

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO  
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**

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**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
HAIPHONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY**

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**A STUDY ON COMMON ERRORS IN SENTENCE  
CONSTRUCTION BY SECONDARY SCHOOLERS IN  
HAIPHONG CITY**

# **GRADUATION PAPER**

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**HAI PHONG - 2018**

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TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**

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**NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP**

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# NHIỆM VỤ ĐỀ TÀI

1. Nội dung và các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp (về lý luận, thực tiễn, các số liệu cần tính toán và các bản vẽ).

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2. Các số liệu cần thiết để thiết kế, tính toán.

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3. Địa điểm thực tập tốt nghiệp.

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## CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP

### Người hướng dẫn thứ nhất:

Họ và tên: Không Thị Hồng Lê

Học hàm, học vị: Thạc sĩ

Cơ quan công tác: Đại học Dân lập Hải Phòng

Nội dung hướng dẫn: A study on common errors in sentence construction by secondary schoolers in Haiphong city

### Người hướng dẫn thứ hai:

Họ và tên:.....

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Cơ quan công tác:.....

Nội dung hướng dẫn:.....

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*Sinh viên*

Đã giao nhiệm vụ ĐTTN

*Người hướng dẫn*

*Hải Phòng, ngày ..... tháng.....năm 2018*

**Hiệu trưởng**

**GS.TS.NGƯT Trần Hữu Nghị**

## PHẦN NHẬN XÉT CỦA CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN

**1. Tinh thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp:**

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**2. Đánh giá chất lượng của khóa luận (so với nội dung yêu cầu đã đề ra trong nhiệm vụ Đ.T. T.N trên các mặt lý luận, thực tiễn, tính toán số liệu...):**

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**3. Cho điểm của cán bộ hướng dẫn (ghi bằng cả số và chữ):**

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*Hải Phòng, ngày ... tháng ... năm*  
**Cán bộ hướng dẫn**  
*(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên)*

**CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM**  
**Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc**

**PHIẾU NHẬN XÉT CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN HƯỚNG DẪN TỐT NGHIỆP**

Họ và tên giảng viên: .....

Đơn vị công tác: .....

Họ và tên sinh viên: ..... Chuyên ngành: .....

Đề tài tốt nghiệp: .....

Nội dung hướng dẫn: .....

**1. Tinh thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp**

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**2. Đánh giá chất lượng của đề án/khóa luận (so với nội dung yêu cầu đã đề ra trong nhiệm vụ Đ.T. T.N trên các mặt lý luận, thực tiễn, tính toán số liệu...)**

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**3. Ý kiến của giảng viên hướng dẫn tốt nghiệp**

Được bảo vệ  Không được bảo vệ  Điểm hướng dẫn

*Hải Phòng, ngày ... tháng ... năm .....*

**Giảng viên hướng dẫn**

*(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên)*

**CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM**  
**Độc lập - Tự do - Hạnh phúc**

**PHIẾU NHẬN XÉT CỦA GIÁO VIÊN CHĂM PHẢN BIỆN**

Họ và tên giảng viên: .....

Đơn vị công tác: .....

Họ và tên sinh viên: ..... Chuyên ngành: .....

Đề tài tốt nghiệp: .....

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**1. Phần nhận xét của giáo viên chăm phản biện**

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**2. Những mặt còn hạn chế**

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**3. Ý kiến của giảng viên chăm phản biện**

Được bảo vệ  Không được bảo vệ  Điểm phản biện

*Hải Phòng, ngày ... tháng ... năm .....*

**Giảng viên chăm phản biện**

*(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên)*



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Hai Phong, August 2018

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as foreign language
ESL	English as second language
L1	First language
L2	Second language
NL	Native language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TL	Target language

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Rationale

There is no denying that English has become the most widely used language all over the world. It is considered as an effective medium of communication in a variety of fields such as science, technology, aviation, international sport, diplomacy, and so on . English is used as the working language of the Asian Trade group ASEAN and the official language of the European Bank. In fact, with the spread of globalization and the rapid expansion of information and technology, there has been an explosion in the demand for English worldwide.

In Vietnam, in recent years, English has been given the first priority because it is an international language promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between Vietnam and other countries. Therefore, English becomes a compulsory subject in many schools and universities. However, Vietnamese learners still face a lot of difficulties in mastering four English skills, especially writing skill. Known as a productive skill, writing requires learners to have profound knowledge to produce a standard written product. Nonetheless, “for a student who has never written more than a single sentence at a time, drafting a whole paragraph, even a short one is a daunting challenge” (Ronald, 1987: VI). Writing is actually the most difficult skill for learners to acquire (Tribble, 1996). It also takes them a long time to master this skill. As a matter of fact, while every healthy human beings knows how to speak, “writing is an advanced technology, even a luxury and it is not possessed by everyone” (Finegan, 2004). Ronald (1987: 260) also affirms that writing “is not a natural activity. People have to be taught how to write”. The difficulty of writing lies in its nature because it is “de-contextualized” and it is “one-way communication” (Tribble, 1996: 10). Therefore, it is easily comprehensible why the learners of writing skill often make a lot of mistakes, which they learn to correct in order to develop themselves.

Brown (2001: 257) emphasizes that “learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes”. In other words, making mistakes and committing errors are inevitable during the process of learning a foreign language. Nevertheless, it is proved that “success comes by profiting from mistakes by using mistakes to obtain feedback from the environment and with

that feedback to make new attempt that successively approximately desired goal” (Brown, 2001: 257). Hence, although mistakes and errors are unavoidable, they can be impeded through the process of working on them due to the given feedback. At the same time, methods can be found out to deal with the mistakes and correct them. Secondary schoolers in Hai Phong city are no exception. They also cope with a lot of troubles in constructing sentences. It is in this light that a lot of attempts have been made to do a research on “common grammatical errors in sentence construction by secondary schoolers in Haiphong city”. The study was conducted with the aim of finding out common errors secondary schoolers often do during the process of constructing sentences and suggesting some ways they can use to correct their errors in sentence construction.

### **1.2. Aims of the study**

This study aims at locating the most common grammatical errors in sentence construction done by secondary schoolers in Hai Phong city. In addition, the study is expected to give some suggestions for students to deal with those errors.

Two research questions were addressed as follow:

- ✓ *What are common grammatical errors done by secondary schoolers in constructing sentences?*
- ✓ *What are the possible causes of secondary schoolers’ grammatical errors?*

### **1.3. Methods of the study**

In order to complete this study, the following methods were employed:

- Analytic and synthetic methods
- Descriptive methods

First, the study took full advantage of analytic and synthetic methods to review all the theories related to the matter from various reliable sources to create the framework for the data analysis.

Second, descriptive methods were used to find out the percentage of each type of errors, analyze the students’ common errors in constructing sentences and describe some ways for learners to improve their writing.

#### **1.4. Scope of the study**

Knowledge of English grammar is very immense, so the study cannot cover all about grammatical errors done by students in sentence construction. It mainly focuses on some common errors and suggests some ways for learners to correct their errors. It was carried out within Popodoo English Centre and the priority was given to writing skill. The subject of the study mainly aimed at students in secondary schools in Hai Phong city.

#### **1.5. Design of the study**

This study is composed of two main parts:

- ✚ Part 1 is the introduction which consists of rationale, aims, study methods, the scope and design of the study.
- ✚ Part 2 is the development- the main part of this paper which is divided into four chapters :
  - Chapter one is theoretical background of error and sentence construction.
  - Chapter two shows detailed explanation of the methodology.
  - Chapter three indicates common grammatical errors done by secondary schoolers, causes of errors and useful teaching implications.
  - Chapter four is the conclusion which summarizes what was given in previous parts.

**PART II**  
**DEVELOPMENT**  
**CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**1.1. Overview on Errors**

**1.1.1. Definition of Errors**

Errors have a crucial part in English learning process because they are analyzed to provide learners with a notice and a try to avoid making them. So far, there exist different definitions by researchers worldwide. To have a comprehensive understanding of errors in language learning, the comparison between “an error” and “a mistake” is made. Even if both errors and mistakes refer to something wrong in the process of learning a language, there are differences between them which will help us understand the definition of error better.

Hedge (1988: 9-11) claimed that there three main types of mistakes including errors. They are slips, errors and attempts:

(i) Slips are caused by carelessness. The learners can self-correct them if pointed out and give the chance.

For example: *\*She left school two years ago and now works in a factory.*

(ii) Errors are wrong forms that the students can not self-correct even if these wrong forms are pointed out. However, “the teacher can organize what the students wanted to produce and think that the class is familiar with the correct form”.

For example: *\*although the people are very nice, but I don't like it here.*

(iii) Attempts are almost incomprehensible mistakes, and the students have no ideas how to structure what they want to mean or their intended meaning and structure are not clear to the teacher.

For example: *\*this, no, really, for always my time...and then I happy.*

(Hedge, 1988:11)

From his point of view, the learners can self-correct slips by themselves as slips are caused by carelessness not by the lack of language knowledge. On the contrary, the learners themselves cannot correct errors and attempts since they are caused by the lack of knowledge.

Brown (2001) gave a clear distinction between errors and mistakes. He defined that an error is “a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the inter language competence of the learner”, meanwhile, a



mistake is defined as “a performance error is either a random guess or a slip in that it is failure to utilize a known system correctly” (Brown, 2001: 257-258) Ellis Rod (1997) shares the same point of view: “*errors reflect gaps between learner’s knowledge*”. *They occur because the learner does not know what is correct. Mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance. They occur because in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows*”. As stated in the definitions above, both errors and mistakes are deviations in the usage. They both refer to the incorrect use in target language made by L2 learners. However, errors and mistakes differ in the cause. If errors are caused by the lack of knowledge, mistakes are caused by the lack of intention, fatigue, and carelessness. Hence, teachers do not usually need to correct mistakes, errors are more serious, especially errors in language already learnt in class, which need to be corrected by language teachers during the process of teaching and learning.

It is essential here to make a distinction between mistakes and errors. According to Brown mistakes refer to "a failure to utilize a known system correctly" whereas errors concern "a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner" (1994a: 205). Two things need to be stated here: Firstly, mistakes do not require special treatment assuming they are recognized. Secondly, error here refers to structures only. Both Corder (1967, 1971) and James (1998) reveal a criterion that helps us to do so: A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Errors are “systematic,” i.e. likely to happen regularly and not recognized by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or researcher would locate them, the learner would not (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

Norrish (1983) made a clear distinction between errors and mistakes. He stated errors are "systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong." He added that when a learner of English as a second or a foreign language makes an error systematically, it is because he has not learnt the correct form. Norrish defined mistakes as "inconsistent deviation." When a learner has been taught a certain correct form, and he uses one form sometimes and another at other times quite inconsistently, the inconsistent deviation is called a mistake. And it is in this light that the researcher has chosen to focus on students' errors not mistakes. An error, however, is considered more

serious. In Contrastive Analysis, the theoretical base of which was behaviourism, errors were seen as “bad habits“ that had been formed. The response was based on the stimulus. It was assumed that interference of the mother tongue (L1) was responsible for the errors made during the transition period of learning the target language. As an English teacher, I am well aware of the fact that my Arabic speaking students in grade 12, science section, commit many errors in essay writing (See appendix 6). These students have been studying English almost their whole lives and still, their errors are numerous.

In the cognitive approach, errors are seen as a clue to what is happening in the mind. They are seen as a natural phenomenon that must occur as learning a first or second language takes place before correct grammar rules are completely internalized. I think teachers are relieved to find a more realistic attitude toward errors. Errors are no longer a reflection on their teaching methods, but are, rather, indicators that learning is taking place. So errors are no longer “bad” but “good” or natural just as natural as errors that occur in learning a first language. The insight that errors are a natural and important part of the learning process itself, and do not all come from mother tongue interference, is very important. There is variation in learners' performance depending on the task. Learners may have more control over linguistic forms for certain tasks, while for others they may be more prone to error.

### **1.1.2. Classification of Errors**

Over the past few years, many scholars have spent their time and effort in classifying errors. According to Corder (1981), errors are classified into two main types which are errors of competence and errors of performance. In his opinion, errors of competence are subdivided into “interlingual” which depends on linguistic differences between the mother tongue and the target language and “intralingual” which is the result of overgeneralization in both languages. Errors of performance happen when learners make mistakes due to their stress, fatigue or carelessness, etc. Besides, Burt and Kiparsky (1972, cited by Brown, 2001) view errors as either global or local. It is explained that “global errors hinder communication; they prevent the hearer from comprehending some aspect of the message. Local errors do not prevent the message from being heard, usually there is only a minor violation of one segment of a sentence allowing the hearer/

reader to make an accurate guess about the intended meaning.” (Burt & Kiparsky, 1972 cited by Brown, 2001: 263). Brown (2001: 262) also states that “the most generalized breakdown can be made by identifying errors of addition, omission, substitution and ordering”. In addition, within each category, aspects of language such as phonology or orthography, lexicon, grammar and discourse are taken into account.

### **1.1.3. Errors analysis**

In terms of Error Analysis - the first approach to the study of Second language acquisition which includes an internal focus on learners’ creative ability to construct language, it has been followed and developed by such researchers as Ellis (1997), Gass & Larry (2001), Yule (2006). All researchers agreed that as the name suggests, error analysis is the study of learners’ error (Ellis 1997, Gass & Larry 2001). The definition emerged from the fact that “ learners do make errors and these errors can be observed , analyzed and classified to reveal some things of the system operating within the learner” (Brown, 2001: 223). The significance of learners’ errors was explained by Corder (1981) in three different ways. First, if the teachers undertake a systematic analysis of learner’s errors, they can know how far towards the goal the learner has progressed, and consequently what remains for them to learn. Second, errors provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly, (and in a sense this is their most important aspect) they are indispensable to the learner himself, making errors is regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. There is a famous Italian proverb: we learn through our errors. It is believed that making errors is an essential part of language learning process because errors are the things that language teachers and learners will go through. Making errors reflects the nature of students’ learning process. They tell the teacher whether their students have progressed or not, at which level their students are and learners’ errors are also helpful for the teachers to decide what they should teach in the subject. Therefore, error analysis is of great importance in improving the learning and teaching quality.

Although the terms may be differently used, Corder's method of analyzing errors (1967) and Ellis's one (1997) seem to meet each other. They both followed the following steps:

Step 1: error collection

Step 2: error identification

Step 3: error classification

Step 4: quantification

Step 5: analysis of error source

Step 6: design of pedagogical materials

Evaluating student's written work is naturally a hard job to do, for teachers. It is difficult both to guide and facilitate students during the development of the written work and judge it at the same time. The matter of fairness and explicitness in teacher's evaluation of student's writing, therefore, has long been an endless source of research among ELT researchers. There are six categories that form the basis for the evaluation of students' writing proposed by Brown (2001: 357), namely content, organization, discourse, syntax, vocabulary and mechanics. The fourth of the list – syntax was chosen as the focus of the current research. According to Fromkin (2000), syntax tells us what constitutes a well – formed string of words, how to put words together to form phrases and sentences. As regards sentence and sentence structure, there have been many researchers investigating this field such as Lyon (1996), Saeed (2005), Halliday (1994). Nevertheless, very few have tried to identify the common sentence structure errors. Thus, the purpose of the researcher to conduct an investigation on the common grammatical errors in secondary schoolers' writing sentences in Haiphong city. The results of this study would hopefully help teachers correct such kinds of errors in their students' writing.

Sridhar (1981) points out that Error Analysis has a long tradition. Prior to the early 1970s, however, Error Analysis consisted of little more than impressionistic collections of 'common' errors and their linguistic classification (e.g French 1949). The goals of traditional Error Analysis were pedagogic -- errors providing information which could be used to sequence items for teaching or to devise remedial lessons. The absence of any theoretical framework for explaining the role played by errors in the process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) led to no serious attempt to define 'error' or to account for it

in psychological terms. Also as the enthusiasm for Contrastive Analysis grew, the interest in Error Analysis declined. In accordance with Behaviourist learning theory, the prevention of errors (the goal of Contrastive Analysis) was more important than the identification of errors. It was not until the late 1960s that there was a resurgence of interest in Error Analysis. A series of articles by Corder (e.g. 1967; 1971; 1974) all traced this resurgence and helped to give it direction.

Error Analysis provides two kinds of information about interlanguage. The first is concerned with the linguistic type of errors produced by L2 learners. Richards (1974), for instance, provides a list of the different types of errors involving verbs (e.g. 'be'+ verb stem instead of verb stem alone -- 'They are speak French'). However, this type of information is not very helpful when it comes to understanding the learner's developmental sequence. Error Analysis must necessarily present a very incomplete picture of SLA, because it focuses on only part of the language L2 learners produce -- that part containing idiosyncratic forms. Describing interlanguage requires identifying what the learner can do by examining both idiosyncratic and non-idiosyncratic forms. Also because SLA is a continuous process of development, it is doubtful whether much insight can be gained about the route learners take from a procedure that examines language -- learner language at a single point in time. Error Analysis provides a synchronic description of learners' errors, but this can be misleading. A sentence may appear to be non-idiosyncratic (even in context), but may have been derived by means of an "interim" rule in the interlanguage. An example might be a sentence like "What's he doing?" which is well formed but may have been learned as a ready-made chunk. Later, the learner might start producing sentences of the kind 'What he is doing?', which is overtly idiosyncratic but may represent a step along the interlanguage continuum. For those reasons an analysis of the linguistic types of errors produced by learners does not tell us much about the sequence of development.

The second type of information -- which is relevant to the question about the strategies used in interlanguage -- concerns the psycholinguistic type of errors produced by L2 learners. Here Error Analysis is on stronger ground. Although

there are considerable problems about coding errors in terms of categories such as ‘developmental’ or ‘interference’, a study of errors reveals conclusively that there is no single or prime cause of errors (as claimed by the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis) and provides clues about the kinds of strategies learners employ to simplify the task of learning a L2. Richards (1974) identifies various strategies associated with developmental or, as he calls them, ‘intralingual’ errors. Overgeneralization is a device used when the items do not carry any obvious contrast for the learner. For example, the past tense marker, ‘-ed’, often carries no meaning in context, since pastness can be indicated lexically (e.g. ‘yesterday’). Ignorance of rule restrictions occurs when rules extend to contexts where in the target language usage they do not apply. This can result from analogical extension or the rote learning of rules. Incomplete application of rules involves a failure to learn the more complex types of structure because the learner finds he can achieve effective communication by using relatively simple rules. False concepts hypothesized refer to errors derived from faulty understanding of target language distinction (e.g. ‘is’ may be treated as a general marker of the present tense as in ‘He is speak French’). Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to explain SLA by analyzing the psycholinguistic origins of errors, however, is to be found in George (1972). George argues that errors derive from the learner’s need to exploit the redundancy of language by omitting elements that are non-essential for the communication of meaning. Implicit in the types of analysis provided by both Richards and George is the assumption that at least some of the causes of errors are universal. Error Analysis can be used to investigate the various processes that contribute to interlanguage development.

The most significant contribution of Error Analysis, apart from the role it played in the reassessment of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, lies in its success in elevating the status of errors from undesirability to that of a guide to the inner workings of the language learning process. As a result of interlanguage theory and the evidence accumulation from Error Analysis, errors were no longer seen as ‘unwanted forms’ (George 1972), but as evidence of the learner’s active contribution to SLA. This contribution appeared to be broadly the same irrespective of differences in learners’ backgrounds, suggesting that the human

faulty for language may structure and define the learning task in such a way that SLA, like L1 acquisition, was universal in nature. However, the conclusive evidence -- proof that there was a natural route of development -- was not forthcoming from Error Analysis.

#### **1.1.4. Sources of Errors**

A lot of causes and sources of errors have been introduced by some theorists. In the following section the primary causes of errors will be reviewed: Interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are those which are related to the native language (NL). That's to say there are interlingual errors when the learners' NL habits (patterns, systems or rules) interfere or prevent them, to some degree, from acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language (SL) (Corder, 1971). Interference (negative transfer) is the negative influence of the mother tongue language (MTL) on the performance of the target language (TL) learner (Lado, 1964).

Intralingual errors are those due to the language being learned, independent of the native language. According to Richards (1971) they are items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language. The learner, in this case, tries to “derive the rules behind the data to which he/she has been exposed, and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the target language” (Richards, 1974, p. 6). In other words, they produce deviant or illformed sentences by erroneously applying their knowledge of TL rules and structures to new situations. In 1974, Selinker (in Richards, 1974, p. 37) reported five sources of errors:

1. Language transfer.
2. Transfer of training.
3. Strategies of second language learning.
4. Strategies of second language communication.
5. Overgeneralization of TL linguistic material.

In 1974 Corder (in Allen & Corder, p. 130) identified three sources of errors: Language Transfer, Overgeneralization or analogy, & Methods or Materials used in the Teaching (teaching-induced error). In the paper titled “The Study of

Learner English” that Richards and Simpson wrote in 1974, they displayed seven sources of errors:

1. Language transfer, to which one third of the deviant sentences from second language learners could be attributed (George, 1971).
2. Intralingual interference: In 1970, Richards exposed four types and causes for intralingual errors:
  - a. Overgeneralization (p. 174): it is associated with redundancy reduction. It covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure based on his experience of other structures in the target language. It may be the result of the learner reducing his linguistic burden.
  - b. Ignorance of rule restrictions: i.e. applying rules to contexts to which they do not apply.
  - c. Incomplete application of rules.
  - d. Semantic errors such as building false concepts/systems: i.e. faulty comprehension of distinctions in the Target language (TL).
3. Sociolinguistic situation: motivation (instrumental or integrative) and settings for language learning (compound or co-ordinate bilingualism) may affect second language learning.
4. Modality: modality of exposure to the TL and modality of production.
5. Age: learning capacities vary with age.
6. Successions of approximative systems: since the cases of language learning vary from a person to another, and so does the acquisition of new lexical, phonological, and syntactic items.
7. Universal hierarchy of difficulty: This factor has received little interest in the literature of 2nd language acquisition. It is related to the inherent difficulty for man of certain phonological, syntactic, or semantic items or structures. Some forms may be inherently difficult to learn no matter what the background of the learner is. Krashen (1982) suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. This order seemed to be independent of the learners' age, L1 background, and conditions of exposure.

James (1998, p. 178) exposed three main diagnosis-based categories of error:



1. Interlingual: interference happens when “an item or structure in the second language manifests some degree of difference from and some degree of similarity with the equivalent item or structure in the learner’s first language” (Jackson, 1981,101).

2. Intralingual:

a. Learning strategy-based errors:

i. False analogy

ii. Misanalysis

iii. Incomplete rule application

iv. Exploiting redundancy

v. Overlooking co-occurrence restrictions

vi. Hypercorrection (monitor overuse)

vii. Overgeneralization or system simplification

b. Communication strategy-based errors:

i. Holistic strategies: e.g. approximation and language switch

ii. Analytic strategies: circumlocution (expressing the concept indirectly, by allusion rather than by direct reference.

3. Induced errors: they “result more from the classroom situation than from either the student’s incomplete competence in English grammar (intralingual errors) or first language interference (interlingual errors)

a. Material induced errors

b. Teacher-talk induced errors

c. Exercise-based induced errors

d. Errors induced by pedagogical priorities

e. Look-up errors

Language transfer is another important cognitive factor related to writing error. Transfer is defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired (Odlin, 1989). The study of transfer involves the study of errors (negative transfer), facilitation (positive transfer), avoidance of target language forms, and their over-use (Ellis, 1994). Behaviorist accounts claim that transfer is the cause of errors, whereas from a cognitive perspective, transfer is seen as a

resource that the learner actively draws upon in interlanguage development (Selinker, 1972).

Despite the fact that L1 transfer is no longer viewed as the only predictor or cause of error at the structural level, a writer's first language plays a complex and significant role in L2 acquisition. For example, when learners write under pressure, they may call upon systematic resources from their native language for the achievement and synthesis of meaning (Widdowson, 1990). Research has also shown that language learners sometimes use their native language when generating ideas and attending to details (Friedlander, 1990). In addition, contrastive studies, which have focused on characteristics of L1 languages and cultures, have helped us predict rhetorical error in writing. These studies have been valuable in our understanding of L2 writing development. However, many feel that these studies have also led to reductive, essentializing generalizations about ways of writing and cultural stereotypes about students from certain linguistic backgrounds (Fox, 1994; Leki, 1997; Spack, 1997). As a result, erroneous predictions about students' learning based on their L1 language and culture have occurred regardless of social factors, such as "the contexts, and purpose of their learning to write, or their age, race, class, gender, education, and prior experience" (Raimes, 1998, p. 143).

J. Kerr (1970) based his study on the common errors in written English made by a group of Greek learners of English as a foreign language. It was found that the causes of mistakes were: 1. Ignorance of the words or constructions to express an idea; 2. Carelessness; 3. The influence of the mother – tongue; 4. Mistakes arising from making false analogies with other elements of the foreign language.

On the other hand, Ntumngia (1974) conducted research on error analysis of Francophone Cameroonian secondary school students. The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze the errors of these students with the hope that this identification and analysis would result in implications for instructional strategies used by teachers of English. The result of the study showed that the sources of errors committed by the students were due to both interlingual and intralingual factors. For instance, the writing problems experienced by Spanish speakers living in the United States may be due to a multiplicity of factors,

including the effects of transfer and interference from the Spanish language, and cultural norms (Plata, 1995). First of all, learners may translate from L1, or they may try out what they assume is a legitimate structure of the target language, although hindered by insufficient knowledge of correct usage. In the learning process, they often experience native language interference from developmental stages of interlanguage or from nonstandard elements in spoken dialects (a common occurrence in students writing in their native language as well). They also tend to over-generalize the rules for stylistic features when acquiring new discourse structures. In addition, learners are often not certain of what they want to express, which would cause them to make errors in any language.

Finally, writers in L2 might lack familiarity with new rhetorical structures and the organization of ideas (Carson, 2001; Connor & Kaplan, 1987; Kutz, Groden, & Zamel, 1993; Raimes, 1987). L2 writing relates closely to native-language literacy and particular instructional contexts. Students may not be acquainted with English rhetoric, which can lead to writing that appears off topic or incoherent to many learners of English as a foreign language. The studies relating to the process of language transfer and overgeneralization received considerable attention in the literature. Swan and Smith (1995, p. ix) gave a detailed account of errors made by speakers of nineteen different L1 backgrounds in relation to their native languages.

Diab (1996) also conducted a study in order to show through error analysis the interference of the mother-tongue, Arabic, in the English writings of EFL students at the American University of Beirut. Okuma (1999) studied the L1 transfer in the EFL writings of Japanese students. Work on over-generalization errors, on the other hand, is reported by Richards (1974, pp. 172-188), Jain (in Richards, 1974, pp. 208-214) and Taylor (1975). Furthermore, Farooq (1998) identified and analyzed two error patterns in written texts of upper-basic Japanese learners, in an EFL context. He focused on both transfer and overgeneralization errors. Habbash (1982) studied common errors in the use of English prepositions in the written work of students at the end of the preparatory cycle in the Jerusalem area and found out that more errors were attributable to interference from Arabic than to other learning problems. She indicated that students always resort to literal translation before they form English patterns. In

other words, they translate the English into Arabic and then the Arabic back into English, word for word (not phrase by phrase). Finally it is clear from this brief discussion that the learner brings with him one source of error: his mother tongue. Even more importantly, the learning process itself is the source of other errors.

### 1.1.5. Common Errors

In order to make the process of error analysis proceed systematically, all steps such as collecting error samples, identifying, classifying, explaining, and evaluating errors, should be conducted carefully.

Politzer and Ramirez (1973) summarize and synthesize a number of common grammatical errors in terms of morphological and syntactical errors made by language learners (cited in Pardede, 2006, p. 11).

**Table 1: Politzer and Ramirez’s Linguistic Category Taxonomies**

Linguistic Category and Error Type	Example of Learner Error
<p><b>A. Morphology</b></p> <p>1. Indefinite Article Incorrect</p> <p>2. Possessive Case Incorrect</p> <p>3. Third Person Singular Verb Incorrect</p> <p>4. Simple Past Tense Incorrect</p> <p>    a. Regular past tense</p> <p>    b. Irregular past tense</p> <p>5. Past Participle Incorrect</p> <p>6. Comparative Adjective/Adverb Incorrect</p> <p><b>B. Syntax</b></p> <p>1. Noun Phrase</p> <p>    a. Determiners</p>	<p>A ant</p> <p>The man feet</p> <p>The bird help man</p> <p>The bird he save him</p> <p>He putted the cookie there</p> <p>He was call</p> <p>He got up more higher</p> <p>He no go in hole</p> <p>By to cook it</p>

b. Nominalization	He got some leaf
c. Number	My brother he go to Mexico
d. Use of Pronouns	He came (to) the water
e. Use of Prepositions	
2. Verb Phrase	He in the water
a. Omission of Verb	The bird was shake his head
b. Use of Progressive Tense	The apples was coming down
c. Agreement of Subject and Verb	He was going to fell
3. Verb-and-Verb Construction	The bird (object) he was gonna to
4. Word Order	shoot it
5. Some Transformations	
a. Negative Transformation	They won't have no fun
b. Question Transformation	How the story helps? s
c. There Transformation	There is these hole
d. Subordinate Clause Transformation	For the ant could get out

Gocsik (2005) listed out ten most commonly committed grammatical errors among students. Those are:

1. Missing comma after introductory phrases.

For example: After the devastation of the siege of Leningrad the Soviets were left with the task of rebuilding their population as well as their city. (A comma should be placed after "Leningrad.")

2. Vague pronoun reference.

For example: The boy and his father knew that he was in trouble. (Who is in trouble? The boy? His Father? Some other person?)

3. Missing comma in compound sentence.

For example: Wordsworth spent a good deal of time in the Lake District with his sister Dorothy and the two of them were rarely apart. (Comma should be placed before the "and.")

4. Wrong word.

5. No comma in nonrestrictive relative clauses.

For example: "My brother in the red shirt likes ice cream."

6. Wrong/missing inflected ends.

For instance: "To who am I speaking?"

We say "Who is the speaker of the day?" because "who" in this case refers to the subject of the sentence. But we say, "To whom am I speaking?" because, here, the pronoun is an object of the preposition "to."

7. Wrong/missing preposition.

8. Comma splice or run-on sentence

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are joined only with a comma. For example: "Picasso was profoundly affected by the war in Spain, it led to the painting of great masterpieces like Guernica."

9. Possessive apostrophe error.

Sometimes apostrophes are incorrectly left out; other times, they are incorrectly put in (her's, their's, etc.)

10. Tense shift.

Too often students move from past to present tense without good reason. The reader will find this annoying.

## **1.2. Overview on writing**

Writing is not a natural occurrence. It is a skill acquired from learning. An explanation is not needed as to why writing skill is a must for everyone to acquire. It is vital and it is needed in our daily life especially for students. According to Eberly Center (2015), writing is described as a complex intellectual task accompanied with numerous component skills. Some of the component skills are reading comprehension, analytical skills, writing mechanics which are derived from many more small mechanisms. All these components are needed to write well. Students may completely lack all of these and some might master them partially (Eberly Center, 2015). Without proper understanding in these skills, students' writings could hardly reach satisfactory marks or level.

Throughout the history, writing plays an extremely important role in our society (Tribble, 1996; Martin, 1989). Writing can help people communicate effectively in their social life. It is also "associated with status and power" (Tribble, 1996: 13). Nevertheless, it is not a straightforward skill for learners to acquire as the

speaking skill. Finegan (2004) confirms that “the ability to speak arose hundreds of thousands of years ago as part of our intellectual development during evolution, but writing was invented quite recently”. Learners need instructions to produce a standard writing product. Good writers should be very skillful at the implementation of elaborated and complex sentences as well as the choice of lexical items to make their writing as vivid as what is there in their mind. What is more, learning to write is closely associated not only with learning new genres and new ways of using grammar but also with different ways of dealing with the world because the social functions of writing tend to focus on recording things, completing tasks, developing arguments and assembling ideas. Obviously, “writing is a process requiring writers to explore, oppose and make connections between propositions for themselves” (Boughey, 1997: 127). Furthermore, Potts (2005) announces that writing process involves not only composing but communicating as well. According to Hedge (1988), before writing, writers always identify the reader they are writing to because this will provide them with a context to know what or how to write. Apparently, in order to have a quality writing product, the writer needs to make use of various knowledge, namely, “content knowledge, context knowledge, language system knowledge and writing process knowledge” (Tribble, 1996: 67). Crystal (1997) also points out three factors that should be taken into consideration when judging proficient writing are content knowledge, context knowledge and culture knowledge. It can be concluded that writing is the most significant and challenging productivity activity for L2 learners when they have to use the language for academic purposes.

### **1.3. Sentence construction**

A sentence is a collection of words that conveys sense or meaning and is formed according to the logic of grammar. Clear, short sentences are preferable, and more effective than long, complex ones.

Sentence structure is the way a sentence is arranged grammatically. The sentence structure of your writing includes where the noun and verb fall within an individual sentence. Sentence structure depends on the language in which you're writing or speaking. It's common in English for a simple sentence to look like this: "She throws the ball." In this case, the sentence structure is "Subject,

verb, object." There are many ways to make the sentence structure much more complicated while still providing a framework for the information you're conveying and being grammatically correct.

In traditional grammar, the four basic types of sentence structures are the simple sentence, the compound sentence, the complex sentence, and the compound-complex sentence.

The following statements are true about sentences in English:

- A new sentence begins with a capital letter.

*He obtained his degree.*

- A sentence ends with punctuation (a period, a question mark, or an exclamation point).

*He obtained his degree.*

- A sentence contains a subject that is only given once.

*Smith he obtained his degree.*

- A sentence contains a verb or a verb phrase.

*He **obtained** his degree.*

- A sentence follows Subject + Verb + Object word order.

*He (subject) **obtained** (verb) **his degree** (object).*

- A sentence must have a complete idea that stands alone. This is also called an independent clause.

*He obtained his degree.*

### ❖ Simple Sentences

A simple sentence contains a subject and a verb, and it may also have an object and modifiers. However, it contains only **one** independent clause.

Key: S = subject; V = verb, blue, O = object, pink, P =prepositional phrase

Here are a few examples:

She read.

S V

She completed her literature review.

S V O



He organized his sources by theme.

S      V      O      P

They studied APA rules for many hours.

S      V      O      P

### ❖ Compound Sentences

A compound sentence contains at least two independent clauses. These two independent clauses can be combined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction or with a semicolon.

Key: independent clause = underline; comma or semicolon = bold; coordinating conjunction = italics

Here are a few examples:

She completed her literature review, *and* she created her reference list.

He organized his sources by theme; then, he updated his reference list.

They studied APA rules for many hours, *but* they realized there was still much to learn.

Using some compound sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.

### ❖ Complex Sentences

A complex sentence contains at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. Dependent clauses can refer to the subject (who, which) the sequence/time (since, while), or the causal elements (because, if) of the independent clause.

If a sentence begins with a dependent clause, note the comma after this clause. If, on the other hand, the sentence begins with an independent clause, there is not a comma separating the two clauses.

Key: independent clause = underline; comma = bold; dependent clause = italics

Here are a few examples:

Although she completed her literature review, *she still needed to work on her methods section.*

- Note the comma in this sentence because it begins with a dependent clause.

Because he organized his sources by theme, *it was easier for his readers to follow.*

- Note the comma in this sentence because it begins with a dependent clause.

They studied APA rules for many hours *as they were so interesting.*

- Note that there is no comma in this sentence because it begins with an independent clause.

Using some complex sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.

### ❖ **Compound-Complex Sentences**

Sentence types can also be combined. A compound-complex sentence contains at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

Key: independent clause = underline; coordinating conjunction = bold; dependent clause = italics

She completed her literature review, **but** she still needs to work on her methods section *even though she finished her methods course last semester.*

*Although he organized his sources by theme,* he decided to arrange them chronologically, **and** he carefully followed the MEAL plan for organization.

*With pizza and soda at hand,* they studied APA rules for many hours, and they decided that writing in APA made sense *because it was clear, concise, and objective.*

Using some complex-compound sentences in writing allows for more sentence variety.

#### **1.4. Previous Studies**

There were several previous studies that highlighted grammatical errors done by students due to their first language interference. Not many researchers relate and use interlingual and intralingual errors as the factors of first language interference in students' grammatical errors. However there was one research conducted by Taiseer (2008). In his research, he applied the rules and functions of interlingual errors and intralingual errors in identifying his samples. The title of his research is "An Analysis of the Common Grammatical Errors in the English Writing made the 3rd Secondary Male Students in the Eastern Coast of the UAE". The purpose of his study was similar to this research which was to explore the common types of grammatical errors made by students in their writing. His samples were Emirati secondary male students. Their first language is Arabic and it is vastly different from English. He managed to differentiate Arabic language and English in detail in his research. He included four aims of this study and one of them was the same as the main purpose of this research. Taiseer (2008) wanted to find out whether mother tongue interference was the major cause for errors in the English writings of Emirati male students. Based on his analysis on 105 samples, it was found out that the UAE students did different types of grammatical errors in a lot of aspects such as passive voice, verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, plurality, and auxiliaries. All of these grammatical errors are mostly contributed due to intralingual errors. Intralingual errors were more frequent than interlingual errors. The Emirati students applied the rules of L2 in their writings without comprehending the whole rules first. Taiseer's findings were not made solely on his analysis, but he also put forward the answers from questionnaires that he provided to the supervisors of those students. The main purpose of the questionnaires was to get perspectives from the students' supervisors. Based on the answers given by the supervisors, there were other reasons that contributed to the students' weak performance in writing such as less practice, not having enough experience in this skill, changes in education system, new language curriculum, and minimum time allotted for acquiring writing skill. Those were

the additional reasons that were added up to the students underachievement in writing. With those findings, it showed that English writing skills of the secondary male students needs more reinforcement and development because they still have a long way to go in writing satisfactory essays in English (Taiseer, 2008).

The growing number of studies on error analysis is very remarkable. Several studies have been conducted to investigate Arab EFL learners writing errors in general and grammatical errors in particular.

In a large study, Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid (2014) examined the writing of 266 Jordanian first year university students. They used a translation test to find out the errors and the source of committing them. The percentage of total errors made exceeded the percentage of correct answers. In other words, the writing of these students had more grammatical errors than correct ones. They also found that most of the errors done are due to the L1 transfer (interlanguage). The unexpected results of their study may be due to the use of instrument (translation test). It can be expected that first year students would use the word to word translation method to translate. As a result, a large number of interlanguage grammatical errors would occur in their translated sentences. Using a different method, Ridha (2012) examined English writing samples of 80 EFL college students and then categorized the errors according to the following taxonomy: grammatical, lexical/semantic, mechanics, and word order types of errors. The results showed that most of the students' errors were due to L1 transfer. Furthermore, she found that most students rely on their mother tongue in expressing their ideas. Therefore, it seems that Arab EFL learners commit numerous various errors when they write in the target language. In addition, the influence of the mother tongue seems to be a major source of committing these errors. Both studies contend that most of errors committed by Arab English learners are due to the mother tongue interference.

In a more focused research, Sawalmeh (2013) analyzed the grammatical errors in a corpus of 32 essays written by Arabic speaking Saudi learners of English in a preparatory year program at University of Ha'il. The findings revealed that the most frequent errors were in verb tense, article, and sentence fragment whereas the least frequent errors were in capitalization, pronoun, and preposition. The findings also indicated that most of students' errors were interlingual errors due

to the influence of mother-tongue. The tense system of Arabic language is almost completely different from that of the target language. Additionally, Arabic language has no indefinite article (an, a) in their system. Therefore, most of the inter-language errors committed in the use of tense and article. In the same line, Hourani (2008) examined the grammatical errors in essays written by 115 Emirati secondary students. He found that most of errors were in the categories of verb tenses and subject-verb agreement whereas the least frequent errors were in the categories of passive voice and singular/plural. Both studies are similar in the sense that most of the errors committed were in verb tense. However, there is a difference in source of committing those errors. The former indicated that most of students' errors were interlingual errors (mother-tongue interference) while the later showed that most of the errors made were intralingual (lack of knowledge). From the contradicted results that have been seen in both mentioned studies, it can be noticed that there is a need to conduct a further research with more deep analysis on the causes of the errors that commonly made by Arab EFL learners.

Moreover, Abushihab et al. (2011) conducted a study to identify and classify the grammatical errors in the writings of 62 Jordanian university students who study in the department of English Literature and Translation. The errors were first classified into six major categories and then they were divided into subcategories. The findings showed that the largest number of errors were in the use of prepositions followed by morphological errors, articles, verbs, active and passive and tenses. Similar results were found in the study conducted by Nawar Diab (2014) who examined through error analysis 73 essays written by Lebanese university students. In his findings, Nawar showed that the transfer of Arabic linguistics structure influences the writing of Lebanese EFL learners. In most past studies, the mother tongue (Arabic) had a negative influence in Arab EFL learners writing in the target language. The reason could be due to the learning method employed by the students and the instruction given by EFL teachers in teaching their students to write in the target language. It is important to mention that Arab EFL learners need to understand the grammatical system of English language and applied it in their writing without any influence from the first language (Arabic).

Regarding the types of errors committed in the grammatical categories, Zawahreh et al. (2012) studied errors made by ten graders in writing English essays and found that the most dominant errors were in subject verb agreement, insertion of preposition, verb omission, tense, and word choice. The fact that Arabic language has no subject-verb agreement in their system might led students to commit many errors in this grammatical category. Regarding the prepositions, Arabic and English language are similar in that they both have several types of prepositions. However, the using of prepositions in Arabic is differ from that of English language. Using the same method but different sample, Abushihab et al. (2011) found that the omission of prepositions and articles were the most types of errors occurred in Jordanian students' writings. On the other hand, Mohammed and Abdalhussein, (2015) conducted study to investigate the grammatical errors committed by Iraqi postgraduate students in UKM. They found that addition of preposition, omission of plural ending "s" and misuse and addition of plural ending "s" are among the most frequent types of errors occurred. The differences found in the results of Mohammed and Abdalhussein, (2015) and Abushihab et al. (2011) could be due to the sample used or the educational level of the students. The former used Iraqi Arab students and the later used Jordanian students. In addition, Mohammed and Abdalhussein, (2015) investigated research proposal written by postgraduates while Abushihab et al. (2011) analyzed essays written by undergraduates.

Most of the aforementioned studies analyzed the errors of the grammatical categories committed in the writings of Arab EFL learners and the cause of committing these errors. However, few studies have been done to look at the types of errors (omission, addition, substitution and permutation) committed in each grammatical category. Thus, there is a need for further research to examine the types of errors that could be found in the grammatical categories. On the other hand, many studies used Arab EFL learners from various countries as their participants whereby research investigated the writing of Iraqi Arab EFL learners have been neglected. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the grammatical errors committed by Iraqi pre-university students in their writing in English language.

As mentioned above that errors done by learners can be used to assist learners to write better, Error Analysis (EA) which is the process to analyze learners' errors

systematically has gained a great deal of interest from many scholars and researchers. Error Analysis (EA) was employed to help both EFL and ESL learners improve their writing. Zheng and Park (2013), for instance, analyzed the errors found in English essays written by Chinese and Korean students. Results showed that errors made by these two groups of writers were various. They had problems in using articles and punctuation marks, and ordering words. Zheng and Park (2013) mentioned that the negative transfer of the subjects' first language was the major source of the errors. In a similar study of Liu (2013), it was found that the participants who were Chinese learners made the errors when they wrote English sentences. She pointed out that the sources were carelessness and negative influence of the subjects' mother tongue.

The present study, therefore, was conducted to find errors frequently found in English sentences written by secondary schoolers in Hai Phong city. Besides, it aimed at examining sources of the errors. Apart from studying previous studies related to sources of errors, this study employed the designed exercises so as to get some in-depth information lying behind the errors. Hopefully, this will raise students' awareness on the errors they did and prevent them from making the errors again.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Participants

The population of the study consisted of 40 students who were in their first year and second year of secondary education, aged between 11 to 13 years. They were selected from Popodoo English center. All these participants are students from different secondary schools in Haiphong city. They have been studying English as a school subject for more than 12 years and the number of English periods taught per week is six and the duration of each period is 30 minutes.

These students have just access to basic English in a few years, so they are generally at the elementary level of English. They could use English as a foreign language to communicate with their teachers and classmates in English classes. The students have opportunities to learn with teachers from America and Holland in Popodoo English center. For communication at home, in non – English classes, and in daily life, they use Vietnamese.

### 2.2. Description of data collection procedures

#### *Step 1: Collect 40 handouts delivered to secondary schoolers*

In order to collect the data, the handout including two exercises was suitably designed for target students.

Students were required to do two certain exercises in 30 minutes. There are ten questions in each exercise. Exercise one requires students to make a complete sentence basing on given words, and exercise two requires them to translate certain sentences into English.

The handouts were distributed at the end of their English classes in Popodoo English center. The students were given 30 minutes to complete the items in the handout and all their answers were kept confidential.

#### *Step 2: Process the data*

Data were processed by (1) using the descriptive statistics, finding out the percentage of each kind of mistakes and (2) working out the common kinds of mistakes following Politzer and Ramirez's steps of analyzing error (1973).



### ***Step 3: Suggest strategies to correct the error***

Based on the findings from sample analysis, the researcher would give some pedagogical implications to help teachers find appropriate ways to correct such errors for their students.

### **2.3. Data collection and analysis**

Designed exercises was employed as the main method of data collection, specifically document analysis. The whole collected handouts were thoroughly examined to identify any grammatical errors made in them. In other words, qualitative research is the dominant method of the study. According to Selinger and Shohamy (1989: 124), this “a useful approach whenever an investigator is concerned with discovering or describing second language acquisition in its natural state or context and where there are no assumptions about what that activity consists of or what its role is in acquisition”(cited in Pardede, 2006, p. 15).

In the study, statistical analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the given handouts. Simple descriptive statistics was the most suitable method data analysis for this study in terms of the study scope as well as the researcher’s own capabilities. Other methods like content analysis were more complicated and seem to be beyond the researcher’s management and abilities.

The errors were descriptively analyzed by using the following four steps. First, the errors were identified by carefully examining all erroneous sentences. Second, the errors were classified by comparing each erroneous sentence to its reconstructed counterpart. Third, the errors’ main causes was then determined.

### CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The number of sentences in each exercise is 10 sentences. Thus, the overall number of all sentences was 800. According to the results of the analysis process, 547 sentences were found to be grammatically incorrect. In addition, the 547 sentences comprised of 583 errors. Accordingly, an average of 1 or 2 errors were detected in each sentence. In fact, the number of errors was higher than the presented statistics. However, the other errors are not grammatical but related to word choice, expression and register.

The overall sum and percentages of error types found are presented in the following table. Nevertheless, only the eight most commonly committed errors were listed out. The other errors were present in the subgroup of “Others”. The types of errors were listed in the order from the most commonly committed to the least commonly committed.

**Table 1: Common grammatical errors in sentence construction by secondary schoolers**

No	Error Types	Sum	Percentage
1.	Number	121	21
2.	Incorrect Article Use	100	17
3.	Preposition Incorrect	92	16
4.	Third Person Singular Verb Incorrect	68	12
5.	Tense Shift	61	10
6.	Miuse of Pronouns	59	10
7.	Nominalization	54	9
8.	Word order	18	4
9.	Others	10	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>583</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3.1. Data Interpretation

Based on the result of the data analysis, it can be clearly seen that the students made much more syntactic errors than morphological ones. In fact, only three types of errors in the table are related to morphology that totally makes up 39% of the whole detected errors regarding Incorrect Article Use (17%), Third Person Singular Verb Incorrect (12%), and Tense Shift (10%). Meanwhile, 60% of the total errors are involved with syntax.

According to the calculations, the greatest number errors of all were related to Noun Phrases (40%) with three subgroups namely Number (21%), Misuse of Pronouns (10%) and Nomination (9%). Number is the most commonly committed types of error with 121 detected out of 583 errors. Following are some examples of Noun Phrase errors found

**Table 2: Examples of Noun Phrase Errors done by secondary schoolers**

<b>Error Type</b>	<b>Erroneous sentence</b>	<b>Reconstructed sentence</b>
Number	Megan has many pencil in her box	Megan has many pencils in her box
	Those are his black car	Those are his black cars
	Lucy's house has a big garden with many tree	Lucy's house has a big garden with many trees
Pronoun Misuse	Annie and me saw a movie yesterday	Annie and I saw a movie yesterday
	I gave she a gift	I gave her a gift
Nomialization	He likes cook with his grandmother	He likes cooking with his grandmother
	I love go swim in the summer	I love going swimming in the summer

It can be seen that students made mistake in the use of singular and plural nouns. They do not seem to fully master the use of such kinds of nouns in writing sentences. The same problem encountered involves the distinction between subject and object pronouns together with the use of gerund as a subject of a sentence.

Incorrect article use with 17% was a remarkable error committed by the students. Most students had problem with the use of singular noun. Additionally, they made mistakes with the rule of adding “a” and “an”. Some examples are as follows.

- *I see **a ant** on **apple**.*
- *There is **an orange umbrella** in her bag.*
- *Lucy’s house has **big garden** with many trees.*
- *I gave her **gift**.*

Preposition proved to cause difficulty to the students with 92 detected errors making up 16%. Most students forgot to add prepositions after the verb or use the incorrect preposition. Besides, they were still confused between “in” and “on”. Some examples are as follows.

- *She is **going** school.*
- *My aunt and my uncle are traveling **plane**.*
- *I see an ant **in** the apple.*
- *There is an orange umbrella **on** her bag.*

Students also had problem when dealing with Third Person Singular Verbs. This type of error made up 12% of the total errors. Most of the cases students did not put “s” or “es” after the verb when it goes with a third person singular subject. Besides, they made mistakes with the rule of adding “s” and “es”. Following are some incorrect sentences.

- *He **like** cook with his grandmother.*

- *My sister often **teachs** me to play a guitar.*
- *My son **ride** a bike to school everyday.*

The most common errors involving the tense shift with (10%) were the shift between past and present tense. Students used present tense when they were writing about something in the past. For instance,

- *Last Sunday, he **doesn't** visit his grandparents.*
- *Last night, I **go** to my friend's house and we **make** a cake.*
- *Annie and I **see** a movie yesterday.*
- *I **give** her a gift.*

Word order respectively made up 4% among the sum of errors. This types of errors mostly occurred when students used adjectives in their writing. Some examples can be taken as evidence of the error commitment.

- *There is **an umbrella orange** on her bag.*
- *Lucy's house has **a garden big** with many trees.*

Other types of errors include spelling mistakes , misuse of Past Verb form. All of them made up 1% of the total number of errors.

### 3.2. Causes of errors

It can be inferred from the analysis of the major types of grammatical errors above that most of the errors are resulted from the inference or bilingual transfer from the native language as well as the incompetence of the target language. To be more specific, the inference from Vietnamese took place because the students transferred Vietnamese rules into English. It could show that the students had encountered more difficulties of English production in the word level than in the sentence level. In Vietnamese, there is no difference between singular and plural nouns. Besides, verbs appear in the same form for all types of subject, tenses and positions in a sentence. Similarly, subject and object pronouns are the same. In Vietnamese, we put adjectives after nouns and a subject can go with an adjective without any verb. We can see such difference between Vietnamese and English in the following table:

**Table 3: The differences between English and Vietnamese**

	<b>English version</b>	<b>Vietnamese equivalence</b>
Number	Megan has one <b>pencil</b> in her box  Megan has many <b>pencils</b> in her box	Megan có một cái <b>bút</b> trong hộp của cô ấy  Megan có nhiều <b>bút</b> trong hộp của cô ấy
Pronouns	I gave <b>her</b> a gift  <b>She</b> cooked a dinner	Tôi đã tặng <b>cô ấy</b> một món quà  <b>Cô ấy</b> đã nấu bữa tối
Nominalization	He likes <b>cooking</b> with his grandmother  <b>Cooking</b> is very fun	Anh ấy thích <b>nấu ăn</b> cùng bà của anh ấy  <b>Nấu ăn</b> rất vui
Third Person Singular Verbs	My son <b>rides</b> a bike to school everyday  I <b>ride</b> a bike to school everyday	Con trai của tôi <b>đạp xe</b> tới trường mỗi ngày  Tôi <b>đạp xe</b> tới trường mỗi ngày
Article use	There is <b>an orange umbrella</b> in her bag  I see <b>an ant</b> on <b>the apple</b> .	Có <b>một cái ô màu cam</b> trong cặp của cô ấy  Tôi nhìn thấy <b>một con kiến</b> trên <b>quả táo</b>
Word order	Lucy's house has a <b>big garden</b> with many trees  Those are <b>his black cars</b>	Nhà của Lucy có một cái <b>vườn lớn</b> với rất nhiều cây cối  Đây là <b>những con xe màu đen của anh ấy</b>
Tense shift	Last Sunday, he <b>didn't visit</b> his grandparents.  He <b>doesn't visit</b> his grandparents	Chủ nhật tuần trước, anh ấy <b>không thăm</b> ông bà anh ấy  Anh ấy <b>không thăm</b> ông bà anh ấy

### **3.3. Implications**

From the findings and interpretations above, the researcher would like to put forwards several recommendations concerning the error correction and grammar teaching. Initially, a course based on the frequency of errors will enable the teacher to teach the point of error and to emphasize more on those errors where the error frequency is higher. Errors provide feedback, they tell the teachers something about the effectiveness of their teaching techniques and show them what parts of the syllabus they have been following have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention. Teachers should increase the number of assignments for the sake of which the students would have to do a lot of writing during their free time, hence they would be reading a lot of English materials and thinking in English. Furthermore, in order to help students avoid errors, teachers should assist them to identify the error themselves. This could be done through peer checking process in writing. Learners can easily identify their peers' error than their own ones and thus they can learn from such errors. In addition, the students should be aware of grammatical applications when writing English, especially the top three error types: the singular/plural errors, the article errors, and the preposition errors. The English writing teachers and the syllabus designers could create more appropriate lessons and teaching material to remedy their English grammatical problems by using the research results as guidance. The teachers should instruct the students to realize the importance of using correct English grammar. The teachers should provide the appropriate feedback and explanation of the errors made to the students in order to make them recognize and be aware of the common grammatical error commission, especially the top three common errors. The teachers should distinguish different structures between Vietnamese and English grammar and explain them to the students. The teachers may encourage the students to think in English and use plain English when writing sentences in order to prevent any direct translation of Vietnamese to English. Moreover, the characteristics of the errors which were caused from the difficulties and problems within English itself should be focused and explained more by the teachers. It is hoped that implications of these exposed findings might raise the students' understanding and awareness to write English sentences more accurately.

## **CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION**

### **4.1. Summary**

Based on the findings and interpretations in the data analysis, the following conclusion could be drawn.

First, the students' grammatical competence in particular and English competence in general was quite low. On average, each sentence contained up to two grammatical errors.

Secondly, the two sources of errors were detected. All the errors were caused by two factors, i.e. inference from Vietnamese and incompetence of the target language.

Besides, according to the errors students done in their writing sentences, it is necessary to make students practice more grammar and spelling skills in the process of writing. Grammar should be taught in context and through peer checking and giving feedback from teachers.

### **4.2. Limitations**

Although this research was carefully prepared, I am still aware of its limitations and shortcomings.

First of all, one of the limitations of this study is that it focuses only on grammatical errors in sentence construction and only on secondary students.

Furthermore, it is clear that other studies may focus on grammatical errors in both spoken and written forms in a variety of different participants, such as high school students and college students. However, with secondary schoolers in this study, they have access to basic English in a few years, and they are generally at



the elementary level of English. Thus, the designed exercises only stops at the level of the sentence construction

Additionally, because of the limited time, secondary schoolers were only given 30 minutes to complete their exercises. Hence, the students' overload work in the limited amount of time might affect the result of their writing products.

Besides, the population of the experimental group is small, only forty students and might not represent the majority of the students of the elementary level.

#### **4.3. Recommendations for further studies**

From the limitations of this study, the researcher would like to give some suggestions for further study. First, there exists a limitation concerning the data collection for the study. Due to the time and financial constraints, the designed exercises were only administered to a small population of secondary schoolers (40), which had a great influence on the reliability and accuracy of the collected data to some extent. Therefore, other studies may focus on students in high schools or universities. Second, within the scope of minor thesis, the subject of the study mainly aims at sentence construction in writing skill. Hence, the forthcoming researches may be conducted in other skills like speaking and assess more aspects of students' language competency.

In spite of above-mentioned shortcomings, it is hoped that the study will be of great help in enhancing the teaching and learning quality at secondary schools in Haiphong city.

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## APPENDIX

These exercises are designed to collect the data for my research in common grammatical errors in sentence construction by secondary schoolers in Hai Phong city. Your assistance in completing the following items makes a great contribution to my study. I assure all your answers will be kept confidential.

(Các bài tập này được thiết kế để thu thập dữ liệu cho nghiên cứu của tôi về các lỗi ngữ pháp phổ biến trong xây dựng câu của học sinh trung học ở thành phố Hải Phòng. Sự hỗ trợ của bạn trong việc hoàn thành các mục sau đây là sự đóng góp lớn đối với nghiên cứu của tôi. Tôi đảm bảo tất cả các câu trả lời của bạn sẽ được giữ bí mật.)

**Exercise 1.** Make a complete sentence with the given words. (Hoàn thành câu với các từ cho sẵn)

1. My sister/ often/ teach/ me/ to play a guitar.

.....

2. Last Sunday/ he/ not/ visit his grandparents.

.....

3. Megan/ have/ many/ pencil/ in/ her box.

.....

4. Last night/ I/ go to/ my friend's house/ and we/ make a cake.

.....

5. My son/ ride a bike to school/ everyday.

.....

6. Trang, Eric, and Mark/ like/ reading books and listening to music.

.....

7. We/ be/ go to/ the supermarket/ this evening.

.....

8. Her brother/ or/ her sister/ be/ arrive/ by train/ today.

.....

9. I/ will/ see/ a doctor/ tomorrow.

.....

10. Those/ be/ his black cup.  
.....

**Exercise 2.** Translate the following sentences into English. (Chuyển các câu sau sang tiếng Anh)

1. Tôi đã tặng cô ấy một món quà.  
.....

2. Tôi thích đi bơi vào mùa hè.  
.....

3. Tôi đang về nhà.  
.....

4. Annie và tôi đã xem phim ngày hôm qua.  
.....

5. Nhà của Lucy có một khu vườn rộng với rất nhiều cây.  
.....

6. Cô ấy đang đến trường.  
.....

7. Anh ấy thích nấu ăn cùng bà của anh ấy.  
.....

8. Cô và chú của tôi đang đi du lịch bằng máy bay.  
.....

9. Tôi nhìn thấy một con kiến trên quả táo.  
.....

10. Có một cái ô màu cam trong cặp của cô ấy.  
.....

**Thank you for your co-operation!**