a phrase (James, 1998). The problem is not which word can substitute a specific word, but which word has to precede or follow a word. During the process of analysing errors of collocations, the author detected 19 errors and the typical ones were “*extend apology” for “express apology”, “job *happiness” for “job satisfaction”, “*attack the problem” for “deal with/ tackle/ solve the problem”, “*do an attempt” for “make an attempt”, “they *met difficulties” for “they encountered/experienced/faced difficulties”, “*drink medicine” for “take medicine”, “*forgot my book at home” for “left my book at home”. To explain the cause of this type of error, the author suggested that it was caused by students tending to translate each word from Vietnamese into English and then put them together without realizing that there are fixed phrases in English in which specific words have to go together. This explanation was plausible when Nguyen (2021) also shared the same point of view. Nguyen concluded in her research named “The influence of the native language in learning a foreign language” that errors in collocation occurred when there was an inappropriate combination of words. Specifically, when dealing with a string of words, learners tended to look for the equivalent Vietnamese word for each individual word in the string, translate them into English, and then put them together. This led to non-standard expressions in the target language.

Syntactic errors

Students often made errors in the number of nouns, articles, verb tenses, lack of “to be” (“to be” deletion), verb forms, sentence formation, word orders, prepositions. The total of these errors was 223 (out of 323 errors of three error groups including lexical, syntactic and discoursal errors), the number of errors of each type would be cited as follows:

Regarding the number of nouns (37 errors), ELT students often made errors of adding s/es to show the plural meaning of nouns which do not have plural forms in English. For example, in one piece of writing, one student wrote “I’m writing to ask for some useful *advices about the problem I’m having with my mother”, but the right way to write this was “I’m writing to ask for some useful advice about the problem I’m having with my mother”. In other cases, some students wrote “on my last birthday, my sister gave me some *jewelleries” for “on my last birthday, my sister gave me some jewellery”, “Can you recommend me some place of *interests to go on my vacation?” instead of “Can you recommend me some places of interest to go on my vacation?”, “If you want to get more *informations about myself, don’t hesitate to contact me via my phone number” for “If you want to get more information about myself, don’t hesitate to contact me via my phone number”, “The *feedbacks can help students realise what they need to improve” for “The feedback can help students realise what they need to improve”, “*Policemans play a vital role in ensuring the security of the local citizens” for “Policemen play a vital role in ensuring the security of the local citizens”, “My *foots were bleeding” for “My feet were bleeding”, etc. In these cases, the words “advice”, “interest”, “information”, “evidence”, “feedback” are uncountable nouns and “policeman” and “foot” are irregular nouns that require a specific vowel change to become plural nouns such as “feet” and “policemen”. These words cannot be made plural by adding the suffix “s”. Errors regarding the number of nouns occurred because of the dissimilarities between Vietnamese and English and this was also affirmed in the research named “Vietnamese negative transfer to numbers of nouns in English” by Le (2017). Le asserted that unlike in English, in Vietnamese, grammatical classification is performed by adding words (for example, the word “những” in “những bông hoa” instead of adding the suffix “s” as in English to express the plural meaning “flowers”). As a result, when learning English, Vietnamese students tended to add the suffix “s” to nouns to indicate the plural forms. However, this application is not always appropriate because there

are differences between the two languages in some cases. Specifically, in Vietnamese, even if a noun is countable or uncountable, it can still be used with quantifying adjectives such as “các, những” (những con vật, những đồ nội thất, các đồ trang sức,...) to express the plural meanings. However, in English, there are some uncountable and irregular nouns, which cannot be made plural by adding the suffix “s” (Le, 2017).

As regards articles (41 errors), in Vietnamese, there is no concept of articles (Duong, 2021). Meanwhile, in English, there are 3 articles (a/an/the) divided into two types which are definite articles (the) and indefinite articles (a/an) with many rules. Therefore, students often used the wrong articles or lacked articles in necessary situations. Students often made article errors when forgetting to add articles to nouns. Additionally, using the article “the”, “a” or “an” with general comments or general and abstract concepts was also one kind of error that students made. For instance, when mentioning “car” for the first time, they forgot to add “a” to form “a car” or with the abstract word “love”, instead of writing “I know that love is something that everyone wants to have”, one student wrote “I know that *the love is something that everyone wants to have”.

Concerning verb tenses (54 errors), verb tense was considered, for the most part, the thing that hindered students from having a good piece of writing because of the dense frequency of occurrence (54 errors out of 223 syntactic errors). During the process of analysing data, it could be found that errors regarding verb tenses appeared in almost every piece of writing. Students made errors in most of the tenses, especially the number of errors related to past simple and present perfect accounted for the largest percentage of the total errors in tenses (29%). This happened because of the fact that English is divided into three main tenses: present, past and future. The present tense is divided into 4 minor tenses including present simple, present continuous, present perfect, and present perfect continuous. The past tense is divided into 4 minor tenses including the past simple, the past continuous, the past perfect, and the past perfect continuous. The future tense is divided into 4 minor tenses including future simple, future continuous, future perfect, and future perfect continuous. In Vietnamese, the concept of conjugation does not always exist. Listeners or readers can also understand the timeline through the context rather than the grammar of the verbs. For example, when describing the action of “doing a test” in the past, in English, the correct sentence is “I did homework yesterday”, but in Vietnamese, the word “did” - “đã” does not have to be used. Lam (2019) also claimed that “đã” is considered as an isolated component that is added to, interspersed with the utterance. The removal of “đã” does not affect the message or the content of the sentence. Therefore, the sentence can be in two ways which are “Tôi đã làm bài tập hôm qua” or “Tôi làm bài tập hôm qua”. In the former, when translating word-for-word into English, students may write correctly as “I *did* homework yesterday”. However, in the latter, the listener or reader can implicitly understand that the action is in the past based on the word “hôm qua” without the need for “đã”. As a result, in this case, one ELT student forgot to put the word “do” in the simple past tense, leading to the wrong sentence “I *do homework yesterday”. It can be inferred that errors of verb tenses occurred due to the conjugational differences in the two languages when the verb tense in English is mandatory, Vietnamese people typically understand the situations thanks to word mentioning the time or the context without having to use verb tenses all the time (Jack, 2010).

For lack of verb “to be” (23 errors), according Nguyen (2021), the verb “to be” is frequently used in English, often in conjunction with adjectives to describe the characteristics of an object, an event, or a person. Although Vietnamese also has a corresponding form of “be” in the word “là”, in Vietnamese usage, the word “là” is often omitted when describing characteristics or traits. For example, the sentence “Anh ta khá thẳng thắn” in which “Anh ta” means “He”, “khá” means “quite” and “thẳng thắn” means “straightforward”. When translating from Vietnamese into English, some students tended to forget the verb “be” and combine words to form the sentence “He *quite straightforward”. However, the correct English sentence was “He is quite straightforward”. For this study, in 146 students’ pieces of writing, there were about 23 errors of missing the verb “to be”, most of them were “to be” used before adjectives to describe the nature of things and events. For example, one student wrote “the event *so exciting that everyone feels satisfied” instead of “the event is so exciting that everyone feels satisfied”.

In terms of verb forms (13 errors), “people may want *get promoted” for “people may want to get promoted” or “My parents allowed me *go camping this morning” for “My parents allowed me to go camping this morning” or “*Apply for the job helps me gain much experience” for “Applying for the job helps me gain much experience” or “*Live independently without parental support can help outstation students become more mature” for “Living independently without parental support can help outstation students become more mature” were typical errors showing that students made errors with words in the form of gerund, and infinitive with or without “to”. In these examples, the verbs needed more attention. Specifically, “get promoted” needed to be converted into “to get promoted” because it followed the word “want”. Similarly, the right structures for “allow” are “allow someone to do something”, “allow something” or “Subject + be + allowed + to do something”, so “go camping” needed to be changed into “to go camping” due to the structure “allow + someone + to infinitive”. “Apply” and “live” needed to be changed into “applying” and “living” respectively when standing at the beginning of the sentence and playing the role of subjects. That errors of verb forms occurred can be explained by Nhung (2019) that verbs in English are influenced by many factors around them, such as the subjects, words mentioning time, other verbs preceding them or the position of the verbs. However, the form of verbs in Vietnamese always remains the same and Vietnamese words do not need to change morphemes. This is because Vietnamese words do not depend on the surrounding factors. In addition, in Vietnamese (an isolating language), there is no concept of “infinitive” or “gerund”. Words are just put together; however, when learning English (an integrated language), students have to pay attention to the use of infinitive and gerund so as to produce correct sentences (Nhung, 2019).

Regarding the sentence formation errors (17 errors), students made this kind of error with a low frequency. However, the error types that appeared most often were those in the passive sentences. For errors of the passive voice, because of the differences in Vietnamese and English, errors occurred. Specifically, in Vietnamese, when students want to express the idea that someone or something is affected by others, the idea will be presented in the form “Ai đó, người nào đó + bị / được + ...”. Meanwhile, in English, the passive sentence is in the form of “S + be + Ved / Verb past participle + ...”. Regarding these two structures, “be” in the English structure can be translated into Vietnamese as “bị” or “được”. Nevertheless, in English, only transitive verbs (which are mandatory verbs followed by an object) can be changed into the passive. In contrast, intransitive verbs (without an object) are used only in the

active form (Hagen, 2017). Students often made errors related to changing the intransitive into the passive form, for example, “my car *was broken down on the way home” to express the idea of “my car broke down on the way home”, or used “the delivery *was arrived” instead of “the delivery arrived” or “the festival *was taken place” instead of “the festival took place”. In these cases, “break down”, “arrive” and “take place” are intransitive verbs, which cannot be turned into passive forms. Apart from the errors of using intransitive verbs in the passive form, the students also made errors of adding “ed” after the verb following “to be”. This happened because of the difference between Vietnamese and English language types. While Vietnamese only needs to put words together to form meaning, English requires learners to change the morphemes to use the right form of words and verbs in sentences (Nhưng, 2019).

With regard to word orders (7 errors), it could be seen from the students’ writings that the influence of word orders in Vietnamese was also reflected in the order of adjectives and adverbs when ELT students wrote English although the frequency of these errors was very low. This was caused because the positions of adverbs and adjective phrases in Vietnamese are constructed differently from those in English. In Vietnamese, most adjectives come after the noun it modifies, while the English structure is opposite that adjectives are used before nouns in noun phrases (Ho, 2003 & Diep, 2005). This error type occurred in ELT students pieces of writing and one example of this was the phrase “*book cook”. In Vietnamese, the book about cooking recipes is called “sách nấu ăn” in which “sách” means “book” and “nấu ăn” means “cook” and when translating into English word by word, students made the wrong phrase “*book cook” while the right one is “cooking book”.

In terms of the prepositional error (31 errors), this error type was made because students paid little attention to the differences between the two languages. In 146 pieces of writing, ELT students made different errors. Firstly, they often used unnecessary prepositions. This is because in English, there are a number of verbs that do not need to be accompanied by prepositions (Minh, 2014). Some common errors were detected from the students’ writings were “people married *with the person having a different nationality” for “people married the person having a different nationality” or “contact *with the customers” for “contact the customers”. In these cases, students were affected by the way they used Vietnamese to translate into English. Specifically, in Vietnamese, there is the word “với” which has the similar meaning with the prepositions “with” in some cases (Minh, 2014). When they wanted to express the ideas “kết hôn với” and “liên lạc với” in which “kết hôn” means “marry”, “liên lạc” means “contact” and “với” means “with”, they were prone to write the phrases as “marry *with” and “contact *with”. However, in fact, the words “marry” and “contact” should be followed by direct objects in English, not by the preposition “with”, this was why errors occurred. Errors in using other prepositions could also be found and examples for the errors that the author detected were “people should discuss *about the matter” for “people should discuss the matter”, “reach *to the destinations” for “reach the destinations”, etc. Similarly, in these examples, students often added prepositions to verbs while they were unnecessary. According to Minh (2014), that students made errors of the preposition “about” resulted from the fact that in Vietnamese, there is the word “về” which is similar to the preposition “about” when mentioning the thing that everyone gets involved. For example, when they want to express “lo lắng về” in which “lo lắng” and “về” can be translated into English as “worry” and “about” respectively. Students can easily combine the words “worry” and “about” to form a phrase “worry about it”. Some students apply the same way to other situations. However, it is not always right. The Vietnamese sentence “Người ta nên bàn luận về vấn đề này” in which “người ta” means “people”, “nên bàn luận” means “should discuss”, “về” means “about” and “vấn đề này” means “the matter” can be translated word-by-word into English as “people should discuss *about the matter”. Nevertheless, the right English sentence is “people should discuss the matter” without “about” after “discuss”. The word “discuss” should be followed by a direct object in English. With the error “reach *to the destinations”, some students perceived the word “to” in English as “đến” in Vietnamese, but in fact, only the word “reach” was enough, there was no need to add “to”. The word “reach” should be followed by a direct object in English. Secondly, about omitting prepositions, the author detected some errors such as “young people should *care their health” for “young people should care about their health”, “the kids having disobedient behaviours usually *shout others when they feel uncomfortable” for “the kids having disobedient behaviours usually shout at others when they feel uncomfortable”, “in my opinion, the fact that people *apply another job has many benefits” for “in my opinion, the fact that people apply for another job has many benefits” or “the problems which they *tell are very difficult” for “the problems which they tell about are very difficult”, etc. In these cases, the presence of the prepositions is required in English, but students ignored it because in Vietnamese grammar, the presence of these prepositions is sometimes unnecessary (Minh, 2014). Thirdly, there were errors related to the confusion between conjunctions and prepositions. Examples of this were when students wrote “Your son left my bag *besides the entrance” instead of “Your son left my bag beside the entrance”, or “I have worked *like a tutor for 3 years” instead of “I have worked as a tutor for 3 years”. In these cases, students made errors regarding “besides” and “beside”, “as” and “like” in which “besides” is used as an adverb to mean “in addition”, while “beside” is used as a preposition to mean “next to” although both of these words have the meaning of “bên cạnh” in Vietnamese. Similarly, “like” and “as” can be translated into Vietnamese as “như”. However, “like” indicates the equal comparison whereas “as” indicates the nature of the matter. These cases of confusion showed that the difference between conjunctions and prepositions in English was more difficult to distinguish than in Vietnamese because it was related to the structure, and the difference in typology also led to this phenomenon. Students were prone to make errors because when they translated a phrase or a sentence from Vietnamese to English, they thought that two words with the same meaning in Vietnamese could be used interchangeably in all cases in English (Minh, 2014).

Discoursal errors

Students often made cohesion and coherence, pragmatic and receptive errors. The total of these errors was 49 (out of 323 errors of three error groups including lexical, syntactic and discoursal errors), the number of errors of each type would be cited as follows: As for cohesion and coherence errors (13 errors), according to the provided error analysis theories in Chapter 2, errors of this type can be made as a result of the inconsistency of meanings and ideas in the same piece of writing or the wrong use of lexical and grammatical connections that connect one section of a text to another. Through the process of analysing students’ writings, the

author found that most errors caused by Vietnamese negative transfer occurred in some structures or conjunctions to connect clauses and ideas such as “Although S + V, *but S + V” instead of “Although S + V, S + V” or “S + V, but S + V”, “Because S + V, *so S + V” for “Because S + V, S + V” or “S + V, so S + V”. Regarding the factors leading to this type of error, Trang (2011) asserted that in Vietnamese, “mặc dù” or “tuy” convey the same meaning as “although” in English and often appear with the word “nhưng” - “but”. This indicates the Vietnamese concessive structure, for example, the sentence “*Mặc dù cô ấy bị ốm, nhưng cô ấy làm rất việc chăm chỉ*”. Additionally, the word “bởi vì” having the same meaning as “because” is often used together with “nên” - “so” to indicate the causal relationship in Vietnamese, for instance, “*Bởi vì cô ấy tốt bụng, nên nhiều người thích cô ấy*”. It can be seen that in Vietnamese, for complex sentences, it is often necessary to use two conjunctions to link two clauses together. In English, however, using one conjunction is enough to express the same idea. If “although” is used in a sentence, there is no need for “but”. Similarly, if “because” is used, there is no need for “so”, and vice versa. Consequently, the right English sentences are “*Although she is ill, she works very hard*” or “*She is ill, but she works very hard*” and “*Because she is kind-hearted, many people like her*” or “*She is kind-hearted, so many people like her*”. It could be obvious that in many cases, the difference in how sentences are structured in the two languages is often the cause of errors when students translate sentence structures from Vietnamese to English. In other cases, students even used “At the same time” instead of “On the other hand” to express the contrasting ideas. The main reason was that they tended to translate from Vietnamese to English and ignored the rules of linking in sentences. For instance, when expressing a contrasting idea on a specific phenomenon, one student wrote “At the same time, advocates of this tendency argue that...” instead of “On the other hand, advocates of this tendency argue that...” because they thought in Vietnamese that “*Cùng lúc đó thì những người ủng hộ xu hướng này lại tranh luận rằng*”.

Apropos of pragmatic errors, ELT students made errors with a low frequency, power and social distance errors are the most common ones that students made (17 errors). In the writings, some students have made their writing too formal when they wrote informal letters, on the contrary, some used non-formal words in the formal writing such as essays or formal letters. For example, one student made error of greeting in a formal letter when writing “Dear professor *Mary”. In fact, when addressing someone with her title to express the respect, full name must be given (Ngoc, 2016). Another error occurred when ending an informal letter sent to a friend, one student wrote a formal phrase “Best regards,” instead of informal languages such as “Love,” or “Your friend,”.

Regarding receptive errors (19 errors), through the process of analysing students’ writings, the author detected some receptive errors regarding wordiness and one example of this was “Well, the sightseeings are breathtaking: from the crystal-clear sea, the soothing waterfalls, magnificent mountain ranges to the mystery historical sites, etc, all of them are insanely beautiful and make me feel that they’re worth visiting because of their breathtaking views.”. This was the sentence that one ELT student wrote and the sentence was seen as a wordy one. In this case, the student just needed to write as “Well, the sightseeings are breathtaking ranging from the crystal-clear sea, the soothing waterfalls, magnificent mountain ranges to the mystery historical sites, etc”. This was because, at the beginning of the sentence, the student already mentioned that “the sightseeings are breathtaking”, there was no need to add extra information such as “all of them are insanely beautiful and make me feel that they’re worth visiting because of their breathtaking views.” at the end of the sentence since it repeated the same meaning as “the sightseeings are breathtaking”. To explain this error type, the author referred to Van’s affirmation (2019) that due to limited vocabulary and insufficient knowledge of English culture, students tend to translate word-for-word from Vietnamese to English instead of using English sentence structures in writing. Additionally, in Vietnamese, many students often write in a lengthy manner to express ideas or to add extra information with the aim of expanding the sentence so that they can meet the requirements of the required number of words in writing tasks. This sometimes results in wordy writing. However, in English, writing should be clear and the application of English sentence structures is necessary. Translating directly from Vietnamese to English can sometimes lead to wordy writing, which sounds unnatural.

ELT students’ perceptions of Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing

Understanding of the notion “Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing”

In the process of learning a foreign language, making errors is inevitable. However, whether learners realize it or not was still something that the author wanted to know, therefore, statement 1 “I know what “Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing” means” and statement 2 “I know what “negative influences of mother tongue on English writing” means” in the questionnaire were aimed to investigate students’ perceptions of Vietnamese negative transfer in English writing. The results were clarified according to the statistics described in the following Figures.

Figure 1 I know what “Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing” means

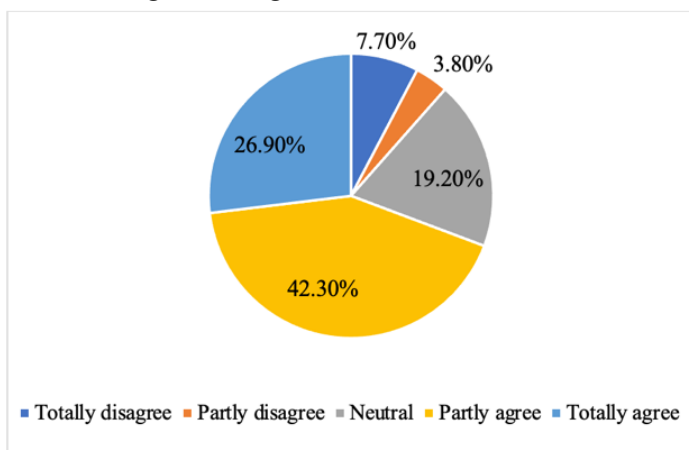
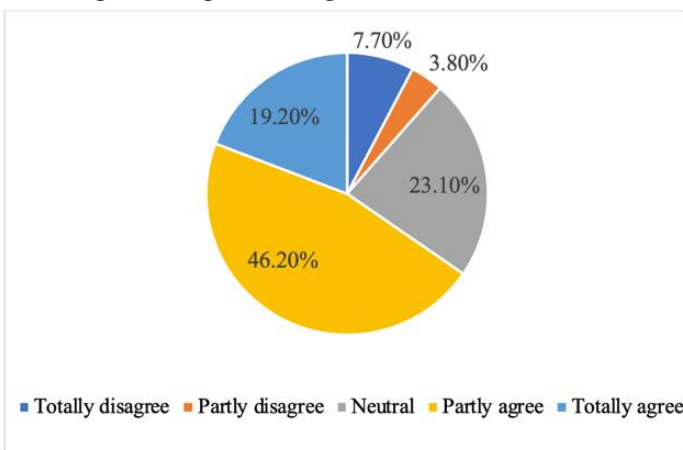


Figure 2 I know what “negative influences of mother tongue on English writing” means



The number of questionnaires distributed and then collected was 46, which corresponded to 46 informants. For the first statement “I know what Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing means” illustrated in Figure 1, up to 42.3% of the total chose “partly agree” and 26.9% for “totally agree”. The figures for “neutral”, “partly disagree” and “totally disagree” were 19.2%, 3.8% and 7.7% respectively.

As can be seen in Figure 2, 46.2% was the total percentage of students choosing “partly agree”, while many students totally agreed on this statement, which accounted for 19.2%. The proportion of students choosing neutral ideas was 23.1%, which was significantly higher than that of those choosing “totally disagree”, with 7.7%. A mere 3.8% was recorded in the rate for “partly disagree”.

In general, most ELT students knew the concept of “Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing”. This was clearly shown by the percentages for the answers “partly agree” and “totally agree”, which were much higher than the ones for “neutral”, “partly disagree” and “totally disagree”.

Sources for students’ understanding of “Negative influence of mother tongue to English writing”

In order to know more about from which source of information, students became aware of “Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing”, the author designed a set of 3 statements (statement 3, statement 4, statement5) in the questionnaire to find out the answer. The results were clarified according to the statistics described in the following Table.

Table 1 Sources for students’ understanding of “Negative transfer of mother tongue to English writing”

Statements	Participants’ responses				
	Totally disagree	Partly disagree	Neutral	Partly agree	Totally agree
3. My teacher helped me to know	23.5%	7.7%	26.9%	15.4%	26.5%
4. My friend helped me to know	10.8%	12.7%	46.9	21.9%	7.7%
5. I knew it myself by looking for information about it	7.7%	3.8%	26.9%	38.5%	23.1%

As revealed in Table 1, the percentage of students who totally agreed on the statement 3 “My teacher helped me to know” was 26.5% as compared to 15.4% of students opting for “partly agree”. The sum of these two ratios was 41.9% showing that many students knew the concept of Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing thanks to their teachers. However, the combined figure for “totally disagree” and “partly disagree” was 31.2% which indicated that many students did not have the chance to get to know this concept through their teachers.

The percentages for ELT students’ responses to the statement 4 were also recorded in Table 1 in which not many students responded that they knew this concept through their friends, with 21.9% for “partly agree” and 7.7% for “totally agree” and up to 46.9% chose “neutral”.

Most ELT students knew the concept of “Negative influences of mother tongue to English writing” through self-study. This was shown by 38.5% for the percentage of students who partly agreed on the statement 5 and a relatively large proportion of 23.1% for students who totally agreed.

On the whole, the majority of ELT students learned the concept of “Negative influences of mother tongue to English writing” by themselves. Knowing through their friends is not common. Most notably, the percentage of students who agreed that they knew this concept through their teachers was quite low.

Factors leading to ELT students’ errors of Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing

The use of Vietnamese in English writing

To find out how ELT students used Vietnamese in their English writing as well as the aspects that Vietnamese influenced the English writing process of ELT students, the writer used a set of 4 statements (statement 6, statement 7, statement 8, statement 9)

named “The use of Vietnamese in English writing”. The results were clarified according to the statistics described in the following Table.

Table 2 *The use of Vietnamese in English writing*

Statements	Participants' responses				
	Totally disagree	Partly disagree	Neutral	Partly agree	Totally agree
6. I read the requirements in English and then translate into Vietnamese for better understanding	7.7%	6.4%	23.1%	30.8%	32.1%
7. I use Vietnamese to make an outline for writing	6.7%	25.9%	30.8%	16.4%	20.2%
8. I use Vietnamese to adjust English sentences and paragraphs when writing	15.4%	11.5%	38.5%	11.5%	23.1%
9. After finishing writing, I translate what I have written into Vietnamese to check the content	7.7%	15.4%	23.1%	30.8%	23.1%

The influence of Vietnamese on students' English writing was clear through the statistics shown in Table 2. Accordingly, for the statement 6, up to 30.8% of the total number of participants partly agreed and up to 32.1% chose “totally agree”. It could be inferred that many participants tended to use Vietnamese to assist them in understanding the requirements of the writing task.

Although the percentage of ELT students partly agreeing on the statement 7 “I use Vietnamese to make an outline for writing” was only 16.4% and the figure for “totally agree” was 20.2%, these ratios pointed out that more than one third of all ELT students utilized Vietnamese as a tool for them to make an outline for writing.

According to the statement 8, the proportion for the participants selecting “partly agree” was 11.5%. The figure for those selecting “totally agree” was 23.1%, which was much higher than that of “totally disagree” and “partly disagree” with 15.4% and 11.5% respectively. This referred to the fact that students often used Vietnamese to adjust English sentences and paragraphs.

Based on the statistics shown for the responses to the statement 9, after finishing writing, students translated what I had written into Vietnamese to check the content. To be more specific, when small percentages of students totally disagreeing and partly disagreeing with this checking way were recorded (7.7% and 15.4% respectively), the stark opposite pattern could be seen in the proportions for students choosing “partly agree” and “totally agree”, which were 30.8% and 23.1% respectively. As a result, it can be drawn that there were many students who have translated what they have written into Vietnamese to check their content after completing writing.

As a whole, it was obvious that in three stages of the writing process which were preparation for writing, writing and checking writing, many students turned to Vietnamese as a way to help them understand the requirements of the writing, make an outline, adjust sentences and paragraphs and then check the content. That is, Vietnamese had a great influence on the way students wrote English.

Other factors leading to Vietnamese negative transfer errors in English writing

To investigate other factors leading to Vietnamese negative transfer errors in English writing, the writer used a set of 6 statements (statement 10, statement 11, statement 12, statement 13, statement 14, statement 15) named “other factors leading to Vietnamese negative transfer errors in English writing”. The results were clarified according to the statistics described in the following Figure.

Figure 3 The number of ELT students choosing different factors leading to negative transfer errors in English writing

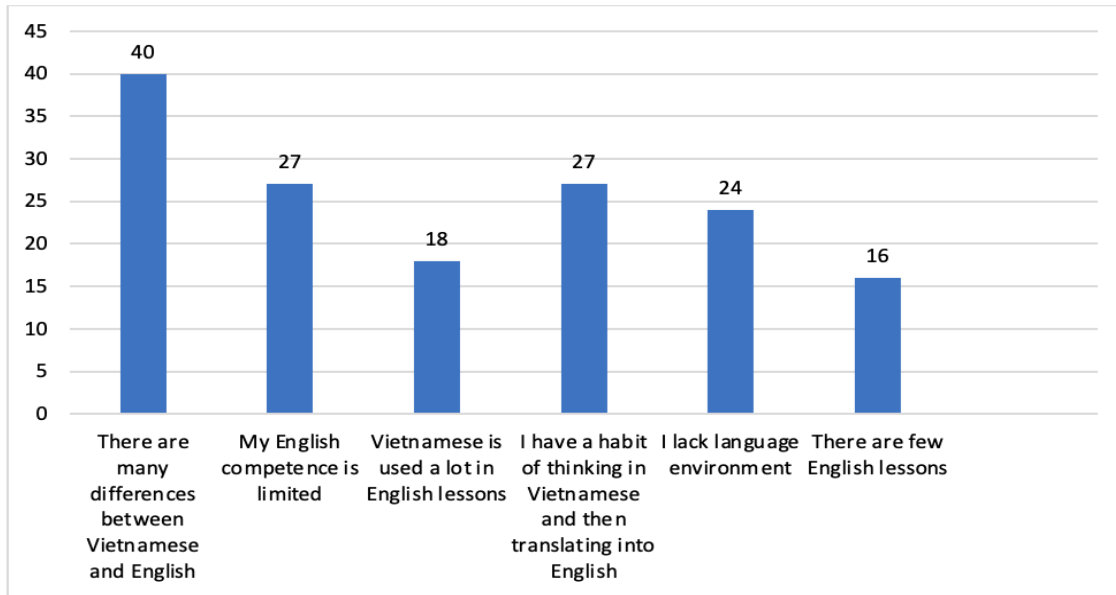


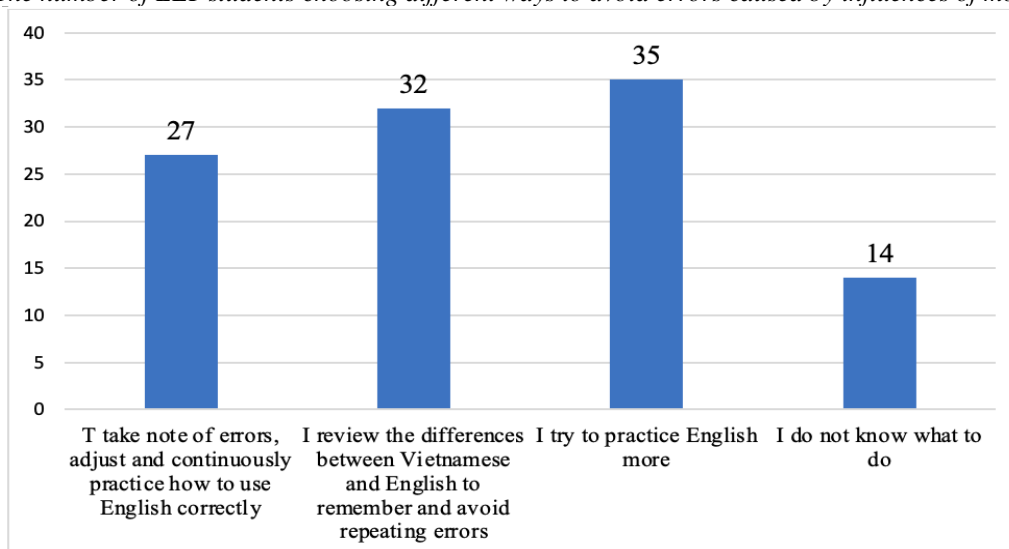
Figure 3 shows the number of ELT students choosing different factors leading to negative transfer errors in English writing (students can choose many choices at the same time). Overall, it could be said that “There are many differences between Vietnamese and English”, “My English competence is limited” and “I have a habit of thinking in Vietnamese and then translating into English” were the three most common factors that students perceived as the culprits leading to their errors in English writing. Specifically, the number of ELT students showing agreement on the factor “There are many differences between Vietnamese and English” was the highest with 40 students followed by the figure for “My English competence is limited” and “I have a habit of thinking in Vietnamese and then translating into English” with 27 students. Other causes, though less common, are also worth noting. 24 participants thought that the factor causing them to make errors related to Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing was because they lacked an English environment. Some students attributed their errors to these two factors: “Vietnamese is used a lot in English lessons” and “There are few English lessons”. The former was chosen by 18 students, which was slightly higher than the number of the students selecting the latter (16 students).

When knowing the causes of the errors, what methods did the students apply to avoid repeating Vietnamese negative transfer errors? Set 5 was designed to find the answer to this question (some ways students have applied to avoid errors related to Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing) and the following section cited this matter.

Ways to avoid errors caused by influences of mother tongue

Set 5 in the questionnaire with 4 statements (statement 16 to 19) was designed to find out the ways that ELT students applied to help them avoid repeating errors related to Vietnamese negative transfer. The results were clarified according to the statistics described in the following Figure.

Figure 4 The number of ELT students choosing different ways to avoid errors caused by influences of mother tongue



According to Figure 4, many ELT students found the ways that were suitable for them to avoid repeating errors of Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing. The majority of ELT students tried to practice English more (35 out of 46 students chose this way). The second most popular method used by ELT students was reviewing the differences between Vietnamese and English to remember and avoid repeating errors, which was selected by 32 students. 27 selections were recorded for the choice of taking note

of errors, adjusting and continuously practicing how to use English correctly, which was not a minimal number. There were 14 ELT students answering that they did not know what to do with these errors. Although 14 was the smallest number among the figures for four options, it was still worth noting. This was because it revealed that there were still students not having had suitable methods to tackle the problems they were facing when writing English. Some solutions should be proposed to help students improve their English writing skills.

Discussions

The results from the analysis of ELT students' writings and questionnaires were discussed in this section.

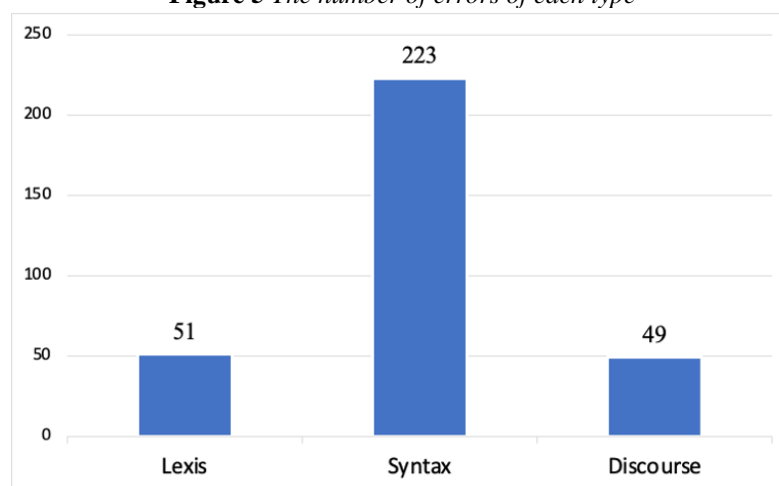
The aim of this study was to find out some common types of errors made by ELT students due to negative transfer in English writing. Also, the research hoped to understand the ELT students' perceptions of Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing. In addition to this, some factors leading to errors in English writing were also investigated. The aims of the study were described in the research questions which are:

- (1). What are ELT students' perceptions of Vietnamese negative transfer in English writing?
- (2). What are ELT students' common types of errors caused by Vietnamese negative transfer in their English writing?
- (3). What are the factors leading to ELT students' errors of Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing?

For the first question (1), "What are ELT students' perceptions of Vietnamese negative transfer in English writing?", in general, most ELT students knew the concept of "Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing" and knew the effects of Vietnamese negative transfer into English writing. However, the way they knew it was to find out more on their own rather than having the teacher help them realize it.

As for the second questions (2), "What are ELT students' common types of errors caused by Vietnamese negative transfer in their English writing?", based on the results analyzed in *Results* section, it could be seen that there were 14 most common errors that students often made in English writing due to the influence of mother language. The 14 most common errors caused by Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing were number of noun, blending, confusion of sense, collocation, article, usage of tense, missing verb "to be" ("to be" deletion), verb form, sentence formation, word order, preposition, cohesion and coherence, pragmatic and receptive errors. Such errors were classified and discussed in three types: lexis, syntax and discourse. The number of errors of each type was illustrated in the Figure below:

Figure 5 The number of errors of each type



Based on Figure 5 illustrating the number of errors of each type, it could be seen that among the three types of errors related to Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing, syntactic interference, in which there were many grammatical errors, seemed to be the most common problem. This was obvious when the number of syntactic errors was the largest with 223 errors, as compared to 51 errors of lexis and 49 ones of discourse.

In terms of the third question (3), "What are the factors leading to ELT students' errors of Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing?", according to statistics shown in *Results* section, students tended to use Vietnamese to serve their English writing. They made use of Vietnamese to understand the requirements of writing tasks, make an outline, adjust their writing and double check after finishing writing. The use of English in stages of processing a piece of writing sometimes led to errors related to "Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing" because according to the students themselves, there are so many differences between Vietnamese and English, but their English language ability was limited, it was inevitable to make errors. In addition, the excessive use of Vietnamese in writing stages also affected students' English writing because they had a habit of thinking in Vietnamese and then translating what they thought to write English, but between the two languages, there are not always similarities in semantics in each context, so it is easy to make errors. Moreover, students also admitted that they did not have many opportunities to use English in the learning environment, leading to the use of Vietnamese without being aware of the differences between the two languages. This was proven in the selecting rates of statement 14, 15 when the numbers of students in favor of "I lack a language environment" and "There are few English lessons" were quite high. Many students also realized that using Vietnamese in English writing caused errors in many cases, so they found ways to improve this. They applied a variety of ways to correct errors. However, even though they had applied many different methods such as taking note of errors, adjusting, reviewing errors as well as practicing English more, they still inevitably made errors in English because of "Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing". There were

even some ELT students who did not know the right way to help them improve. Therefore, there should be some solutions to be supposed to help the students improve their English writing skills.

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study focused on some types of errors resulting from negative transfer of mother tongue to English writing. In addition, it also investigated the ELT students' perceptions of negative transfer of mother tongue to English writing. With these focuses, the study could detect errors and find some other factors making students make negative transfer errors to help ELT students better their English writing skills. It is hoped that this study might not only help ELT students know more about the influences of mother tongue on English writing to avoid making errors in English writing, but also assist educators in knowing more about their students' difficulties and finding more suitable methods to help students improve their English writing skills. As a result, some methods to avoid negative transfer errors were also included in the following *Implications*.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

Implications for teachers

Since writing skills are of great importance in gaining competence in English, teachers should provide ELT students with more opportunities to practice writing. However, before getting students to write a task, teachers should help ELT students to get as much exposure to English as possible so that they can be familiar with English and then practice with confidence. To do this, teachers should speak in English all the time in class and hold more activities that help students to take an active role in English classrooms as well as form the habit of using English in various communicative situations.

In addition, before writing, teachers should provide ELT students with vocabulary related to the topic, and at the same time integrate English - Vietnamese contrastive analysis in the lecture, then design related exercises to help students understand the differences between the two languages to avoid making errors related to "Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing", especially syntactic errors. This is because, according to the analyzed findings, the syntactic errors are the most common errors that ELT students make and the students need to improve their knowledge more. Besides, errors regarding lexis and discourse are also significant. For the errors of lexis, during the learning process, teachers should analyze vocabulary as well as give examples in contexts for students to know the appropriate level of each word in each different context. Moreover, collocations by topics should also be added to the lessons to help students know some fixed phrases in English and use them correctly, which can improve students' writing skills. Regarding discourse, teachers should spend time guiding students on how to write effectively and use conjunctions to connect sentences and change ideas. Teachers can also correct some samples in writing lessons for the students to learn and avoid errors.

Furthermore, some other effective solutions to limit Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing from this study include: guiding ELT students the correct use of English dictionaries to help them know the vocabulary in context. What is more, a writing lesson should have 3 stages including pre-, while-, and post-writing stages. The first stage is to equip students with relevant knowledge, the second stage is to observe the ways students process writing to propose timely advice and guidance. The last one is to correct errors and draw some experience to avoid repeating errors. Last but not least, there needs to be close coordination between teachers and students as well as close cooperation among teachers who are involved in teaching English at the university to be able to implement effective steps with the hope to overcome this situation.

Implications for students

ELT students should spend more time improving vocabulary by topics, however, in the learning process, students should pay more attention to vocabulary in contexts so that they can use vocabulary for each topic more appropriately.

To improve syntactic errors, ELT students should devote their time to find out the differences of each structure in English and Vietnamese to avoid making errors caused by negative transfer. Students should also read and learn from standard sample writing to know how to write effectively, avoid lengthy expressions which can confuse readers. Above all, students should look for opportunities to access real-life language. Learning a lot but not applying what they have learned into the real contexts will also hinder students' use of English. In addition, with the advent of advanced technology, students should make the most use of social media platforms to access communication channels with native speakers for applying vocabulary in contexts. As a result, ELT students' English competence can be improved substantially.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is carried out as a part of my graduation paper at The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

I am conducting a questionnaire on *Negative transfer of mother tongue to English writing among English language teaching students at UD-UFLS*. To help me complete my research, I hope that you will answer this questionnaire seriously and honestly because the results of the study will be based on your answers. I hope you can take a moment of your precious time to help me successfully complete my graduation thesis.

I hereby declare that your answers will be used solely for my research purposes. All the information will be kept confidential. To complete the items in this questionnaire, I would like to instruct you as follows: Each statement will have 5 different levels of agreement, in which, if you completely agree, put a tick in the first column (1), partly agree, tick (2), neutral, tick (3), partly disagree, tick (4), completely disagree, tick (5).

Thank you for your contribution!

Order	Set	Statement	Totally disagree	Partly disagree	Neutral	Partly agree	Totally agree
			1	2	3	4	5
1.	Understanding of the notion	I know what "Vietnamese negative transfer to English writing" means.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.		I know what "Negative influences of mother tongue on English writing" means.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	Sources to understand "Negative influences of mother tongue on English writing"	My teacher helped me to know.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.		My friend helped me to know.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.		I knew it myself by looking for information about it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.	Factor leading to negative transfer errors: The use of Vietnamese in English writing	I read the requirements in English and then translate into Vietnamese for better understanding.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.		I use Vietnamese to make an outline for writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8.		I use Vietnamese to adjust English sentences and paragraphs when writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9.		After finishing writing, I translate what I have written into Vietnamese to check the content.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10.	Other factors leading to negative transfer errors in English writing	There are many differences between Vietnamese and English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11.		My English competence is limited.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12.		Vietnamese is used a lot in English lessons.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13.		I have a habit of thinking in Vietnamese and then translating into English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14.		I lack a language environment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15.		There are few English lessons.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16.	Ways to avoid errors caused by influences of mother tongue	I take note of errors, adjust and continuously practice how to use English correctly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17.		I review the differences between Vietnamese and English to remember and avoid repeating errors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18.		I try to practice writing English more.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19.		I do not know what to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>