COMMON ERRORS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: CURRENT SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS

Dinh Thi Thanh Huyen[1] **Dang Hien Dieu**[2]
Hoang Thi Thu Ha[3]

[1, 2, 3]Thanh Do University

Email: *dtthuyen@thanhdouni.edu.vn*[1], *dhdieu8@gmail.com*[2]; *httha@thanhouni.edu.vn*[3]

Abstract: *Although English is regarded as an international language, speaking English fluently still becomes an obstacle for Vietnamese students, even for those majoring in English. This study aims to identify the most common errors in English speaking made by second-year English-major students in a selected university in the north of Vietnam. The study mainly focuses on three main factors that contribute to these errors: pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Moreover, the study offers some recommendations for students to overcome these obstacles.*

Keywords: *English language learning; Errors in English speaking; Current situation and solutions.*

1. Introduction

In this day and age, English is regarded as the global language whose influence is greater than any other. Individuals are becoming more and more aware of the necessity to study English in order to advance. The trend of English globalization has made it compulsory to communicate with people of different language and cultural backgrounds in distinct environments. Along with other skills (reading, writing and listening), speaking English efficiently serves as a crucial vehicle for assisting students reach their goals. As a result, English speaking is a critical skill that students especially those majoring in English should pay close attention to.

However, learning a new language has always been a challenge, and learners face a number of difficulties. For English majors, fluency in speaking is a crucial skill for their academic and professional pursuits. By the end of the courses, they are expected to effectively and fluently communicate in a variety of English-speaking contexts. Despite being sophomores, many students still struggle with achieving clarity and proficiency in spoken English. As a result, researching common errors in English speaking is necessary for students especially the second-year ones.

The study aims at helping second-year English - major students' amelioration. It focuses on analyzing and evaluating the common errors they make while learning to speak English. By pinpointing the specific errors, the study seeks to provide targeted support tailored to their language abilities effectively. Furthermore, identifying and understanding their frequent errors can empower students to overcome the struggle, ultimately improving their speaking skills and increasing confidence in using English.

2. Research overview

2.1. English speaking and its functions

Wilson (1983) defined speaking the development of the relationship between the speaker and the listener. According to him, the main goal of speaking is to communicate. In 1994, speaking was recognized as critical for functioning in an English language context, both by teachers and by learners (Brown, 1994). In addition, Cameron (2001) pays more attention to the precision of details in speaking a foreign language. She states that speaking is the active use of language to express meanings so that others can make sense of them. Moreover, according to Joanna and Heather (2003), "speaking means using language for a purpose. For example, instead of asking students to repeat sentences, sometimes give students a topic and ask them to construct and say their own responses."

In general, speaking can be understood as the ability to express language, opinions, attitudes, and emotions through speech. Apart from being one of the skills in English learning, speaking can be termed oral communication. Consequently, those who are proficient in English speaking skills have better learning opportunities, and also have the potential for advancement (Baker and Westrup, 2003). Moreover, speaking skills also assist in the development of other skills such as reading (Mart, 2012), writing (Zayniddinovna & Xodjayorova, 2021), and listening (Richards, 2008). Overall, speaking skills play an important role in achieving success and realizing personal ambitions, desires, and goals (Rao, 2019).

2.2. Aspects of English speaking

Unlike other skills, speaking skills require a combination of constituent elements, including accuracy and fluency (Harmer, 2001). On the other hand, the research of Fulcher and Davidson (2006) identifies five components of speaking skills as (a) Pronunciation, (b) Grammar, (c) Vocabulary, (d) Fluency, and (e) Comprehension [16]. Most of the errors in speaking English come from these factors. However, this research paper delves into the study of three factors: Pronunciation, Grammar and Vocabulary to study the common mistakes students make when speaking English.

2.2.1. Pronunciation

Dalton, & Seidlhofer (1994) define pronunciation as the production and reception of sounds of speech. Students are increasingly demanding in English speaking, especially pronunciation. However, learning a foreign language is not that easy. This requires students to spend a certain amount of time studying and improving their language skills. According to Tiansoodeenon (2022), filled pauses, stutters, repeats, corrections, silent pauses and slips of the tongue are some English speaking errors. Beside, when conducting study on third-year English major at Hai Phong Private University, My (2019) pointed out students' common errors including some difficult consonants, ending sounds, intonation, and stress errors and gave them some ideas how to cope with this problem.

One of the major causes of problems is the difference between the sounds in English and their mother tongue (Uyen et all., 2021). For example, the word "car" when not aspirated will become "ca", which means the mug in Vietnamese. When spoken inaccurately, sometimes even the formed sounds like /b/ or /g/ can cause misunderstandings in some contexts. Students may pronounce the word "dog" as "doc" if they mispronounce the /g/ sound, for instance.

In most cases, students often tend to relate the sounds in their own language to English, leading to incorrect pronunciation.

2.2.2. Grammar

Rob (1994) states that grammar consists of two fundamental ingredients – syntax and morphology – and together they help us to identify grammatical forms which serve to enhance and sharpen the expression of meaning. Grammar in English is also an aspect that needs to be considered, especially for those whose native language is distinctive in structure and syntax.

Tarawneh and Almomani (2013) pointed out that mistakes and errors are classified under three categories: subject-verb agreement, plural morpheme, and L1 interference.

English has many rules but also many exceptions, from the use of tenses to the plural form of nouns (Hamidah, 2022). For instance, when students want to change the singular form of the word to the plural form, as they are taught in school, most plural nouns are formed by adding "-s". However, some nouns have irregular forms, such as "mouse" becoming "mice" or "vita" becoming "vitae". As a result, these omissions require learners to memorize more specifics, rather than relying on general rules. The same is true of the past simple form of a verb, following the rule that when changing to the past tense by adding "-ed" at the end of the word. However, there are some exceptions, such as "become" being converted to "became", "choose" being converted to "chose" (Simbolon, 2015). Therefore, these exceptions require learners to memorize more specific information, rather than relying on general rules.

English language learners frequently have problem choosing the right prepositions. For example, people may confuse "in", "on", and "at" while talking about time and place. Months go with "in" (in April, in August) but days go with

"on" (on Monday, on Tuesday) (Nozima & Nilufar, 2023). In addition, depending on the context, phrasal verbs also have different usage. "Stop doing something" means to stop a certain action, event or thing that is taking place. On the other hand, the phrasal verb "stop to do something" means to stop the action that is being done to do another action, event or thing. This distinction can make student confused while using it in English speaking context.

2.2.3. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a word or a phrase. According to John and Mario (2004), "Words hang together in typical clusters rather than exist in splendid isolation. Lexico-grammar – the zone where syntax and lexis cooperate to forge meaning – has become a key consideration in the way vocabulary is taught.". English is one of the languages with the largest vocabulary, with approximately 500.000 words and 300.000 technical terms in use, that take a long time to memorize (Van et all, 2023).

On the other hand, the impact of context can lead to changes in meaning. For example, the word "battery" in different contexts will have different meanings. In the following sentences: My battery is flat. They have to face a battery of problems. The word "battery" in both sentences is a noun but in the first sentence, according to the Oxford dictionary, battery means a device that is placed inside a car engine, clock, radio, etc. and that produces the electricity that makes it work. In the second sentence, "battery" means a large number of things.

Another difficulty is the difference between spoken and written language, as there are many words that are commonly used in everyday contexts while some are used in essays, research, or in the workplace (Alijagic, 2023). In daily communication, students frequently use "To put it in a nutshell" in order to summarize their viewpoints. Instead of using that phrase, they use "In summary" in written language. In some situations, students may even use the wrong word type, instead of using advice (noun) they use advise (verb). In addition, in English there are phrases that often go together, requiring students to memorize them. Therefore, if they cannot memorize them correctly, students will tend to misuse those phrases.

3. Research methods

This studied uses an online survey as quantitative method to identify common errors in English speaking of twenty-six second-year students majoring in English at Thanh Do university. After analizing the data, some common speaking errors are identified and some suggested solutions are recommended to help them to overcome these problems.

4. Research results

According to the data, most of the students (50%) spend about 1-2 hours/day practicing, while only 11,5% spend 2 to 3 hours a day and none of the surveyed students spend more than 3 hours a day improving their English speaking ability although 76,9 % admit that speaking is the most challenging skill.

Figure 1. The amount of time students spend practicing English

The amount of time students spend practicing English

- Less than 1 hour/ day
- 1-2 hours/ day
- 2- 3 hours/ day
- More than 3 hours / day
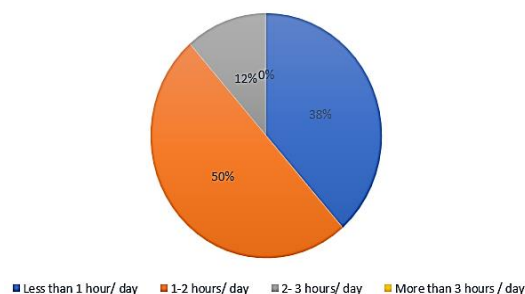
4.1. Current common errors in English speaking

Figure 2. The factors that caused students to make most of the mistakes

Phát âm (Pronunciation) — 19 (73,1%)
Ngữ pháp (Grammar) — 18 (69,2%)
Từ vựng (Vocabulary) — 19 (73,1%)

Among three selected factors (pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary), the majority of errors were in pronunciation and vocabulary, accounting for 73,2%. Grammar-related errors made up 69,2% of the results.

Firstly, in term of pronunciation, four main aspects assessed in this section are presented as follows.

**Table 1. Common mistakes in pronunciation**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
You pronounce English words similarly to Vietnamese	2	7	8	9	0
You incorrectly pronounce voiced sounds such as /dʒ/ or /tʃ/	2	5	9	9	1
You ignore the pronunciation of voiceless sounds such as /h/, /t/, /p/ or /k/	2	3	8	12	1
You mispronounce words that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations	2	1	11	11	1

From figure in Table 1, students frequently ignore the pronunciation of voiceless sounds, with 12 votes in agreement and 1 vote in strong agreement. One of the most common errors is mispronouncing words that are spelled the same but pronounced differently, with 11 votes in agreement and 1 vote in strong agreement. In addition, some students pronounce English words similarly to Vietnamese, with 9 votes for agreement, while 7 votes indicated disagreement. Voiced sounds like /dʒ/ or /tʃ/ also cause struggling for students while speaking, with 9 votes for agreement.

Secondly, in terms of grammar, it can be seen that most students keep neutral when questioned about their grammatical mistakes while speaking.

Figure 3. Common mistakes in Grammar
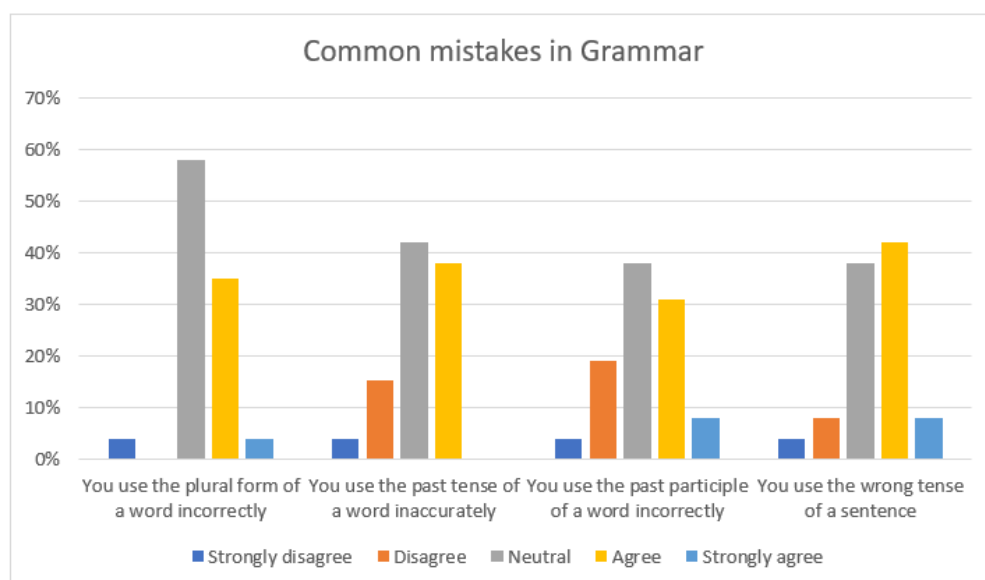
According to Figure 3, one of the most common errors made by students is inaccurate use of verb tenses in sentences. In particular, 50% of the students use the wrong tenses while speaking whereas 38,5% make mistakes in plural form, past tense, and past participle form of a word.

Lastly, in terms of vocabulary, most students still confuse about how they use language while speaking.

Table 2. Common mistakes in Vocabulary

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
You use words in the wrong context.	1	0	14	11	0
You misuse common phrases while speaking English.	1	1	12	12	0
You use the wrong word form.	1	7	9	9	0
You reuse basic words instead of expanding your vocabulary.	1	2	9	9	5

The statistics reveal that most students reuse basic words (about 54%) instead of expanding their vocabulary (11,5%). In addition, 46,2% of the students make mistakes when using common phrases while speaking English. On the other hand, only 4% use word in the suitable context when communicating orally.

4.2. *Some solutions to overcome errors in English speaking*

After identifying speaking errors, students was asked to choose the ways to overcome these problems.

4.2.1. Pronunciation

In order to improve pronunciation, 57,7% students choose to listen to conversations or speeches of native speakers, and then repeat them regularly. The second most chosen choice is to practice speaking by looking up word's pronunciation in dictionaries, accounting for 53,8%. Students also improve their ability through practice IPA and record their practicing process to find their mistakes while speaking. Nevertheless, compared to others, the least chosen option is recording their process, accounting for only 30.8%.

4.2.2. Grammar

For grammar improvement, most of the students (61,5%) choose to memorize common sentence patterns through social networking sites, entertainment activities, native speakers, etc. Next, 50% plan to review basic and advanced grammar structures, and the rest try to correct themselves while realizing they have made a mistake.

4.2.3. Vocabulary

Finally, most of the students choose the methods of learning new words through news, some kinds of entertainment and native speakers to broaden their wide range of vocabulary, accounting for 76,9%. Others (61,5%) also find learning through using words in a real-life context effective to improve their speaking skills. Using supporting applications and studying specific topics are the least favourite ways of enhancing vocaburaly. About 50% use applications as support tools like Quizlet or Anki and only about 42,3% absorb knowledge through learning about specialized topics.

5. Discussion

Regarding English language teaching and learning, the amelioration of English speaking skills is one of the key objectives. However, The survey results reveal that sophomore English majored students has still encountered some errors while speaking English.

Among the three main dimensions of common errors: pronuncation, grammar and vocabulary, it is under no astonishment that pronunciation is the most obstacle. Vietnamese second-year students (38,5%) have difficulty in pronouncing sounds like /dʒ/ because this sound does not exist in their mother tongue. Instead of pronouncing /dʒ/, they may pronounce it as "d" or "gi" in Vietnamese. Similarly, the collected data imply students to normally ignore the pronunciation of voiceless sounds like /h/, /t/, /p/ or /k/. This problem arises due to the habit of using language in their native language (Uyen et all., 2021). Moreover, English

has a variety of words that spelling and pronunciation are inconsistent. They can be spelled similarly but pronounced differently. These led to the struggling of mastering correct pronunciation in English. English vocabulary doesn't usually follow a consistent rule, so students can easily make mistakes while speaking English. For example, the words "lead" has two pronunciations, /liːd/ means guiding (verb) and /lɛd means a type of metal (noun). The unique aspect of English is word stress. Words can be stressed in many different positions. Nevertheless, Vietnamese people frequently do not have a clear method of stressing, this can lead to the difficulty for English language learners. In addition, English uses intonation to express emotions and emphasize speaker's attitude. Rising intonation in a sentence often expresses positive, happy emotions while falling intonation is used to express certainty, agreement, and maturity in communication. Next, sophomore graduates suffers from vocabulary limitation while speaking English. 54% of participants keep using basic words instead of expanding vocabulary while there are lots of slangs, idioms, phrasal verbs in English. English is not an easy thing to apply, students use words that are not appropriate to the context and misuse common phrases, leading to misunderstanding in communication. Finally, grammar seems to be the least problem in their oral communication. Among grammartical error, 50% participants struggle with sentence tenses while they can distinguish the singular or plural forms, use past and past participle correctly.

Consequently, after the identification of common errors, some main solutions are collected and suggested to enhance students' ability in speaking English as follow

Firtly, it is necessary to revise the phonetic systems and learn to pronounce the phonetic elements correctly, naturally and fluently. Voiceless and voiced sounds and stress in English should be paid attention to.

Secondly, it is better to use dictionary to look up word's phometical transcription for correct pronunciation.

Additionally, listening and then repeating authentic materials that are relevant and suitable for the students' English level is also very important. The authentic materials can be conversations or speeches of native speakers. Singing favourite English songs is of ideal solutions to improve not only pronunciation effectively but listening skill as well as vocabulary, grammar, and cultural insights (Brown, 2006).

Moreover, revising grammartical elements in order to understand their form, time expression and usages. Try to use English sentence structures directly without being influent by the mother tougue.

Learning new words through news, conversations, songs, and books can help broaden students' wide range of vocabularies.

Joining English clubs or talking to foreigners or native speakers should be put into action if someone wants to improve their English speaking proficiency.

Furthermore, using supporting applications currently tends to be a trend in 4.0 era. Quizlet or Anki can help you to improve your vocabulary or grammar, Elsa can help you with pronunciation, etc.

Above all, consistent practice is essential for mastery. To improve English speaking skills, it is important to dedicate time each day to speaking in English, whether through conversations or self-practice. Additionally, recording voice without hesitation allows students to track their progress, identify areas for improvement, and build confidence in their ability to communicate effectively. Over time, these practices will significantly enhance your fluency and overall language proficiency.

To sum up, most of the methods are easy to apply on daily basis, making it more convenient for reviewing and improvement while speaking English.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, by conducting this research and collecting necessary information from second-year English major students at Thanh Do University, the common errors among students are identified and analized during their English speaking lesson in terms of three demanding dimensions: Pronunciation, Grammar and Vocabulary. Besides, the study also shows the methods students use in order to enhance their

ability in speaking English. Most of the methods are easy to apply on daily basis, making it more convenient for reviewing and improvement while speaking English.

Moreover, the study proposes some recommendations for students to receive the best results. For pronunciation, it is necessary to pay attention to voiceless and voiced sounds and stress in English. Students can combine the method of learning pronunciation through IPA and recording their practice process for self-reflection. For grammar, it is advisable to review structures from basic to advanced, in order to build a solid foundation for students. Lastly, for vocabulary, learning new words through specific topics is often not chosen much, because students can encounter new words in that topic, making those words more difficult to understand. Nevertheless, this is also one of the very effective methods, though it can be hard at first, but if students can get used to this method, they can absorb a wide range of vocabulary.

However, the study also found some limitations. First, the data sample only focused on second-year English major students' at Thanh Do University, so the results cannot be generalized to all groups of students. Second, the study only focused on speaking errors, not including writing, reading, and listening errors. Therefore, in the future, it is possible to base on the results of this study to expand the scope of research to provide a more comprehensive view.

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CÁC LỖI THƯỜNG GẶP TRONG KỸ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH CỦA SINH VIÊN, THỰC TRẠNG VÀ GIẢI PHÁP

Đinh Thị Thanh Huyền[1] **Đặng Hiền Diệu**[2]
Hoàng Thị Thu Hà[3]

[1, 2, 3]Trường Đại học Thành Đô

Email: *dtthuyen@thanhdouni.edu.vn*[1], *dhdieu8@gmail.com*[2]; *httha@thanhouni.edu.vn*[3]

Tóm tắt: *Mặc dù là một ngôn ngữ quốc tế, việc nói tiếng Anh trôi chảy vẫn là một trở ngại đối với sinh viên Việt Nam, ngay cả đối với những sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu này nhằm xác định những lỗi phổ biến nhất trong việc nói tiếng Anh của sinh viên năm thứ hai chuyên ngành tiếng Anh tại một trường đại học được chọn ở miền Bắc Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu chủ yếu tập trung vào ba yếu tố chính quyết định những lỗi mà sinh viên thường gặp phải: phát âm, ngữ pháp và từ vựng. Hơn nữa, nghiên cứu cũng đưa ra một số khuyến nghị quý giá giúp sinh viên vượt qua những trở ngại này.*

Từ khóa: *Học tiếng Anh; Lỗi trong kỹ năng nói; Thực trạng và giải pháp.*