

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam



Nguyen Vy Ngoc<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Thi Hanh Phuc<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dai Nam University, Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam

**ABSTRACT:** The current research paper was carried out at a university in Hanoi, Vietnam in order to investigate the effects of misconceptions between Vietnamese syntactic concepts and those in English on writing performance. The design of the study was “qualitative case study”. The case was selected from 116 students who have finished their first year studying in different disciplines such as Business Administration, International Business, Banking and Tourism Administration ... The scope of the study was the misconceptions on syntactic terms in three categories; verb-related, noun-related and adverbial related errors. The findings were that the verb-related errors such as wrong tenses, infinitive phrases and omission of ‘be’ are frequently found; 31.9%, 30.9% and 29.3% respectively. The errors related to determiners and conjuncts make up 47.8% each. Most of the participants do not understand the meaning of syntactic terms in English.

The findings also reveal that some students had poor understanding of the terms just because they did not understand the terms even in Vietnamese language. They are unaware of the importance of the comprehension of the terms in writing English composition. Many of them use the terms by their ‘*hunch or afflatus*’. Some said that their teachers’ explanations of Vietnamese syntactic terms were varied and difficult to generalize.

**KEY WORDS:** syntactic terms, errors in writing, verb-related errors, noun-related errors, adverbial related errors

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background

In second/foreign language learning, writing is often assumed as the most challenging skill to acquire compared to other skills such as listening, speaking, and reading. It is primarily because writing requires a cognitive process which includes thinking ability and verbal command. Learners are required to perform a written task that requires thorough understanding of linguistics basics as well as social and cultural knowledge. Research in error analysis has shown that errors in writing are found as an unavoidable part of EFL student writing. The reasons for this include the varieties or diversities of language systems worldwide. Being aware of the differences between languages may help avoid *interlingual* errors. Brown (1980: 160) says that the learners’ errors in the second language result from the learner’s assumption that the second language or target language forms are similar to the native language (interlingual errors) and the negative transfer of items within the target language (intralingual errors).

Error analysis (EA) has been the aims of a number of researchers in order to fine tune language produced by language learners. Corder (1981) asserts that the aim of error analysis is to deal with analyzing the errors made by second language learners through comparing the learners’ acquired norms with the target language norms, and explaining the identified errors. Selinker suggests five factors which cause errors in learning second language, namely *overgeneralization*, *transfer of training*, *strategies of second language learning*, *strategies of second language communication and language transfer*. Crystal (1999: 108) defines EA as “the study of the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a language, especially a foreign language”. Meanwhile, James (2001) looks at EA from a slightly different perspective as “the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance”.

In terms of foreign language or second language learning, there is at least one other language involved, the learner’s mother tongue (L1). This is known as *learner’s prior linguistics knowledge* (James, 1999: 4). Ellis (1995) labels the transferring process from L1 to L2 as *cognitive comparison*. He recommends that ‘intake is enhanced when learners carry out a second operation - comparing what they have noticed in the input with what they currently produce in their own output’ (1995b: 90). In many cases, language learners misinterpret what they have gained in their L1 into L2, so they make errors in their writing performance. This is what Bley-Vroman has called ‘*the comparative fallacy*’ that is ‘the mistake of studying the systematic character of one language by comparing it to another’ (1983: 15).

# The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

## 1.2. Statement of the Problem

A recent survey (internal survey) in the academic writing performance among students of English non-majored at a university in Hanoi showed that 60% of the participants did not meet the requirements of the institution to be allowed into the second phase of their study. The errors made by these students went to different categories such as morphological, syntactical and semantics errors. One of the most serious and prominent sources of errors came from the misunderstanding of syntactic terms between Vietnamese language and English language. Ellis (1997) notes fossilization of learners' grammar does not occur in L1 acquisition, but is unique in L2 acquisition.

There have been numerous studies investigating sources of errors from different angles in different languages (Murtiana, 2019; Al-Khresheh, 2016; Sawalmeh, 2013). However, just a few researches have been done about the misunderstanding of syntactic terms between first language and target language that causes errors in writing. This paper attempts to identify errors made by Vietnamese English language learners from their understanding of Vietnamese terms transferred into English terms.

## 1.3. Significance of the study

Errors in writing a second or foreign language are unavoidable regardless of a long period of English study (Wee, Sim, and Jusoff, 2009: 016). A thorough understanding of differences between languages would benefit learners in terms of language production. The findings would help learners aware of the mismatch between the two languages to minimize simple errors in writing. Besides, it would also be a suggestion for teachers who teach basic writing skill at institutions.

## 1.4. Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of the current study is to specify errors made by learners due to the misunderstanding (misinterpretation) between Vietnamese and English in terms of syntactic terms. The secondary aim is to investigate the sources of these errors. Finally yet importantly, it is to raise awareness for language teachers when teaching grammar in order that learner are able to interpret correctly syntactic terms in English language.

## 1.5. Research Questions

With the mentioned purposes, the research paper attempts to answer the following research questions

- 1.5.1. *What are the common errors made by English learners due to the misconceptions of syntactic concepts in English language?*
- 1.5.2. *What are the sources of these errors?*

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Errors versus mistakes

The two terms both refer to the wrong performance that language learners made in the process of acquiring a second language. However, they are not exactly synonymous. According to James (1998: 77) an error arises "only when there was no intention to commit one". Errors are systematic, consistent deviance which is characteristic of the learning produced by learners' linguistics system at given stage of learning. Errors are typically produced by learners who do not yet fully command some institutionalized language system; they arise due to the imperfect competence in the target language. Whereas, the mistakes are deviations due to performance factors such as memory limitation, fatigue and emotional strain. They are typically irregular and can be readily corrected by the learners themselves when their attention is drawn to them (Fauziati, 2009: 139). Error is associated with checking the consistency of the L2 learner's performance. If a learner sometimes uses the correct form of a certain structure or rule and later on uses the wrong one, then it is a mistake and can be self-corrected.

### 2.2. Types of errors

Researchers hold different opinions about errors. Behaviourists used to believe that errors are the undesirable problems which teachers tried to prevent. The behaviourist theory, lying on Skinner's model, suggests that learning is a habit formation process, resulting from reinforcement (River, 1968:73). However, recently, errors are differently considered as the sign of learning progress. The current conception of the foreign language learning is that the learners conduct hypotheses about the systematic rules in the target language, test those hypotheses against the perceived information, and make adjustment accordingly (Hadley, 2001:101). Consequently, an error is perceived as the evidence resulting from the language learning process in which the learners use various strategies in learning a new language as well as test the hypotheses. Errors can be classified into many categories from different perspectives. However, most errors analysts agree that errors made by language learners can be categorized as interlingual and intralingual.

#### *Interlingual errors*

Interlingual refers to the interference of the native language. These errors are the results of the learners' application of the native language elements in their spoken or written performances of the target language (Richards, 1971: 205). Ellis (2008: 350) confirms that it is inevitable to learn a foreign language solely without depending on some linguistic features of the language which has already acquired. At any rate, the interference can occur in various areas of linguistics components including phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax, lexis and semantics. By definition, interlingual errors result from the transfer of elements of the

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

learner's mother tongue to the learning of the target language. In Ellis's words (1994: 62), transfer is "a very complex notion which is best understood in terms of cognitive rather than behaviourist models of learning". Lim (2010: 24) points out that interference has long been regarded as one of the major factors causing difficulties in the acquisition of a second language.

### *Intralingual errors*

Rather than interlingual errors which have been considered as the wrong transfer from learners' L1, intralingual errors refer to those which are caused by the effect of the target language itself. Richard (1974: 6) states, intralingual interference refers to items produced by learner, which reflect not the structure of mother tongue, but generalization based on partial exposure of the target language. This types error can be defined as the deviate form of language caused by conflicting information of the target language. Scovel (2001: 51) identifies intralingual errors as;

“... the confusion a language learner experiences when confronting patterns within the structure of a newly acquired language, irrespective of how the target language patterns might contrast with the learner's mother tongue”.

The intralingual errors are classified into four categories including (a) *Over generalization*, which is a deviant structure based on his experience of other structure in the target language. (b) *Ignorance of rule restrictions*, which refers to the errors when learners disobey of the structure of the target language. (c) *Incomplete application of the rules*. This happens when learner fails to apply the rules completely due to the stimulus sentence and (d) *false concept hypothesized or semantic errors*. That is learners' faulty understanding of distinctions of target language items that leads to false conceptualization.

### 2.3. Understanding syntactic concepts

#### *What is syntax and why study syntax?*

The word “syntax” comes from the Ancient Greek for “coordination” or “ordering together.” In spoken and written language, syntax refers to the set of rules that determines the arrangement of words in a sentence. Along with diction, it is one of the key ways writers convey meaning in a text. According to Tallerman (2011: 1) ‘Syntax’ means ‘sentence construction’: how words group together to make phrases and sentences. The study of syntax includes the classification of words, the order of words in phrases and sentences, the structure of phrases and sentences, and the different sentence constructions that languages use. The study of syntax in linguistics is quite challenging since the learner has to know how to put words in a sentence to make it sensible and avoid ambiguity (Smith, 2015). Many people know the meanings of many words, but it is difficult to put the words in a sentence that makes grammatical and logical sense. The main purpose of syntax in a sentence is to show the structural distinction between the parties represented in a sentence (Yule, 2006). Syntactic properties of a language enable the combination of simple sentences to form complex sentences (Valin, 2001). Lack of syntactic properties understanding creates some difficulty in communicating orally as well as in written language. Therefore, it is important for learners of a language to understand the syntax properties before the study of higher aspects of the language.

### 2.3. Misconception

In the learning of science, misconceptions are the flawed ideas held by students, often strongly, which conflict with commonly accepted scientific consensus (Smith et al. 1994). In the literature, various terms have been applied to this kind of thinking including misconceptions, alternative conceptions, preconceptions, and others (Taber 2014). In foreign/second language learning, misconception is a wrong belief or opinion as a result of not understanding something (Macmillan Dictionary of Language Learning, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.: 276). Languages worldwide derive from different origins. They possess different grammatical rules in phonology, semantics, morphology and syntax. Universally, the ideas to be coded are not much different; however, the ways of coding ideas are varied.

### 2.4. English verb phrases

#### *Verb category in English language*

In English, verbs show time and aspects and can be used finitely or non-finitely. The verbs are categorized as *lexical* and *auxiliary*. Lexical verbs are the ones that belong to the indefinitely large general vocabulary of the language (e.g. run, eat, seem, explain, recycle, shatter, prepare, depend...). Auxiliary verbs, by contrast, are a special and very restricted set of verbs (Roberts, 2011: 82). In

the following, the lexical verbs are in bold and the auxiliary verbs are in italics.

- [1a] Diana **plays** the piano.
- [1b] Diana **played** the piano.
- [2] Anders *is* **explaining** his generalisation.
- [3] Maggie *should have* **recycled** those bottles
- [4] Wim *may have been* **preparing** his lecture.

(Roberts, 2011: 82)

#### *Tenses*

One of the most confusing concepts for Vietnamese language learners is the misconception about tenses. They fail to differentiate time and tense. Comrie (1985a: 9) defines *tense* as the ‘grammaticalized expression of location in time’, while time is only one part

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

of what we think of as a specific tense. The English tense system is somewhat of a patchwork of grammars from different root languages which have had an influence on its grammar over the centuries. In addition, the terminology we use to describe tenses has changed over the years, and is different for linguists working in different fields, language educators and classical language scholars. This has given rise to some misconceptions, misunderstandings and incorrect assumptions about the tenses of English.

### Aspects

Aspect marks such properties as whether an action is on-going or completed. For example, in *Kim was eating his dinner*, the verb *was* is past tense but we understand that the eating event wasn't over. This sentence has the progressive aspect, marked in English partly by the *-ing* suffix on the main verb, eat, but also by the addition of an auxiliary, a form of be. In *Kim has eaten her dinner* we have perfect aspect, referring to a completed action. Again, this is marked partly by changes in the verb form itself (eaten) and partly by adding another auxiliary, this time a form of have. (Tellerman, 2011: 42).

### Mood

Mood is defined as “a grammatical category which expresses the degree or kind of reality of a proposition as perceived by speakers (Trask, 1993: 174). Tellerman adds that “mood is a grammatical category which marks properties such as possibility, probability and certainty. Languages tend to distinguish between actual events, and hypothetical events. As in (a) *Kim goes to Greece tomorrow*. And in (b) *Kim would go to Greece tomorrow if she were wealthy enough*. The mood used for actual events, as in (a) is termed indicative. Mood is an entirely separate property from tense. The hypothetical event in (b) *Kim would go to Greece tomorrow* is expressed in English by a separate auxiliary element, *would*, rather than by a change in the form of the main verb go itself. (Tellerman, 2011: 43).

### Semantic sub-categories of verbs

Semantically, English verbs are sub-categorized into stative and dynamic verbs. The former refer to a lexical verb whose meaning expresses a state, rather than an event, such as *know*, *want*, *understand*, *fear* or *like*. Stative verbs in English are distinguished by their inability to appear in the progressive aspect in ordinary circumstances (Trask, 1993: 259). The latter denotes a sentence, *predicate, verb form or lexical verb expressing an action, movement or change* (Trask, 1993: 87).

In terms of complementing a verb phrase, English verbs' classification consist of six groups, namely transitive, intransitive, di-transitive, intensive, complex-transitive, and prepositional verb.

- *Transitive verbs* are verbs that take a direct object in the sentence.
- *Intransitive verbs* are verbs that do not take an object or subject attribute in the sentence.
- *Di-transitive verbs* are verbs that take two objects in the sentence.
- *Intensive (Copula) verbs* require a single complement, which can take the form of an adjective phrase, a noun phrase or a prepositional phrase
- *Complex-transitive verbs* are verbs that take a direct object and an object attribute in the sentence.
- *Prepositional verb* are verbs that can be complemented by a prepositional phrase. Prepositional verbs are called 'prepositional' because they can only be complemented by a prepositional phrase (Roberts: 69-78).

### Syntactic sub-categories of verbs

Syntactically, English verb phrases can function finitely and non-finitely.

#### Finite verb phrases

Denoting a form of a verb or auxiliary which can in principle serve as the only verb form in a sentence and which typically carries the maximum in morphological marking for such categories as tense and agreement permitted in a language (Trask, 1993: 103). Greenbaum and Nelson (2013: 79) assert that verb phrases are either finite or non-finite. A finite verb phrase is one that carries a contrast in tense between present and past, and may also be marked for person and number. In a finite verb phrase the first or only verb is finite, and the other verbs (if any) are non-finite. In a non-finite verb phrase all the verbs are non-finite.

#### Non-finite verb phrases

Denoting any form of a verb which cannot serve as the only verb in a simple sentence. Non-finite forms typically include participles, infinitives and verbal nouns ((Trask, 1993: 103). In the following examples, the non-finite verb phrases are in italic

- [1] Legislators are afraid *to make* any fundamental policy changes.
- [2] *Having stayed* in their house, I can remember how frequently they quarrelled.
- [3] The new system, *described* in a recent report, provides criteria for evaluating scientific priorities.
- [4] *Written* on a few beer mats in a Soho bar, the song was an instant hit.

(Greenbaum & Nelson, 2013: 79)

## 2.5. English noun phrases

### Noun category in English language

A noun or noun phrases (group of words that functions as a noun) is a universal term to name people, objects or concepts. However, misconception in the form and function of a noun phrase is a source of communication breakdown. The dictionary of English grammatical terms in linguistics defines a noun phrase as followed;

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

“One of the principal syntactic categories and one which appears to be perhaps universally present in languages. Functionally, a noun phrase may be defined as any category which can bear some grammatical relation within a sentence, such as subject, direct object, indirect object or oblique object” (Trask, 1993: 189).

Structurally, a noun phrase may be a single noun, a combination of determiners, pre-modifier and post-modifier. The structure of the typical noun phrase may be represented schematically in the following way, where the parentheses indicate elements of the structure that may be absent:

Determiners	(Pre-modifiers)	Head noun	(Post-modifier)
<i>a</i>	<i>new</i>	<i>edition</i>	<i>of the book</i>
<i>some</i>	<i>large</i>	<i>sheets</i>	<i>of paper</i>
<i>the</i>	<i>old</i>	<i>man</i>	<i>that lives near us</i>

Functionally, a noun or a noun phrase can be the subject, objects and complements.

Subject:	<i>The older children</i> feed the younger ones.
Subject complement:	Sandra is <i>my mother's name</i> .
Object complement:	They elected her <i>their leader</i> .
Adverbial complement:	The protestors were outside <i>the White House</i> .
Direct object:	The fire destroyed <i>the warehouse</i> .
Indirect object:	I can show <i>you</i> my diploma.

(Greenbaum & Nelson, 2013: 15-20)

### 2.6. English adverbial phrases

Adverbs or adverbial phrases (or just *adverbials*) cause majority misconceptions for language learners, especially for Vietnamese English learners. That might be because of the complexity of the category structurally, syntactically and semantically. Adverb can be defined as “A lexical category whose members are usually grammatical adjuncts of a verb and most typically express such semantic notions as time, manner, place, instrument or circumstance”. Adverbial refers to any category with a distribution and function similar to that of a lexical adverb, such as tomorrow night, in the garden, when she arrives or in order to find out, regardless of its surface syntactic realization, which may be that of a lexical adverb, an adverb phrase, a noun phrase, a prepositional phrase, an adverbial clause or a non-finite verb phrase (Trask, 1993: 9-10).

Functionally, an adverbial can be an *adjunct*, *disjunct* or *conjunct*.

#### *Adjuncts*

Roberts (2011: 87) explains that adjuncts express a wide range of ideas, including manner, means, purpose, reason, place, and time (including duration and frequency). They tend to answer questions like *Where? Why? When? How? What for? How long? How often? How many times?* Quirk (1982: 190) uses the terms “*integrated*” and “*peripheral*” to distinguish adjunct, disjunct and conjunct. He says “adverbials may be integrated to some extent into the structure of the clause or they may be peripheral to it”. If integrated, they are termed *adjuncts*. If peripheral, they are termed *disjunct* and *conjunct*, the distinction between the two being that conjuncts have primarily a connective function.

- [1] Sam sunbathed *frequently*.
  - [2] He spotted the wildcats quite *accidentally*.
  - [3] She put it under the bed *surreptitiously*
- Roberts (2011: 87)

- [4] John writes *more clearly* than his brother does.
- [5] *However strongly* you feel about it, you should be careful what you say
- [6] *So monotonously* did he speak that everyone left

Quirk (1982: 191)

#### *Disjuncts*

Disjuncts are known as sentence adverbs. They denote the speaker’s attitude toward or judgment of the proposition, expressing, for example, the speaker’s degree of truthfulness or his manner of speaking. Disjuncts can be an adverb phrase or prepositional phrase (Brinton, 2010: 238).

Adverb phrase: *seriously, truthfully, frankly, certainly, hopefully, sadly, personally, confidentially, literally, foolishly, stupidly, oddly, surely, clearly*

Prepositional phrase: *in all frankness, to my surprise, in broad terms, to my regret, of course, on paper*

- [7] *Seriously*, do you intend to resign?
- [8] *Personally*, I don’t approve of her
- [9] What is even more remarkable, he manages to inspire confidence in the most suspicious people

Quirk (1982: 221)

#### *Conjuncts*

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

A conjunct is defined as “anyone of the constituents which are conjoined in a coordinate structure” (Trask, 1993: 56). Traditionally, these are known as conjunctive adverbs. They express textual relations, serving to link clauses; they have no function in their own clause (Brinton, 2010: 238). They may be:

Adverb phrase: *moreover, however, nonetheless, nevertheless, furthermore, next, finally, consequently, therefore, thus, instead, indeed, besides, hence*

Prepositional phrase: *in addition, in conclusion, on the contrary, on one/the other hand, in other words, for example, as a result, in the second place*

[10] He is poor, yet he is satisfied with his situation

[11] I met him in the park, when, *however*, we had no time to speak

[12] I'm inviting Peter, who is a student, and who *therefore* cannot afford to spend too much money.

Quirk (1982: 223)

### 2.7. Vietnamese syntax concepts

#### Verb category in Vietnamese language

There have been many definitions of verbs and verb phrases in Vietnamese language. Some scholars categorize verbs according to semantics features. Some view them from syntactic perspective. Semantically, Quynh (2001: 140) defines verbs as words that show actions or states of people or things. The category of verbs includes *transitive* (ngoại hướng), *intransitive* (nội hướng), *causative* (gây khiến), *existence* (xuất hiện, tồn tại, tiêu tan), *perceptive* (cảm nghĩ, nói năng), *stative* (tình thái).

*Transitive verbs* are verbs that require other constituents to complete its meaning. The constituents are complement (bổ tố)

[1] Thợ gặt đang thoăn thoắt **cắt lúa** (Reapers are cutting **rice** quickly)

*Intransitive verbs* are verbs that do not require a constituent to complete its meaning.

[2] Chị Dậu còn thức hay ngủ? (Does Ms Dau still *awake* or *sleep*?)

*Causative verbs* are verbs that cause some effects on the recipients

[3] Tin sét đánh làm **chị rụng rời chân tay**. (Shocking news *makes her falling off limbs*)

*Existence verbs* are verbs that do not express actions caused by subject, but show the emergence, disappearance of something

[4] Tôi *hết tiền rồi* (I *run out* of money)

*Perception verbs* are verbs that refer to the perception of the brain

[5] Tôi *biết* ông nói đùa tôi thôi. (I *know* that you are kidding me)

*Stative verbs* are the verbs that show speakers' attitude to the receivers.

[6] Tôi *muốn* giúp đỡ **tất cả mọi người** (I *want* to help **everybody**)

Quynh (2001: 141)

From syntactic perspective, Phien (2008) looks at verbs and verb phrases through *predicative* constituent. He divides a sentence into two constituents namely subject (chủ) and predicate (vị). The predicate consists of eight types as followed;

*Predicate contains an action verb*

[7] Tôi *ăn cơm* (I *eat rice*)

[9] Tôi *gửi cho nó một bức thư* (I *sent him a letter*)

*Predicate shows a perception*

[10] Tôi *nghe nhạc* (I *listen to music*)

[11] Chế độ *cho em đôi cánh chim bằng* (Regime *gave you strong wings*)

*Predicate shows a result*

[12] Đại bàng *gãy cánh* (Eagles *broke wings*)

[13] Ruộng *cây xong* (Rice field *has been ploughed*)

*Predicate shows a change*

[14] Anh ta *sinh ra lười biếng* (he *became lazy*)

[15] Ông ta *dạo này tỏ ra điềm đạm hơn trước* (He *recently seems to be calm*)

*Predicate shows an existence*

[16] Mộ anh *trên đồi cao* (His grave *is in the high hill*)

[17] Bố em *ở ngoài đồng* (My father *is on the field*)

*Predicate shows an introduction*

[18] Cách mạng vô sản *là tấn công* (Proletarian revolution *is attacking*)

*Predicate is an adjective*

[19] Chủ trương này *là đúng* (This policy *is right*)

[20] Đường ra trận mùa này *đẹp lắm* (The route to battles field this season *is very beautiful*)

*Predicate is a noun phrase*

[21] Đảng ta *là một đảng cầm quyền* (Our Party *is the ruling Party*)

[22] Thúy Kiều *là chị*, em *là Thúy Vân* (Thuy Kieu *is older sister*, younger sister *is Thuy Van*)

By studying the explanations and examples given by Vietnamese linguists, it is easy to see that there are some ambiguous between syntactic terms in two languages. In [1], **rice** is termed complement in Vietnamese language but it should be direct object in English language. Secondly, in Vietnamese language the “copular” does not exist so it is not easy to identify the verbs in some cases; [16]; [17]; [18]; [19]; [20]; [21]; [22]. Another term that confuses Vietnamese language learners is “tense” which attributes to finite verbs in almost English sentences. Time, aspect and mood markers are shown through the uses of verb forms. By contrast, in Vietnamese language, verbs neither show time nor aspects. To do that, a set of particles are used such as ‘*đã*’ (already); ‘*đang*’ (in progress); ‘*sẽ*’ (future intentions). The verb forms in these contexts remain unchanged. In other word, the concept of ‘tense’ is not familiar with language learners at initial stage.

## ***Noun category in Vietnamese language***

Noun is a universal concept in every language. However, there are some misconceptions about nouns in Vietnamese and English language. Nouns in Vietnamese are classified as followed;

### *Nouns of types*

In Vietnamese language, some nouns are termed similarly to articles in English (this is typical in Vietnamese language), such as “*cái*”, “*con*”, “*chiếc*”, “*bức*”, “*tám*”. These are termed “nouns of types” (Quynh, 158). These nouns go with concepts to form noun phrases. These combinations are in italic in the following examples.

- [1] *Cái nét đánh chết cái đẹp.* (The virtue defeats the beauty)
- [2] *Cái khó lộ cái khôn.* (The difficulty reveals the wise)

Quynh (2001: 139)

### *Nouns of materials*

Some words of materials are categorized as nouns in Vietnamese language. This may confuse with adjectives of material in many cases.

- [3] *Vàng là một kim loại quý* (Gold is a precious metal)
- [4] *Huy chương vàng là một vinh dự lớn.* (The golden medal is a great honour)

Quynh (2001: 139)

### *Nouns of time/directions*

The term “nouns of direction” in Vietnamese language is similar to adverbials in English. For example, *during the day, during the night, in the west, under the table ...*

### *Gerunds*

The nouns which derive from verbs, the so-called “*gerund*” in Vietnamese are not popular. This might be because verbs in Vietnamese language do not change in forms. The nouns that come from verbs can be used in combination with a noun of type. For example, *the working, the living, the raising ...* This is also a misconception for Vietnamese learners when they use gerunds as noun form in writing English.

## ***Adverbial category in Vietnamese language***

In Vietnamese language, the concept of adverb or adverbial is used interchangeably. In the following examples, the adverbials are in italic

- [1] *Họ đang ở Hà Nội.* (They are in Hanoi)
- [2] *Nhà họ xa trường học.* (Their house is far from school)
- [3] *Ông ấy là kỹ sư.* (He is an engineer)
- [4] *Nó gọi ông ấy bằng bác.* (He calls him uncle)

Ban (2004: 72)

In [1] and [2] the concepts of adverbials are similar to that in English. However, in [3] and [4] the terms should be subject and object complements instead of adverbials.

Some adverbials in Vietnamese language are determiners in English. The adverbials in the following examples are in italic.

- [5] *Nửa đời nếm trải mọi mùi đắng cay.* (Half of life, (I) have experienced every bitter)
- [6] *Mỗi người một vẻ mười phân vẹn mười* (Each person is almost perfect. (ten out of ten)
- [7] *Cả thế giới đang theo dõi từng bước tiến của dân tộc ta.* (The whole world is watching every progress that we made)

Quynh (2001: 158)

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Design**

A qualitative case study method was used to investigate the types of errors, the frequency of errors, the similarities and differences of interlingual errors and intralingual errors in writing performance made by first year students at a university in Hanoi. A case study seems to be appropriate for the current study because it is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in

# The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

handling multiple data sources. (Merriam, 1988: 16). It is also referred to as a method, a “strategy” (Punch, 1998; Yin, 2003a), and an outcome of research: “The qualitative case study can be defined in terms of the process of actually carrying out the investigation, the unit of analysis (the bounded system, the case), or the end product” (Merriam, 1998: 34).

The ‘*case*’ in the present study refers to students who does not do very well in the academic writing session due to misconceptions between Vietnamese syntactic terms and those in English language. An investigation into the types of misconception and reasons why they get confused in writing would help instructors improve the situation. Education researchers Gall et al. (2003) describe case study research as “the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (p. 436).

The “*bounded system*” in this study focuses on students who come from different areas in Vietnam who are following a course of English Language Studies at a university in Hanoi. The main outcome of the study is to explain why they make errors in a narrowed scope of syntactic misconceptions. The major approach of the study is *explanatory case study*.

## 3.2. Participants and Sampling

The participants of the current study were 116 second year students. They are following different majors at a university in Hanoi. The data sources were collected through their English written productions. Only low marked papers have been studied to analyze errors which were made by these students.

## 3.3. Instruments

For the present study, three research tools are utilized to collect data; documentation, i.e. the written papers; syntactic constituent tests and semi-structured interview of selected participants. The main instrument is the analysis of written papers submitted by the population. The constituent tests and interviews are utilized as triangulations to consolidate the reliability of the findings.

## 3.4. Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed by using the error analysis suggested by Brown (1980). To analyze them, the researcher used the following steps: (1) Students’ works were identified to interlingual errors and intralingual errors. (2) The students’ works were classified into the level of interlingual and intralingual errors. The levels were verb related level, noun related level, and adverbial related level.

## 3.5. Research Procedures and plans

After collecting the paper works, all the papers which were marked below 5.0 would be put under investigation. The errors then would be classified under three criteria; verb related errors, noun related errors and adverbial related errors. All the students whose papers were poor would be given a syntactic constituent diagnostic test. The results from the test and data via interviews would be used for final findings. The analysis of the papers was carried out at the beginning of the school year. The data collection and analysis would last for one year. The data then would be analyzed for final report.

## IV. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Findings for research question 1

In order to analyze typical errors made by participants, the researcher sort out variety of errors in three categories; verb related errors, noun-related errors and adverbial related errors. In this paper, we were unable to display all types of errors, only some frequent found ones are selected for analysis. The table below illustrates the most frequent found errors.

Table 1: Typical errors made by students in their writing

#	Identified errors	Classification errors	of Types of errors
1.	<i>They have been knowing each other for long.</i>	Verb-related errors	Interlingual
2.	<i>I very love my family and my country</i>	Verb-related errors	Interlingual
3.	<i>My father talking about his hard life.</i>	Verb-related errors	Interlingual
4.	<i>Good planning and careful follow-through is necessary for success in any field.</i>	Verb-related errors	Interlingual
5.	<i>There is usually some leftovers in the refrigerator.</i>	Verb-related errors	Interlingual
6.	<i>The advantages of this entertainment system is that it is more compact and less expensive than others on the market.</i>	Verb-related errors	Interlingual
7.	<i>I bought some foods for the family</i>	Noun related errors	Interlingual
8.	<i>I want to see the Bob’s new car.</i>	Noun related errors	Intralingual
9.	<i>Last night, one of the new cottages were damaged in the storm</i>	Verb-related errors	Intralingual



## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

10.	<i>Owning a pet, even the least demanding of creatures never easy.</i>	Verb-related errors		Interlingual
11.	<i>A researcher who has studied the history of cats <b>believe</b> that the ancestor of today's domestic cats</i> ...	Verb-related errors		Interlingual
12.	<i>The universe of pet owners <b>are</b> divided into two groups</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
13.	<i>There <b>was</b> dozens of books piled on the couch.</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
14.	<i>Each year there <b>is</b> many new movies coming out of Hollywood</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
15.	<i>Our genetic makeup and our personal experience <b>defines</b> us.</i>	Verb-related errors		Interlingual
16.	<i>Two dollars and some loose change <b>was</b> not going to be enough.</i>	Verb-related errors		Interlingual
17.	<i>I <b>felt</b> much more secure ever since we installed a home alarm system.</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
18.	<i>Whenever we went to a restaurant, Robert always <b>makes</b> a fuss about ordering the best wine.</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
19.	<i>Last summer we took a trip to Quang Nam, a province in the centre of VN, which <b>bordered</b> Da Nang city.</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
20.	<i>Unfortunately, most people <b>were</b> involved in an automobile accident at some time</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
21.	<i>We regretted our choice ever since we <b>bought</b> that car.</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
22.	<i>The number of deaths resulting from traffic accidents <b>declined</b> steadily over the past decade.</i>	Verb-related errors		Intralingual
23.	<i>Second, in recent years <b>there was</b> a general decline in the use of alcohol.</i>	Verb-related errors		Interlingual
24.	<i>"Star Wars" was the name of a military program as well as a movie. <b>It</b> was a large research program calling for military defense in outer space.</i>	Noun related errors		Intralingual
25.	<i>The printer for the computer is not working, and I have a paper due in an hour. I knew <b>this</b> was going to happen!</i>	Noun related errors		Intralingual
26.	<i><b>Undaunted</b>, the storm did not prevent the crew from setting sail as planned</i>	Adverbials errors	related	Interlingual
27.	<i>My father saw a deer bounding across a meadow on his way to work.</i>	Adverbials errors	related	Intralingual
28.	<i>The ship's officer explained to the passenger the meaning of the regulation <b>he</b> had just read.</i>	Noun related errors		Intralingual
29.	<i>When Anna brought Lena to the conference, we asked <b>her</b> for <b>her</b> press credentials</i>	Noun related errors		Interlingual
30.	<i>Carlos looked <b>happy</b> at his latest design</i>	Adverbials errors	related	Interlingual
31.	<i>The weather outside looks <b>miserably</b></i>	Adverbials errors	related	Intralingual
32.	<i>My granddad goes jogging <b>regular</b>.</i>	Adverbials errors	related	Intralingual
33.	<i>We remain <b>confidently</b> that there will be a solution to these problems.</i>	Adverbials errors	related	Intralingual

34.	<i>My sister, who grew up in Hanoi, has danced regular since the age of three.</i>	Adverbials errors	related	Intralingual
35.	<i>Wakame may be seaweed, but I am told it tastes quite well in many Japanese dishes.</i>			Intralingual
36.	<i>I feel badly about the accident.</i>	Adverbials errors	related	Interlingual
37.	<i>Last winter in Hanoi didn't rain much.</i>	Noun related errors		Interlingual
38.	<i>Every evening this week has a different movie.</i>	Noun related errors		Interlingual
39.	<i>She put it under the bed surreptitious</i>	Adverbials errors	related	Interlingual
40.	<i>The rumours about him was a fake</i>	Noun related errors		Interlingual

The most frequent found errors in verb-related category were wrong tense (31.9%). The omission of “be” ranked the second with 29.3%. The misconception between finite and non-finite verb uses went to the third place with 18.1 %. In terms of noun related errors, the wrong use of determiners accounted for the largest proportion which was 47.8%. The uses of infinitive phrases cause errors of 30.9%. Turning to the errors caused by adverbials, the uses of conjuncts accounted for 47.8% which ranked the first. The wrong uses of preposition ranked the last with only 19.6%. The adjunct and disjuncts errors were roughly similar of over 25%. Table 2 below summarizes the percentages of errors in three categories.

**Table 2: The percentage of errors by different categories**

#	Types of syntactic related errors	Cases (f)	Percentages (p)	Total number (n)
	<b>Verb-related errors</b>			<b>297</b>
	- No “be”	87	29.3%	
	- Wrong tenses	95	31.9%	
	- Stative verbs vs. dynamic verbs	16	5.4%	
	- Subject – verb agreement	45	15.1%	
	- Finite vs. non-finite verbs	54	18.1%	
	<b>Noun- related errors</b>			<b>213</b>
	- Gerund vs. participle phrase	45	21.2%	
	- Infinitive phrase	66	30.9%	
	- Determiner errors	102	47.8%	
	<b>Adverbial errors</b>			<b>280</b>
	- Wrong preposition	55	19.6%	
	- Errors on conjuncts	134	47.8%	
	- Errors on disjuncts	67	23.9%	
	- Errors on adjuncts	78	27.8%	

#### 4.2. Findings for Research question 2

##### *Syntactic diagnostic test results*

A syntactic diagnose test was administered among 80 students who made serious errors in their writing. There was 50 items in the test (see appendix). Many students were unable to distinguish syntactic terms correctly. The bar chart below summarizes the test results from the diagnostic test.

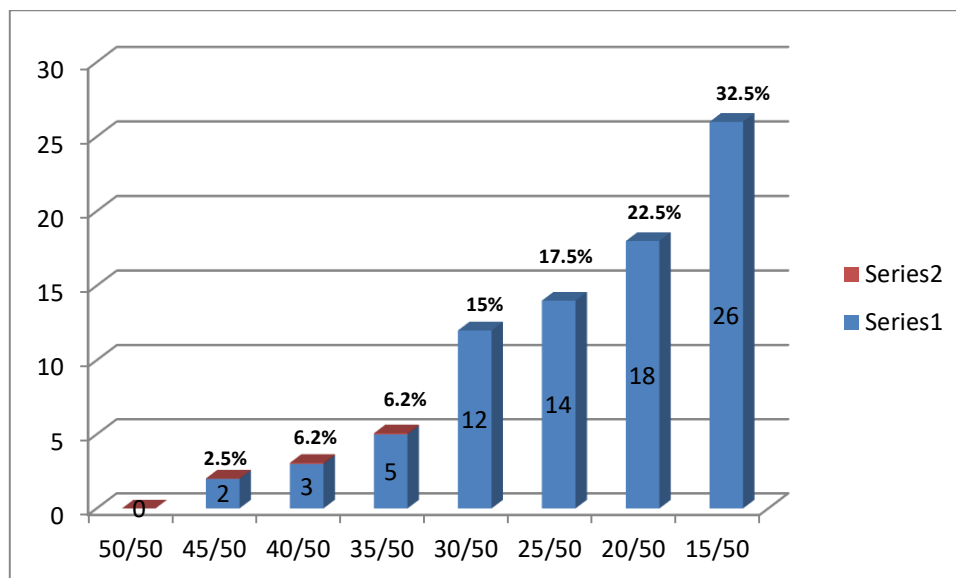


Figure 1: Percentage of correct answers on diagnostic test

The y-axis shows the numbers of students who got correct answer. The x-axis shows the numbers of correct answers that the participants got. Series 1 indicates numbers of students who obtain less correct answers. Series 2 presents the numbers of students who obtain more correct answers. None of them got all the answers correct. Only two students got 45 correct answers out of 50 questions (2.5%) while 26 students got 15 out of 50 (32.5%). The test items were not so difficult but so many students made them wrong. We can say that their understanding of the syntactic terms is poor.

#### Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were conducted among 8 students who got 15 and less correct answers. The interviewer asked questions in English and explained some difficult terms in Vietnamese to make sure that the interviewees understand the questions during the interview. The responses were shocking because most of them confessed that they had known little or nothing about syntactic terms. They said that what they did on the written tests or diagnostic test was just “hunch” about correctness of the terms. Some of them knew some terms but not thoroughly about them. These terms were vague to them. They found English very difficult to master, especially the meaning of the terms. Some of them admitted that when they were at secondary school they did not understand what their Vietnamese teachers explained about Vietnamese syntactic terms (see appendices 2 and 3).

#### V. DISCUSSIONS

There have been numerous studies looking at the errors made by language learners worldwide. Normah (2015) conducted a research about Thai students’ errors in writing. Results showed that the mostly frequent types of errors were translated words from Thai, word choice, verb tense, preposition, and comma. Phuket (2015) found that Thai university students made errors most frequently in translation words from Thai, word choice, verb tense, preposition, and comma. The errors derived from two sources: interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual or native language interference was found to be the dominant source of errors. Chittima (2013) found errors in lexical, syntactic and discourse interference and seven aspects of intralingual interference; false analogy, misanalysis, incomplete rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking co-occurrence restrictions, hypercorrection and overgeneralization. Ruba (2017) discovered that Arab language learners tend to use their previous linguistic knowledge in transferring the target language so they made errors in their writing. Robert & Yui (2018) conducted a study with 61 transcripts written by Japanese students. Results showed that the primary errors were articles, verb tense, prepositions, omission, modifier errors, and subject-verb agreement. These results indicate that L1 is a factor in grammatical accuracy. The findings from different language learners in different L1 backgrounds indicate that the misconceptions among language learners are universal that need to teach carefully and thoroughly at the first stages to ensure a stable language development latter.

In Vietnam, Nhut (2020) examines interlingual errors in Vietnamese English from the survey on forty Tra Vinh University. The error analysis focuses upon four categories: inflectional morphosyntax, copular ‘to be’, article, and word order. The findings have indicated that in inflectional morphosyntax, the interlingual errors were found in tense and aspect (85%), subject-verb agreement (100%), and noun plural inflection (97.5%), where the suffixal morphemes ‘-s’ and the tense and aspect features were omitted. In a similar way, copulas ‘to be’ were omitted before adjective with 30%. The third category is article when the interlingual errors (100%) occurred in two different ways: omission and confusion. Huyen (2020) conducted a study on common grammatical errors in English writing paragraphs made by the second-year Information Technology students at Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI). The findings revealed four most common grammatical errors, namely verb tense, sentence structure, verb form and subject-verb

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

agreement. Besides, the data analysis results also indicated some causes and suitable error correction types to help students avoid these kinds of errors.

From the findings of research conducted by international and domestic researchers, we can say that learners of English languages made errors due to many reasons. The most frequently errors are interlingual and intralingual. The misconception of the syntactic terms also contributes greatly to causes of those errors. It is recommended that, there should be some extra classes to improve students' understanding of syntactic terms before offering them with skills development programmes. As writing is different from speaking, all the errors are easy to specify in writing.

### VI. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the present research papers reveal that participants made considerable errors in writing. The errors were quite numerous, however, the researcher just focused on three categories; verb, noun and adverbial related errors. The findings were that the verb-related errors such as wrong tenses, infinitive phrases and omission of 'be' are frequently found; 31.9%, 30.9% and 29.3% respectively. The errors related to determiners and conjuncts make up 47.8% each. Most of the participants do not understand the meaning of syntactic terms in English. For triangulation, some interviews were conducted to support for the findings. We found that some students did not know about the meaning of simple parts of speech as well as how to differentiate terms in two languages. It is not surprising to see the errors that were made by these students. The main type of error falls into verb-related category, especially the wrong usage of verb tenses, the uses of phrases, omission of 'be', the verb that does not exist in Vietnamese language. The second type of errors was the misconception of determiners. These types of words are defined differently from those in their L1. Moreover, the structure of determiners in English is also very complicated so that they could not master them in English. The third category of errors originates from misconceptions of conjuncts, adjuncts. There are coordinating and subordinating conjunctions in English that relates to the understanding of clauses.

### VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study is carried out among students of non-English major at a university in Vietnam. The sample size is not large enough for generalizability in a large scale.

### REFERENCES

- 1) Al-Khreshah, M.H. (2016). A Review Study of Error Analysis Theory. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research*, 2(8), 49-59
- 2) Ban, D.Q. (2004). *Ngữ pháp Việt Nam – Phần câu*. Nhà xuất bản Đại học Sư phạm. Hà Nội.
- 3) Bley-Vroman, R. (1983). The comparative fallacy in interlanguage studies: the case of systematicity, *Language Learning* 7(33), 1-17.
- 4) Brinton, L.J. & Brinton, D.M. (2010). *The Linguistic Structure of Modern English*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam / Philadelphia
- 5) Brown, H. D. (1980). *Principles of language and teaching*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- 6) Chittima, K. (2013). Writing Error: A Review of Interlingual and Intralingual Interference in EFL Context. *English Language Teaching*. 6(7), 9-18.
- 7) Comrie, B. (1985a). *Tense*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 8) Corder, S. P. (1981). *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 9) Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- 10) Ellis, R. (1995b). Interpretation tasks for grammar teaching, *TESOL Quarterly* 29(1), 87-105.
- 11) Ellis, R. (1997). *SLA Research and Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 12) Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- 13) Fauziati, E. (2009). *Readings on Applied Linguistics: A Handbook for Language Teacher and Teacher Researcher*. Surakarta: Era Pustaka Utama.
- 14) Gall, M.D., Gall, J.P., & Borg, W.T. (2003). *Educational research* (7th ed.). White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- 15) Greenbaum, S. & Nelson, G. (2013). *An Introduction to English Grammar*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Routledge.
- 16) Hadley, A. O. (2001). *Teaching language in context* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- 17) Huyen, N.T., 2020. Common grammatical errors in English writing - A case study with secondyear students of information technology at HAU. *Can Tho University Journal of Science*. 12(1): 37-44.
- 18) James, C. (1999). *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. London: Longman.
- 19) James, C. (2001). Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. 1(3), 266-268

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

- 21) Lim, M. H. (2010). Interference in the acquisition of the present perfect continuous: implications of a grammaticality judgment test. *The Open Applied Linguistics Journal*. 3(5), 24-37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/1874913501003010024>
- 22) Merriam, S. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- 23) Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2<sup>nd</sup>ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- 24) Murtiana, R. (2019). An Analysis of Interlingual and Intralingual Errors in EFL learners' composition. *JURNAL EDUCATIVE: Journal of Educational Studies*, 4(12), 1-13
- 25) Nhut, N.M. (2020). Interlingual errors in Vietnamese English- a Case study on Tra Vinh University students. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*. 8(4), 45-58
- 26) Normah, B.O. (2015). Understanding EFL Students' Errors in Writing. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 6(32), 99-106.
- 27) Phien, H.T. (2008). *Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt – Câu*. Nhà xuất bản Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội
- 28) Phuket, P.R & Othman, N. (2015). Understanding EFL Students' Errors in Writing. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 6(32), 99-106.
- 29) Punch, K. (1998). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- 30) Quirk, R & Greenbaum, S. (1982). *A University Grammar of English*. Longman
- 31) Quynh, N.H. (2001). *Ngữ pháp tiếng Việt*. Nhà xuất bản Từ điển bách khoa. Hà Nội
- 32) Richards, J. C. (1971). A non-contrastive approach to Error Analysis. *English Language Teaching Journal*. 11(25), 204-219.
- 33) Richard, J. C. (1974). *Error Analysis: Perspective on Second Language Acquisition*. London: Longman Group Ltd.
- 34) Rivers, M. W. (1968). *Teaching foreign language skill*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- 35) Roberts, B.N. (2011). *Analysing sentences- An introduction to English Syntax* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Longman
- 36) Robert, L. & Hacho, Y. (2018). The First Language's Impact on L2: Investigating Intralingual and
- 37) Interlingual Errors. *English Language Teaching*, 11(11), 115-121
- 38) Ruba, A.M. (2017). Syntactic Errors Arab Learners Commit in Writing. *Journal of Language, Linguistics and Literature*. 3(1), 1-7.
- 39) Sawalmeh, M.H. (2013). Error Analysis of Written English Essays: The case of Students of the Preparatory Year Program in Saudi Arabia. *English for Specific Purposes*, 40(14), 132-143
- 40) Scovel, T. (2001). *Learning New Languages: A guide to second language acquisition*. Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle.
- 41) Selinker, L. (1992). *Rediscovering Interlanguage*. London: Longman.
- 42) Smith, J. (2015). What students say about linguistics: Why study syntax? Retrieved December 10th, 2015, from <https://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/paper/3097>
- 43) Smith, K. et al. (2009). Why peer discussion improves student performance on in-class concept questions. *Science*. 323(5910), 122-124
- 44) Taber, K.S. (2014). Alternative conceptions/frameworks/misconceptions. In *Encyclopedia of Science Education Vol. A*. Springer, New York, 37-41. DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6165-0\\_88-2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6165-0_88-2)
- 45) Tallerman, M. (2011). *Understanding Syntax*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Hodder Education
- 46) Trask, R.L. (1993). *A Dictionary of Grammatical Terms in Linguistics*. Routledge
- 47) Valin, J. (2001). *An introduction to Syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 48) Wee, R., Sim, J. & Jusoff, K. (2009). Verb-form errors in EAP writing. *Educational Research and Review*, 5(1), 16-23.
- 49) Yin, R. (2003a). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- 50) Yule, G. (2006). *The study of language*. London

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: A Syntactic Term Diagnostic Test

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student code: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Distinguishing Nouns

*Underline the nouns in the following sentences.*

1. During the early years of the United States, thousands of settlers travelled west to build new homes.
2. Women and men worked together to clear the land, plant crops, and build homes.
3. Besides this work, women tended the children and did housekeeping chores.
4. They prepared food to use during the winter.
5. They made clothes for the whole family and used homemade soap to wash the laundry.
6. A frontier mother was often the only teacher her children had.

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

7. Because there were few doctors, women had to take care of the medical needs of their families.
8. Settlers usually lived so far apart that isolation was a common problem.
9. Sometimes pioneer families became friends with Native Americans who lived nearby.
10. To help fight loneliness, many women wrote journals and diaries about their lives and experiences.

### Distinguishing between Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

*Underline the entire action verb, including all auxiliary verbs, in each of the following sentences. Then write whether the verb is transitive or intransitive.*

11. Sailboats have the right-of-way over motorboats. \_\_\_\_\_
12. The careful truck driver slowed noticeably in the rain and snow. \_\_\_\_\_
13. The Chinese pandas should attract many visitors to the zoo. \_\_\_\_\_
14. Architects begin their work long before the start of construction. \_\_\_\_\_
15. Most of the actors have already learned their lines. \_\_\_\_\_
16. The new compact disc will arrive in stores tomorrow. \_\_\_\_\_
17. The ball landed only six inches from the hole. \_\_\_\_\_
18. The scent of fresh sheets welcomes the hotel's guests every night. \_\_\_\_\_
19. Did you simply guess on the last question? \_\_\_\_\_
20. A blues singer does not always sing sad songs. \_\_\_\_\_

### Identifying Direct and Indirect Objects

*For each of the following sentences, underline the direct object once and the indirect object twice. One sentence does not have an indirect object.*

21. Paris has always given foreign writers a place of shelter.
22. Paris also offered a source of inspiration to these writers.
23. In the twenties American writers in Paris would bring Gertrude Stein their writings.
24. In her criticisms she would tell them the truth.
25. Sadly, living in Paris now costs such creative young people a great deal.

### Identifying Subject Complements

*Underline the subject complements in the following sentences. Above each, write whether it is a predicate nominative (PN) or predicate adjective (PA).*

26. A lawyer can become a judge.
27. The stew tastes too salty.
28. The signal may have been a warning.
29. Eddie and Alex Van Halen are brothers as well as professional musicians.
30. That director's movies always have been mysterious

### Identifying Object Complements

*Identifying Underline the object complements in the following sentences. Above each, write whether it is an adjective, noun, or pronoun.*

31. Computers and word processors have made typewriters practically obsolete.
32. Most great musicians consider daily practice necessary and even enjoyable.
33. The art investigator has labelled that painting a fraud.
34. The woman's will declares the land theirs forever
35. The newspaper called the wounded police officer a hero.

### Identifying Participles and Participial Phrases

*Underline the participles and participial phrases in the following sentences. Then circle the word each phrase modifies.*

36. People looking for a word's exact definition should consult a dictionary.
37. Elated with his grade report, Maurice sprinted home to tell his parents.
38. The wolverine, cornered by the bear, hissed and snapped its teeth.
39. The painting hanging in the hall is an original Picasso.
40. Frustrated, the inexperienced golfer threw his putter into the lake.

### Identifying Infinitives and Infinitive Phrases

*Underline the infinitives and infinitive phrases in the following sentences.*

41. The ability to budget time is a large part of being a good student.
42. Melissa has earned the opportunity to attend a prestigious college.
43. This engine has the ability to produce 180 horsepower.

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

44. I am not sure what I am going to do.
45. Karl certainly has the patience to teach small children.

### Identifying Adverb Clauses

*In each of the following sentences, underline the adverb clause once, and underline the word or words that it modifies twice.*

46. John Keats's work will be studied as long as English poetry is studied.
47. Before he died at the early age of twenty-five, Keats had written some of the finest poems in the English language.
48. It is actually quite easy for one to gain a quick taste of Keats's talents, since many of his most acclaimed works are short poems called odes.
49. Some were written in great haste as if he were afraid to lose his inspiration.
50. For example, after he had spent a few hours sitting outside one day, he wrote one of his most famous poems, "Ode to a Nightingale."

### Appendix 2: Questions designed for the semi-structured interview

1. What do you know about English syntactic terms?
2. What is the most difficult term in English for your interpretation?
3. When you write, do you think about the uses of different terms?
4. I see that you made many errors in the diagnostic test? Why is that?

### Appendix 3: Some typical interview transcriptions

Some extracts from the interviews.

*Interviewer:* What do you know about English syntactic terms?

*Interviewee 1:* I must say that I know little about the syntactic terms, even in Vietnamese language.

*Interviewer:* What is the most difficult term in English for your interpretation?

*Interviewee 1:* I get confused with verbs, adverbs and adjectives. I cannot figure out the difference between tenses, especially simple past and present perfect

*Interviewer:* When you write, do you think about the uses of different terms?

*Interviewee 1:* No, I don't. I just write whatever comes to my mind

*Interviewer:* I see that you made many errors in the diagnostic test? Why is that?

*Interviewee 1:* As I told you, I just guess when I feel familiar with the terms

*Interviewer:* Thank you!

-----  
*Interviewer:* What do you know about English syntactic terms?

*Interviewee 2:* I know some of them but I can't really distinguish them altogether.

*Interviewer:* What is the most difficult term in English for your interpretation?

*Interviewee 2:* I find it difficult in understanding adverbial phrases, verb tenses and the uses of articles in English.

*Interviewer:* When you write, do you think about the uses of different terms?

*Interviewee 2:* I do not think much about the uses of those terms. I just use them as my afflatus.

*Interviewer:* I see that you made many errors in the diagnostic test? Why is that?

*Interviewee 2:* I just chose it randomly

*Interviewer:* Thank you!

-----  
*Interviewer:* What do you know about English syntactic terms?

*Interviewee 3:* I have little understanding of the terms. I find that some of them are different from the terms in Vietnamese language.

*Interviewer:* What is the most difficult term in English for your interpretation?

*Interviewee 3:* The articles, the verb tenses, the use of link verbs such as "be" "seem" "look" "find" or stative verbs such as "love" "like" ...

*Interviewer:* When you write, do you think about the uses of different terms?

*Interviewee 3:* I just think of some basic terms such as subject, verbs

*Interviewer:* I see that you made many errors in the diagnostic test? Why is that?

*Interviewee 3:* I have tried but some of them I could not figure out the difference between them.

*Interviewer:* Thank you!

-----  
*Interviewer:* What do you know about English syntactic terms?

*Interviewee 4:* I don't think they are important.

*Interviewer:* What is the most difficult term in English for your interpretation?

## The Effects of Misconceptions Syntactic Concepts on Writing Performance - A Case Study at a University in Vietnam

*Interviewee 4: I have problem with verb tenses and determiners*

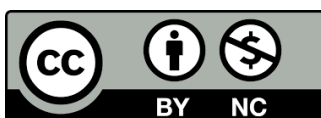
*Interviewer: When you write, do you think about the uses of different terms?*

*Interviewee 4: I use them by hunch or whatever I know about them. I do not care much about the terms*

*Interviewer: I see that you made many errors in the diagnostic test? Why is that?*

*Interviewee 4: I think I have tried all my best. I don't know why my answers are wrong.*

*Interviewer: Thank you!*



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.