

# CORRECTING COMMON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN LEARNING FRENCH BY STUDENTS OF THE PEOPLE'S POLICE ACADEMY

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French grammar is considered extremely complex and the biggest obstacle for those learning French. The new students learning French at the People's Police Academy often make many basic grammatical errors such as: verb conjugation errors, mistakes, word order, incorrect grammatical structure... The cause of these errors may be due to cultural habits, the learner's lack of awareness of correcting errors or due to incompatibility in grammatical order between mother tongue (Vietnamese) and French.

**Keywords:** *Error; Grammatical error; Error correction; Cause of error; Measure of error correction.*

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## 1. Introduction

French grammar is considered extremely complex and considered the biggest obstacle for those learning French. Not only is it difficult because of verb conjugation in different tenses, tenses, gender and number usage of nouns and adjectives..., especially French is also a language of exceptions (pronunciation exceptions, verb conjugation exceptions, gender exceptions, even exceptions of exceptions...). Therefore, new students learning French at the People's Police Academy (Ministry of Public Security) often make many basic grammatical mistakes such as: verb conjugation errors, word order errors, grammatical structure errors... The causes of these errors may be due to cultural habits, lack of awareness of learners to correct their errors or due to the incompatibility in grammatical order (arrangement and combination of subordinate elements in a sentence), due to the characteristics of the language type (inflected and uninflected language) between the mother tongue (Vietnamese) and French.

As people who directly participate in teaching and communicating with students, we see that teachers' correction of students' mistakes in the process of learning French is still not focused on or sometimes corrections are made but only as a formality. The reason for this situation is that the number of students in a class is quite large (over 40 students), the number of teaching periods is large but the number of lecturers is small, so lecturers do not really care to spend much time correcting errors. Besides, the curriculum system also does not have separate exercises on correcting grammar errors for students.

## 2. Research overview

Research on errors in foreign language teaching and learning has developed for a long time, through scientific researchs, articles, theses and dissertations of many educational researchers, university lecturers, language teachers, graduate students and students; some typical researchs include: In the book "Error Analysis Theory: A Look at the Perspective of Language-Culture Interference & Some Applications in Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages" (Binh, 2016), the author clarifies the phenomenon of culture-language interference in interlingual communication, specifically identifying cross-cultural pragmatic errors of Vietnamese people when learning English. The research "Research on common errors in English writing of business students - Current situation and solutions" (Giang, 2017) presented the theory of the research issue including the definition of writing, writing skills in teaching foreign languages, definition of errors, error analysis, ways to classify errors, steps to analyze errors, errors in writing English sentences and causes of errors in the learning process. In the article "Pedagogical measures to reduce grammar errors of French learners" (Nhan, 2013), the author proposed a number of pedagogical measures and applied the most effective types of grammar exercises to reduce the errors that French learners often encounter in the process of learning and using French... Currently, there are still very few researchs focusing on correcting French grammar errors because the number of learners is not really large. Therefore, within the scope of this article, the author focuses on analyzing and studying common French grammar errors to find solutions to improve

grammar teaching and learning for students studying French at the People's Police Academy (Ministry of Public Security).

### 3. Research methods

The article uses several main methods such as: analyzing and synthesizing secondary documents on correcting grammatical errors for students learning foreign languages, at the same time using the method of observing reality from the practice of teaching and learning French for students of the People's Police Academy to analyze the current situation of grammatical errors of students, on that basis, proposing effective solutions to innovate methods of detecting and correcting grammatical errors in particular and other errors (phonemic errors, vocabulary errors, communication strategy errors...) in general for students learning French at the People's Police Academy.

### 4. Research result

#### 4.1. Viewpoint on error

##### 4.1.1. Error concept

According to the 1985 Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, the definition of error is as follows:

*An error (in the speaking or writing of a foreign or second language learner) is the use of a linguistic unit (a word, a grammatical unit, a speech act) in a way that a native or proficient speaker of that language would judge as problematic or imperfect* (Binh, 2016, p.95).

Previously, in traditional methods, errors were considered "mistakes" (faute) and as evidence of non-mastery, deserving of punishment. Nowadays, especially since the advent of the communicative approach, the view of error has changed fundamentally. The fault is not that the learner is poor or incapable, but that the learner does not have enough knowledge, assimilates poorly or is not well consolidated. Errors are a significant failure and are the key to the pedagogical process. Even when teachers try to guide learners in the right direction and only let learners speak and write grammatically correct, errors still appear.

From a cognitive perspective, *errors* are a natural phenomenon in the process of learners acquiring and using a language. Errors commonly appear in the process of second language acquisition. But errors are not a negative phenomenon in the process of learning a foreign language, but they help assess the learner's level of approach to the target language.

The initiator of this revolutionary concept of error in language acquisition is Corder, S.P., whose series of researches left clear marks and helped orient the field of error analysis. According to him, error "*is the result of unsuccessful performance*" (Corder, S.P., 1981, p.152).

Also based on Corder, S.P.'s pointview, language researcher Hendrickson also believes that an error "*is an utterance, a form of expression or a structure that a particular language teacher finds unacceptable because of their inappropriate use or their absence in everyday discourse*" (Henrickson, 1980, p.169).

There are many definitions of errors according to different criteria. In this article, the author would like to give a definition based on the following basic rules:

##### 4.1.2. Error description

People often distinguish between two types of errors:

(1) Mistakes: these are normal language phenomena. Learners can correct these types of errors themselves when they recognize them.

For example, in French, in order to express occupation, such as "I am a policeman", "She is a journalist", "They are architects", people write "*Je suis police*", "*Elle est journaliste*", "*Ils sont architectes*" instead of "*Je suis un policier*" "*Elle est une journaliste*", "*Ils sont des architectes*". In this case, beginners often make the mistake of writing the article (un, une, des) before the noun indicating the occupation.

(2) Errors of ignorance: the learner does not know or forgets the rule. These types of errors reflect the learner's limited knowledge of the foreign language or interference between the mother tongue and the foreign language. Regarding these errors, learners cannot correct these errors themselves, especially in the beginning stages of learning, because they are often not aware of them. Learners need to be exposed to language rules more to become more aware of them.

For example, learners often confuse the gender of French nouns. Some nouns end in a vowel, similar to the identifying feature of feminine nouns - ending in the vowel "e" (*musée, mausolée, grade, Cambodge...*), but are actually masculine (*le musée, le mausolée, le grade, le Cambodge...*), leading to learners using the wrong article before the noun (using "la" instead of "le"). Or there are nouns indicating professions in French that are only in the masculine form (*le professeur, le docteur, le médecin, l'ingénieur*), although their meaning is only feminine (*teacher, female doctor, female engineer, female architect...*), which also leads to learners making mistakes in using articles in this case.

##### 4.1.3. Grammatical error

In the organizational structure of the language system, in addition to the phonetic and semantic lexical parts, there is also grammar. According to the common concept "grammar is the whole set of rules and regulations on the structure of words,

the transformation of words and the combination of words to form larger units such as phrases and sentences. At the same time, grammar also includes the rules for sentence structure, linking sentences into paragraphs and into texts”.

Grammatical errors are errors that occur in the process of language acquisition by learners, they are a form of language expression that does not follow the correct order and rules of word formation, word transformation and word combination into larger units than words, at the same time also occur in the process of creating sentences and linking sentences into text. Grammatical errors in general or French grammatical errors in particular, are often considered in two aspects: morphology and syntax. Morphology is related to word structure, while syntax is related to structures larger than words.

*Morpheme errors:* Morpheme errors are classified according to grammatical categories: nouns, pronouns, verbs... And according to word structure such as inflection, derivative, construction...

*Syntax errors:* Syntax errors are often at the level of noun phrases and verb phrases.

In grammar, errors can appear in word classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions or sentence levels such as simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, sentence conjunctions, sentence components,...

## **4.2. Causes of grammar mistakes in learning French**

### *4.2.1. False assumptions and inferences*

When learning a new word, phrase or structure, students mistakenly assume that the new word, phrase or structure has the same usage as words, phrases or structures they already know.

Forexample, when learning the preposition “*sur*” (meaning “on, above”), students often combine it with nouns to express “*sur la rue*” (on the road), “*sur la télé*” (on the television), “*sur l’arbre*” (on the tree), “*sur le monde*” (in the world)... leading to the mistake of using the preposition “*sur*” incorrectly. In order to express “on the street”, “on television”, “on a tree”, “in the world”... the French use the preposition “*dans*” (meaning “in”, “inside”) to express “on the street” (*dans la rue*), “on a tree” (*dans l’arbre*), “in the world” (*dans le monde*)... or combine the preposition with the article to express “on television” (*à la télé*)...

### *4.2.2. Applying the incomplete rule*

This error often occurs when learners apply only part of a grammar rule rather than the whole grammar rule in order to simplify the process of acquiring a second language.

For example, when learning to use verbs in the double past tense (*Passé composé*), students must agree on gender (add “*e*”) and number (add “*s*”)

to the past participle of the verb, in case the subject is a feminine, plural noun. Students often stop at conjugating verbs in the past tense, ignoring the step of conjugating gender and number. Thus, students only apply part of the grammar rule of conjugating and using verbs in the double past tense, leading to incomplete application of the rule.

### *4.2.3. Negative transfer*

With basic knowledge of the mother tongue, learners have made hypotheses about the target language, proposed “substitutes”, that is, borrowed the rules and structures of the mother tongue to put into the target language. Negative transfer occurs when learners use the forms of expression, structures and rules of their mother tongue to create new combinations to express and explain their ideas, either because they cannot find the way to express themselves in the target language or because of their habit of using words.

Ví dụ: Le président Ho Chi Minh est un homme grand.

(President Ho Chi Minh is a great man.)

In the example above, the student used the adjective “grand” meaning “large, great” and thought according to the rules of his native language to express “a great person”. However, correct usage requires the adjective to be placed before the noun:

Le président Ho Chi Minh est un grand homme.

## **4.3. Analysis and correction**

In the learning process, errors are necessary because it is a stage of knowledge acquisition. Therefore, instead of punishing or blaming mistakes, mistakes should be placed at the center of the pedagogical process. Error analysis is an indispensable pedagogical activity of lecturers. This is an important stage, the stage where learners recognize, present and clarify the mistakes they make.

### *4.3.1. Error handling*

For lecturers, error handling is considered an important pedagogical tool. Lecturers need to spend adequate time analyzing errors, discussing and explaining clearly in class to help students recognize, present and understand the errors they make.

### *4.3.2. Correct the error*

Error correction is not about judging errors according to certain criteria. The purpose of error correction is to help learners improve, understand their abilities, and thereby open up other activities.

Here, we also need to discuss how teachers correct errors. Correcting students’ mistakes is not a simple task, it is necessary to determine whether “the mistake is serious or not?” then decide “who should correct it”, the lecturer or the student. Most importantly, when correcting mistakes, the lecturer needs to respect the dignity of the student.

#### 4.4. Suggested references for correcting the error

Correcting grammar errors while learning French helps both teachers and learners to assess the correct destination. For teachers, through error correction, they will accurately assess the actual capacity of the learner, thereby creating strategies and providing appropriate teaching methods. At the same time, it also helps teachers promptly supplement appropriate teaching materials during the teaching process. In addition, error correction also helps students self-assess their own level, thereby creating a suitable research plan and being able to memorize or come up with self-correction methods to improve their ability to use the target language they want to aim for.

##### 4.4.1. On the teacher's side

###### *Firstly, correct the grammar explanation*

The French grammar system is often very abstract, so requiring teachers to have their own techniques to turn those abstract things into more understandable and concrete things. This will help learners remember and deepen what they have learned, without confusion or mistakes. It is necessary to be flexible in designing lectures, using visual images, illustrations and adding additional exercises to help students grasp the problem more easily.

For example, students have a lot of difficulty conjugating verbs in the past imperfect tense (*Imparfait*), despite being given explanations, illustrations of the uses of this tense and practice exercises. Students often find it difficult to distinguish when to use the past imperfect tense (*Imparfait*) and when to use the past double tense (*Passé composé*), especially when they have to speak or write a paragraph about events that happened in the past. In order to help students avoid making mistakes when using these two verb tenses that are very closely related, teachers can guide students to imagine themselves walking into a theater. Which verbs are used to describe the stage (decoration, backdrop, lighting...), describe the actors (appearance, makeup, costumes, demeanor...), describe the atmosphere in the theater (crowded, empty, audience mood)...

Everything that forms the background to the performance is conjugated in the imperfect past tense (*Imparfait*). The actors' performances that make the play take place, develop and end are divided into the double past tense (*Passé composé*). Thus, students can visualize more easily and remember more essentially the usage of the two tenses in the past.

###### *Secondly, correct the exercise part*

After mechanical exercises with the purpose of forming habits through repetition (usually exercises in the textbook), which students do not need to fully understand but can still do correctly, teachers

need to design cognitive exercises to help students remember longer.

###### *Thirdly, the lecturer corrects the students' mistakes*

The most common method that teachers still use is to correct students' work directly. This method helps students with knowledge gaps to easily recognize their mistakes. However, this method requires a lot of time. In addition, teachers can use indirect methods such as underlining errors and using symbols to explain the type of error that students make (for example: T = verb tense error; Prép = preposition error...). This method reduces the time required for detailed correction and allows the instructor to correct more papers in the same amount of time. Teachers can combine individual and general error correction. Each session, teachers will correct a number of students in detail and then write on the board typical error sentences so that the whole class can identify the type of error and suggest ways to correct it. This is a very effective method for large classes like today (>30 students). In actual teaching, the author often applies this error correction method in each lesson. This method helps students learn from their friends' mistakes to avoid making them and also helps students consolidate their own knowledge and promote initiative in learning.

###### *Fourthly, systematize common errors*

The teacher chooses the grammar topics that learners make the most mistakes and introduces their meanings and usage. Next, from a series of incorrect sentences, the lecturer classifies them into typical types, explains the causes and shows how to correct them, in order to help students not only understand their mistakes, but also be able to correct them themselves during the self-research process. The lecturer systematizes common errors at the word - phrase - sentence levels. Each grammar topic includes a warm-up section for students to judge whether the expressions are correct or not; the next section is the systematization of knowledge about semantics and usage of the grammar topic.

##### 4.4.2. For students

Students are the ones who receive and use the knowledge that the teacher wants to convey. If students "refuse" to learn, lecturers cannot require them to achieve results in their researchs. Therefore, in order to improve the ability to absorb and use French grammar, students need to actively participate in the self-research process (here we temporarily ignore the issue of talent) by:

- (1) Listen to the lecture with concentration.
- (2) Talk to your teacher immediately if you have any difficulties.
- (3) Take advantage of reference resources from the library, the internet and online exercises to improve your knowledge.

(4) Always be aware of self-correction. Self-correction can be done using debugging software.

(5) Join a research group to practice what you have learned together and learn new knowledge from your friends in the group in the fastest and most effective way.

### 5. Discussion

A question that many people are interested in is how to help students avoid common mistakes? It would be a mistake for teachers to only hope for error-free papers from students. Errors are seen as a diagnostic tool, indicating to the teacher what the learner does not understand and where additional exercises are needed. Correcting errors can be done through a reasonable arrangement of lessons in the curriculum (from easy to difficult, from simple to complex, each stage should have appropriate

exercises so that students can gradually get used to them) and increasing practice of the parts where errors are often made.

### 6. Conclusion

French is one of the most widely spoken languages and also ranked among the most difficult languages in the world. With the characteristic of being an inflectional language, grammatical meaning is expressed in the words themselves, the French grammar system is strict with many governing rules, causing many difficulties for learners. Finding, explaining the causes and providing solutions to errors is very necessary, helping teachers and students find the most suitable common solution to contribute to improving the quality of teaching and learning French at the People's Police Academy.

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## KHẮC PHỤC MỘT SỐ LỖI NGỮ PHÁP THƯỜNG GẶP TRONG HỌC TIẾNG PHÁP CỦA SINH VIÊN HỌC VIỆN CẢNH SÁT NHÂN DÂN

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Ngữ pháp tiếng Pháp được xem là vô cùng phức tạp và là rào cản lớn nhất đối với những người học tiếng Pháp. Các sinh viên mới học tiếng Pháp tại Học viện Cảnh sát nhân dân thường mắc nhiều lỗi ngữ pháp cơ bản như: lỗi chia động từ, lỗi trật tự từ, cấu trúc ngữ pháp không đúng... Nguyên nhân của những lỗi này có thể là do thói quen văn hóa, người học không có ý thức sửa lỗi hoặc do sự không tương thích về trật tự ngữ pháp giữa tiếng mẹ đẻ (tiếng Việt) và tiếng Pháp.

**Từ khóa:** Lỗi; Lỗi ngữ pháp; Chữa lỗi; Nguyên nhân mắc lỗi; Biện pháp khắc phục lỗi.