

Interference Errors in Numerical Expression by Vietnamese EFL Speakers

Nhon Dang

Tan Tao University, Long An, Vietnam

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate numerical expression by Vietnamese speakers of English as a foreign language (EFL). The study identifies and explains the causes of interference errors in expressing number of nouns. A descriptive-cognitive research design was conducted error-oriented investigation of 62 high-school students and 30 employees working in English-speaking companies participating in writing a 45-minute essay for numerical errors from the essays collected. The findings revealed that Vietnamese EFLspeakers had difficulty in expressing the number of the entities represented by the nouns due to differences in means and manner of numerical expression in English whose sentences are numerically obligatory and grammatically relevant as opposed to those in Vietnamese whose numerical category is grammatically unimportant, but lexically relevant, and seen with number-neutral nouns or general numbers. Errors also occurred as Vietnamese EFL speakers failed to acquire the count-uncount distinction due in part to differences in cognizing the numerical meaning of the entities represented by nouns, ascribing the countability wrong and keeping the same property of countable/uncountable nouns despite having referred to different referents. The paper ended with some pedagogical implications to help Vietnamese EFL speakers improve numerical errors when using English.

Keywords: interference errors, general number, numerical expression, grammatically relevant, cognition, countability

Date of Submission: 15-10-2021

Date of Acceptance: 30-10-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

Number is arguably the most important, but it is by far “the most underestimated of the grammatical categories, and is a matter of ‘not many people talk about’” (Corbett, 2000:1). Corbett (2000) said, number is a much more diverse and complex category than it is commonly thought. Lyons (1968) shares the same opinion, stating that “analyzing numerical categories in a particular language can be a very complex problem” (p. 283). The difficulty in number lies in many different factors, and Corbett (2000) outlined five incorrect assumptions about number, including “(1) number is just the opposite of singular versus plural; (2) all relevant items (nouns, for instance) will mark number; (3) items which do mark number will behave the same; (4) number must be expressed; and (5) number is a nominal category (pp.1-2).

It is said that the numerical category is quite broad and requires quantification and special research methods. Also, many languages in which number is fundamentally different in that it is not the category of nouns, but it is of the verbs. Moreover, numerical expression is often irregular and may not be an inflectional category (Corbett, 2000:6). English and Vietnamese are the two languages of two different types. While English is an inflectional language, Vietnamese belongs to an isolating one. Differences in language typology can result in various difficulties making Vietnamese EFL learners commit errors in using the English language.

This paper is concerned with the way number and other numerical characteristics are expressed and cognized in English and in Vietnamese. More specifically, the author aims at investigating errors in expressing number of the entities represented by nouns and nominal cognition. Differences in expressing and cognizing the number of the entities in English and Vietnamese are said to play a major part in causing numerical errors when the Vietnamese EFL speakers express the numerical meaning in English. Therefore, this paper is to examine errors in numerical expression and cognition, including countable/uncountable distinction in Vietnamese and English. The study is to answer the following questions:

- 1)What are underlying differences in numerical expression and cognition in between Vietnamese and English?
- 2)What interference errors in expressing number of the entities represented by nouns are committed by Vietnamese EFL speakers?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Differences in expressing numerical meaning in English and Vietnamese

English and Vietnamese have their own ways to express numerals in terms of general number, manners, and properties of numerical expression.

General number

That “the meaning of the noun can be expressed without reference to number” is called ‘general number’, by which we mean that it is outside the number system” (Corbett, 2000:10). General number is to express a number-neutral form, a zero form, or a bare noun that has no affixes to mark numbers or is not indicative of numbers, quantities or classifiers in front. The meaning of general number can be understood either a singular or a plural. According to Corbett (2000:11-16), there are three types of general number as follows:

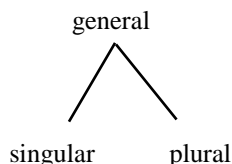


Figure 1. System with separate number

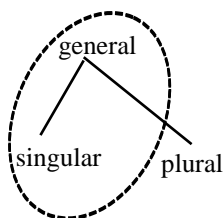


Figure 2. System with general/singular versus plural

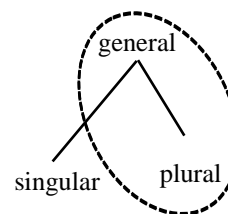


Figure 3. System with general/plural versus singular

Vietnamese has “general number”, sometimes referred to as “number-neutral” (Nguyen, 1975:259; Diep, 2005:483; Nguyen, 2015:229), or as “outside the number” (Dinh, 2015: 121-122). The use of general number is quite common in Vietnamese, and it appears in different positions in a sentence. It is used to indicate a singular or a plural, depending on context. In general, the Vietnamese are not interested in the number of entities, but more about the entity itself, and thus the numerical cognition is backgrounded, as in:

(1) *Nhà nó vừa mua xe hơi.*

House – him – just – buy – car

(His family has just bought a car.)

As in (1), the Vietnamese are more interested in talking about the purchase of a car, rather than the number of cars bought, and “car” here can be understood in either the singular or the plural. When the Vietnamese want to express the exact or specific number, they can say it as in (2):

(2) *Nhà nó vừa mua một (chiếc) xe hơi.*

House - him – just – buy – one - (classifier) – car

(His family has just bought **one/a** car.)

Also, while general number in Vietnamese is also used to make a general statement or judgment about a type or class of things, as in (3a):

(3a) *Cọp đi săn vào ban đêm.*

Tiger – go – hunt – at - night

In English, either generic singular or generic plural is used

(3b) *A tiger/ the tiger hunts by night,* or in (3c):

(3c) *Tigers hunt by night.*

General number is also used to unintentionally express indeterminate or ambiguous numbers, lending itself for the Vietnamese to form a habit of lacking exact number in some cases where accurate quantification is necessary, as in (4):

(4) *Tính đến thời điểm hiện tại, đã có công nhân tử vong và nhiều công nhân vẫn còn bị mắc kẹt trong hầm.* (Báo Mới, Online, ngày 13/10/2020)

Count-to- time-present, [past marker] – have – **worker**- die – and –many- worker – still-[passive] trap- in-plant (Báo Mới, Online, October 13, 2020)

(Up to the present time, **one/two/some/many worker(s)** had been killed, and many other workers have still been trapped at the plant.)

In contrast, English grammar does not have general number. Grammatical number in English has a singular and plural value, entailing the number of a verb in a sentence. The differences in number categories between English and Vietnamese can be seen in Tables 1a and 1b (The blue highlighted areas are the scope of the grammatical number categories.)

Number value	General
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	Singular	Dual	Trial	Paucal	Plural	number
Noun						
Verb						
Adjective						

Table 1a. Expression of grammatical number category in English.

	Number value					General number
	Singular	Dual	Trial	Paucal	Plural	
Noun						
Verb						
Adjective						

Table 1b. Expression of grammatical number category in Vietnamese.

Means of numerical expression

Number in English is a grammatical category, and English uses inflectional affixes or stem alternations to express number, while as an isolated language whose nouns are not inflectionally changed, Vietnamese uses lexical means (number, quantifiers, classifiers, or a combination of “number/ quantifiers + classifiers + noun”) placed at the beginning of a noun or a noun phrase as the main method to express number. For example:

Một *con chim*

One [number] – [**classifier**] – bird

(One bird)

Các *em học sinh*

[Quantifier] – [**classifier**] – student

(Students)

It is worth noting here that English also uses classifiers as an intermediary to personalize uncountable entities (mass nouns) to express their number through a combination of “number/ quantifiers + classifiers + *of* + noun”, as in *a piece of advice, an item of news, several pieces of jewelry, many nuggets of gold, two tubes of toothpaste, ...* However, this nominal quantification is not as common as in Vietnamese.

In a nutshell, the difference in means of numerical expression between English and Vietnamese can be seen as the former uses inflectional means and the latter employs a combination outside of the word to express. This difference somehow reflects the different typological characteristics of the two languages.

Properties of numerical expression

Expressing number in English becomes one of the primary concerns as it is significantly relevant. The singular/plural distinction of nouns is grammaticalized, and obligatory numerical marking is done for different types of nouns. This is typical for a model of a “two-valued number system with an imperative use of numbers, represented by an inflectional morphology” (Corbett, 2000:295). This obligatory number expression is a basic syntactic principle of constructing a sentence in inflectional languages like English; without knowing the number of the noun functioning as the subject of a sentence, it will be unlikely to conjugate the verb by number. In other words, expressing number has both lexical function of manifesting the number of entities represented by the noun, and syntactic function of setting the organization of a sentence.

In contrast, Vietnamese has enough means to express number of the entities, including “*những*”, “*các*”, “*mấy*”, “*vài*”, “*dăm*”, ... for marking a plural; “*một*” or an emptiness before a classifier for the singular category, or a numerical, quantifier, classifier, or a combination of a numerical/quantifier and classifier placed at the beginning of a noun for an exact or specific number. However, expressing number of the noun is not obligatory in all situations, but it is optional, and depends on context.

Where the context allows, the Vietnamese can choose to use or not use the means of marking the number of a noun. That means, expressing the number of a noun is arbitrary, optional, and unimportant, and the singular/plural distinction is not grammaticalized. The numerical expression only has lexical value (by saying about the number of entities) and does not have some grammatical role in the sentence, but it is the main means to express number. The features of expressing number in English and Vietnamese are tabulated as follows:

English	Vietnamese
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Scope	Numerical category of nouns	+	+ ¹
	Numerical category of verbs	-	-
Numeral system	Singularity	+	+
	Plurality	+	+
Outside of the numeral system	General number	-	+
Means of expression	Inflection	+ ²	-
	Counting words/ Quantifiers	+	+
	Determiners/Articles	+	-
	Classifiers	+	+
Properties of expression	Obligation	+	-
	Relevance	+	-

Table 2. Numerical expressions compared in between English and Vietnamese

Cognition of the nominal countability in English and in Vietnamese

Since nouns denoting entities are one of the objects of expressing number, numerical expression between English and Vietnamese is different not only because these two languages have different ways of expression, but also different cognitions in countability of the nouns at issue are found. In some cases, the same equivalent noun of the same number category and system from the two languages is considered a mass noun, and therefore, uncountable, and not directly combined with a number, while that noun is regarded as a countable noun, and therefore, directly combined with a number to express different quantities in the other language. In other words, expressing number of the same equivalent noun in the two languages is different.

Cognition of the nominal countability in English

In English, countable nouns usually refer to concrete things, like, a boy, a dog, a house, a car, ... Countable nouns have two forms: singular and plural (Krifka, 1986). Countable nouns in a plural form are often added 's/es' to the stems as in *carrots* or *potatoes* though there are some irregular plural forms. In contrast, uncountable nouns are usually material nouns and abstract nouns. They take only a singular noun form, as in *relaxation*, not **relaxations*, or *advice* instead of **advices*, and they cannot go with indefinite articles (a/an) or an exact number. To express the number of entities, English uncountable nouns must be combined with quantifiers through measure words or unit words functioning as "classifiers" (Kodera, 2011:44). For example, *two liters of water*, *a slice of bread*, or *a pile of wood*.

Apart from the countable and uncountable nouns, English also has nouns that can be both countable and uncountable, and they are called crossover nouns (DeCapua, 2008:55). For example, the noun *change*¹ as in *a minor change* is countable when referring to as a specific change, and *change*² as in *many aspects of change* is uncountable when referring to as a general change; Likewise, the noun *iron*¹ is uncountable when it means a kind of metal, and *iron*² is countable when it refers to a piece of equipment usually heated with electricity for making clothes smooth.

The possibility of countability conversion of English nouns is quite broad, and is found two-way, and this happens for both concrete and abstract nouns. According to English linguists, most English uncountable nouns can be used as countable nouns in certain situations, and they are treated as the singular. For example, *wine* (material noun and therefore, uncountable) can be changed into *a wine* (when referring to as a type of wine, indicating a concrete noun, and therefore countable), as in (5):

(5) *This region produces some awful wines as well as good ones.*

On the other hand, some English countable nouns can also be used as uncountable nouns (but this conversion is much less common). For instance, *apples* (a concrete object, and therefore a countable noun) can be transferred into *apple* (when referring to as apple material, and therefore, an uncountable noun), as in (6a) and (6b) respectively:

(6a) *She took two apples from the fridge.*

(6b) *She put more apple to the salad.*

The count-uncount distinction in English is by no means absolute because it is cognitively relativistic.

¹Vietnamese has no number category, but number in Vietnamese is expressed in the score of number of nouns, indicating the number of entities.

² Inflection is the main and distinctive means of expressing numbers of the entities represented by English nouns, and the other means of numerical expression of nouns are only secondary in nature.

Cognition of the nominal countability in Vietnamese

Vietnamese belongs to the classifier-type language, and it has both countable and uncountable nouns, which shares some similarities with Chinese and English. On one hand, the Vietnamese language is similar to the Chinese language in such regards as both belong to the classifier language whose nouns in general cannot be directly combined with a number or a quantifier to express the quantity, but they must go with a measure or unit word as an intermediary. Nouns in both languages do not have numerical markers. On the other hand, Vietnamese and English have some similarity with English because the two languages have both countable and uncountable nouns. However, while English nouns have numerical markers, Vietnamese does not. Also, unlike Vietnamese, English uncountable nouns coincide with mass nouns in the correct sense.

The countability of Vietnamese nouns is by no means invariable. In some specific contexts, some Vietnamese countable nouns can be used in an uncountable meaning and vice versa. However, this linguistic phenomenon appears to be limited. According to Diep (2005), “the actual use of Vietnamese shows that there are cases where uncountable nouns can still be used as countable nouns” (2005: 482), as illustrated in (7a) and (7b):

(7a) *Biavà càphê ở Hồ Tây ngon thật!*

(*Beer and coffee in Ho Tay are good!*)

(7b) *Cho thêm **hai** bia với **một** cà phê chú quán nhé!*

(*I'd like **two** more **beers** and **one** coffee, please!*)

Bia (beer) and *cà phê* (coffee) in (7a) both refer to materials, and therefore, uncountable noun, while they in (7b) refer to “objects”- *bottles of beer*, and *a cup of coffee*, respectively, and therefore, countable.

It is worth noting here that the possibility of transferring countability of Vietnamese nouns is more often than not found from uncountable nouns to countable nouns, not the other way around, and this phenomenon occurs for concrete nouns. Additionally, all the usages of Vietnamese uncountable nouns are actually shortenings of the counting since a full model of the usage can be reproduced naturally with a classifier.

Differences in cognizing number of the entities in English and Vietnamese

Vietnamese and English are classified as the languages with count-uncount nouns. However, as can be seen in Figure 4, “Vietnamese is toward the negative end (-), referring to languages with all uncount nouns (e.g., Chinese), and in fact, most Vietnamese nouns are uncount. In contrast, English is toward the positive end (+), indicating languages with count nouns (e.g., Hopi, or Halkomelem Salish), and English is said to have more count nouns” (Dang, 2020:38).

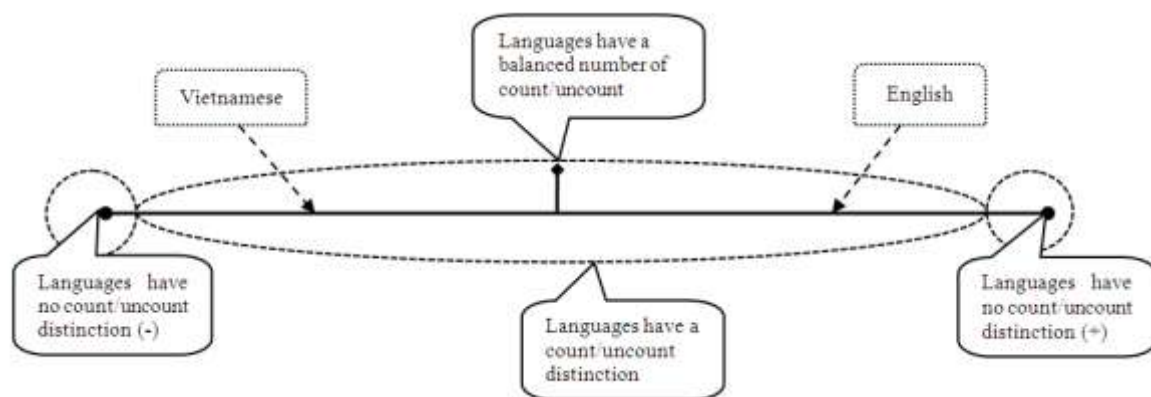


Figure 4: *The distribution of languages about count/uncount nouns on the continuum.*

As aforementioned, the two nouns in English and Vietnamese can be treated differently where one noun in this language is countable, while the equivalent counterpart is uncountable in the other language. There are some causes leading to this mismatch in their noun counterparts.

(i) English concrete nouns are countable, while the majority of their counterparts in Vietnamese³ are not countable, as in (8a) and (8b) respectively.

(8a) *My room has **five** tables.*

(8b) **Phòng **tôi** có **năm** bàn.*

(*Phòng **tôi** có **năm** cái bàn.*)

(ii) some English nouns indicating people are countable⁴, as in respective (9a) and (9b).

³In Vietnamese, “concrete nouns are not countable, and cannot go with the exact number, but they must be followed by “a classifier” (Diep, 2005: 482).

(9a) I have **two** pretty **children**.

(9b) Tôi có **hai** **con** **kháu** **khinh**.

(Tôi có **hai** **đứa** **con** **kháu** **khinh**.)

(iii) many English abstract nouns are uncountable, but their counterparts in Vietnamese⁵ are countable, as in (10a) and (10b) respectively.

(10a) *I have just done with **four** **homeworks**.

(I have just done with **four** **items** **of** **homework**.)

(10b) Minh **vừa** **làm** **xong** **bốn** **bài** **tập** **về** **nhà**.

The incompatibility of count-uncount nouns in English and Vietnamese is quite systematic. The first incongruence falls into the category of concrete noun where English concrete nouns are said to be countable, while their Vietnamese counterparts are not. Another discordance eventuates the category of abstract nouns where the majority of English abstract nouns are uncountable, whereas it is not the case for Vietnamese.

In general, the differences in the cognition of noun countability between English and Vietnamese can be tabulated as follows:

Noun classes	Object	Material	Animal	People	Phenomenon	Collective	Concept
English	+ ⁶	-	+	+	+/-	-/+	-
Vietnamese	-	-	-	+	-	-	+/-

Table 3. Comparison of cognitive countability of noun classes between English and Vietnamese

The comparison from Table 3 shows that differences in countability of nouns in English and Vietnamese by far outweigh similarities. This is one of the reasons why it poses a lot of challenges for Vietnamese people to learn and use the quantity in English.

Errors and interference errors in numerical expression

Errors versus mistakes

It is important to distinguish *errors* from *mistakes* when conducting research in error analysis. An *error* is ‘a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker’ (Brown, 2007: 258). Dullay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) define errors as the flawed side of learner’s speech or writing. Errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being learned, and the learners consistently get it wrong (Cummingworth, 1987; Norrish, 1987). Gass and Selinker (2008) state that ‘errors can be taken as red flags; they provide windows onto a system that is, evidence of the state of a learner’s knowledge of the L2’ (2008:102). Therefore, deviations from the standard norms are systematic, and learners have got it wrong repeatedly, reflecting their incompetence. In other words, they use it incorrectly, but they think it is correct.

(11) *He just bought many **softwares**.

In (11), the student uses his Vietnamese knowledge of the equivalent noun “*phần mềm*” as a countable noun, plus the quantifier “*many*”, resulting in **many softwares*, but he is not aware of “*software*” as an uncountable noun in English.

Conversely, a *mistake* occurs because of memory lapses, physical tiredness or psychological conditions like anxiety or nervousness, and is therefore unsystematic. According to Corder (1981), mistakes are akin to slips of the tongue, and users are able to recognize and correct them. Mistakes reflect ‘occasional lapses in performance: they occur because in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows’ (Ellis, 1997: 17).

(12) *Many **student** go to school by bike.

In (12), the learner knows that *students* should be used instead because the noun *student* is common and understood to be a countable noun, plus the quantifier “*many*” and the verb “*go*” in plural, but he mistakenly uses *go* due to psychological reasons or fatigue.

⁴ “The ability to combine with quantifiers of nouns in ambiguity. Some nouns referring to position tend to combine directly with quantifiers, but others indicating social classes cannot go with quantifiers” (Bui, 1995:130).

⁵ “Today, abstract nouns tend to be directly combined with quantifiers, like *một quan điểm* (one viewpoint), *ba lý do* (three reasons). However, there are still quite a few abstract nouns that cannot be directly combined with quantifiers, namely **hai văn học* (two literatures), *hai nền văn học* (two [classifier] of literature)” (Bui, 1995:130).

⁶(+) and (-) referred to as countability and uncountability respectively

Interference errors in numerical expression

Interference errors in numerical expression in a second language learners can be defined as the misuse or lack of formal means necessary to express the correct number of the objects at issue and in accordance with the grammatical rules of the target language. This article focuses on the type of error of numerical expression caused by the transfer of structural properties of the Vietnamese language or Vietnamese speakers' habits to the English language, and this will therefore lead to formal deviations or errors in terms of quantity.

(13). Họ cho tôi một vài *phản hồi* có giá trị.

They – give [past marker] – me – some- feedback – valuable.

* They gave me some valuable feedbacks.

(They gave me some valuable *feedback*.)

(14) *Môi trường* tốt là nơi mà người ta có thể kiếm sống và tối đa hóa tiềm năng.

Environment – good – is – place – where – people – can- earn- living – and –maximize – potential.

* Good environment will be the place where people can earn their living and maximize their potential.

(A *good environment* will be the place where people can earn their living and maximize their potential.)

In English, the noun “*feedback*” in (13) is uncountable, so it cannot have a plural form, while the Vietnamese equivalent “*phản hồi*” is countable. In Example (14), English does not allow the expression of a noun with general number “*good environment*” but it must have quantitative determination because English does not have general number as in Vietnamese

Therefore, it is possible to define interference errors in numerical expression as errors of learners (/users) of transferring linguistic structural properties or Vietnamese speakers' habits of expressing the number of entities or events from Vietnamese to English.

Classification

There are many ways to classify errors in numerical expression by Vietnamese EFL speakers, including forms of nominal expression, or characteristics of nominal quantification. This study uses the causes of the interference errors to classify errors. For further classification, three sub-categories are made, including (i) errors involved in transferring general number from Vietnamese into English, (ii) errors due to wrong assignment of countable/uncountable properties to English nouns, and (iii) error keeping countable/uncountable properties when the word at issue has changed meaning.

III. METHODOLOGY

Method design

The focus of this study was to investigate and analyze the errors in numerical expression by Vietnamese speakers in using English. A descriptive-cognitive research design was conducted error-oriented investigation of 62 high-school students and 30 employees working in English-speaking companies participating in writing a 45-minute essay on the topic of “*Your Favorite Job*”. The two groups of participants in the study demonstrated an English language requirement to be certified as Intermediate-level speakers of English, and they use English in their study or work on a daily basis. The researcher analyzed and described the data from 92 essays with a total of 15,163 words written by the Vietnamese respondents to find out types of errors of expressing the entities represented by nouns in English.

Procedures of data collection and analysis

As an error-oriented research study, the writer designed the data collection exercises in the textual format. For the first group of respondents, the researcher asked them to write a complete essay of at least 250 words in class under the supervision of their English teachers after the Principal's approval for conducting the essay test, while the second group of participants completed their essays of the same topic at home. Google Forms were chosen to specifically design the same essay topic needed to be completed within 45 minutes, and their essays were automatically collected right after submission. After receiving a collection of 92 full pieces of writing from the participants, the researcher bold highlighted the count-uncount nouns used from these essays and then sent them to two separate native English professors who proofread and checked if there were any misuses or incorrect uses of the count-uncount nouns resulting in numerical errors. It was concluded that the feedback regarding the errors made by the respondents from the two professors was virtually the same.

The principle for identifying nominal quantification errors was set. The appropriateness of meaning and grammatical structure of a noun at question and the appropriateness of the context in which this noun is quantified were examined. Other types of errors such as orthographic, inconsistently spelt or developmental errors are not regarded as the objects of this study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Survey results

In 92 pieces of writing, there were 245 errors in numerical expression, of which the errors involving interference errors in general number accounted for the highest figure (162 out of 245 errors for nouns in the positions of subject with 150 errors and object with 12 errors of a sentence), coming second was the errors in keeping the same property of countable/ uncountable nouns, and then coming the errors in wrongly assigning the uncountability.

Error types	Counts	%	
Transferring general number	For nouns as subjects (BS)	12	4,89%
	For nouns as objects (BO)	150	61,22%
Wrongly assigning the countability/uncountability	Countability for uncountability (CU)	41	16,73%
	Uncountability for countabiity (UC)	0	0%
Keeping the same property of countable/ uncountable nouns	Countability for uncountable meaning/referent (RC)	19	7,75%
	Uncountability for countable meaning/referent (RU)	23	9,38%
Total	245	100%	

Table 4. Statistical errors in numerical expression from the survey results.

When comparing the survey results of the two groups of respondents (see Figure 5a and Figure 5b), the kind of errors made by the two groups was found almost the same (though the number of respondents was different, with 62 and 30 respondents for Group 1 and Group 2 respectively). We can assume that it is because they have the same mindset, the same way of thinking and cognizing, and this cognition is completely different from that of native English speakers. Therefore, when Vietnamese EFL speakers bring this way of thinking into learning and using English, they are likely to commit errors in numerical expression.

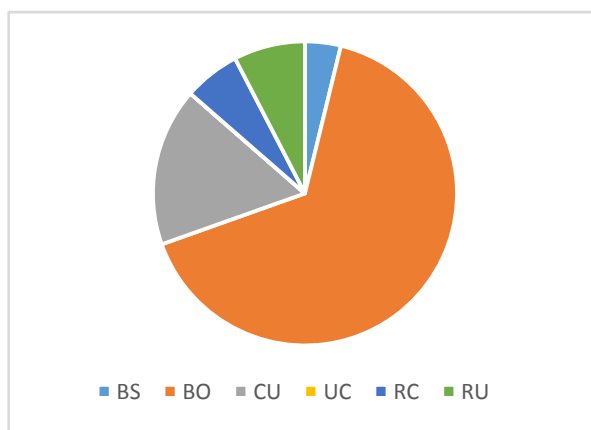


Figure 5a. Errors in numerical expression by Group 1

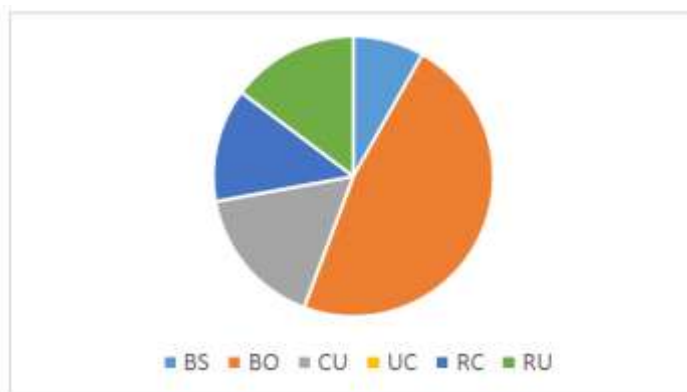


Figure 5b. Errors in numerical expression by Group 2

V. DISCUSSION

Errors due to transferring general number from Vietnamese into English

The results show that Vietnamese EFL speakers made many errors in general number, in both the positions of a subject and an object in a sentence. The errors at the position of an object in a sentence accounted for the highest number, with 150 out of 245 errors from 92 essays, making up more than half of the total errors. Here are some examples taken from the surveyed texts:

Errors in general number	Texts extracted from respondents' writing	Texts corrected
For nouns as subjects	(1a) Every now and then <u>dangerous disease</u> grab the humanity. (11L02)	(1b) Every now and then dangerous diseases grab the humanity.
	(2a) <u>Doctor plays</u> an important role in a rapidly changing technological world as there are an increasing number of sophisticated diseases. (11E21)	(2b) Doctors play an important role in a rapidly changing technological world as there are an increasing number of sophisticated diseases.
For nouns as objects	(3a). [*] ... They motivate and encourage <u>sick person</u> . They are <u>source</u> of hope and strength. (11L02)	(3b). [*] ... They motivate and encourage sick people . They are sources of hope and strength.'
	(4a). [*] ... All of them are friendly and easy-going to share <u>lifestyle</u> as well as <u>career</u> . Sometimes, our office will organize <u>meeting</u> , we have to prepare tea -breaks and some coffee. (ED01)	(4b). [*] ... All of them are friendly and easy-going to share lifestyles as well as careers . Sometimes, our office will organize a meeting/ meetings , we have to prepare tea -breaks and some coffee.'
	(5a). [*] ...This is <u>wonderful chance</u> to expand more knowledge about cuisines, culture, regions and sites in this place. For <u>new graduate</u> , there is a great experience in the working time. (BZ15)	(5b) ' [*] ...This is a wonderful chance to expand more knowledge about cuisines, culture, regions and sites in this place. For new graduates , there is a great experience in the working time.

Table 5. Examples of numeral expression errors due to the use of general nouns.

As can be seen from the sample extracted texts, Vietnamese EFL speakers made errors in using a bare noun or a noun with general number. Specifically, they should use "diseases" instead of "disease" in (1a), "doctors" instead of "doctor" as in (2a), "persons" and "sources" instead of "person" and "source" as in (3a), "lifestyles", "careers", and "meetings" instead of "lifestyle", "career", and "meeting" respectively as in (4a), or "a [wonderful] chance", and "graduates" instead of "wonderful chance", and "graduate" as in (5a). This can be explained that the Vietnamese tend not to use an article before a noun, and they only quantify it when it is really necessary or for emphatic purposes. Also, the habit of expressing number in Vietnamese is semantically arbitrary and grammatically unimportant. Nouns in the position of an objects are much freer, and are therefore not bound by the agreement between a subject and a verb in a sentence, as well as the rule for the agreement of numbers in a sentence. Furthermore, nouns do not have numerical markers, and are used outside the words at issue, and through the combination of quantifiers placed in front of the noun.

b) Numerical expression errors involved with wrongly assigning the noun countability- uncountability

According to the survey results, Vietnamese EFL speakers wrongly assigned the noun uncountability rather noun countability, as illustrated in some examples in the following table.

Texts extracted from respondents' writing	Texts corrected
(6a) [*] '...There is <u>a good feedback</u> from listeners like my friends and my family, but I always want to try more to become a singer.' (11E24)	(6b) '...There is good feedback from listeners like my friends and my family, but I always want to try more to become a singer.'
(7a) [*] '...And I have done <u>many researches</u> and that was the time that I know editing videos so the job requires a good knowledge about computer ...' (11E25)	(7b) '...And I have done much research and that was the time that I know editing videos so the job requires a good knowledge about computer ...'
(8a) [*] '...I find myself more into the mental work and	(8b) '...I find myself more into the mental work and

all the stuffs ...' (11E26)	all the stuff ...'
(9a) '...I am also empowered to run and develop company's business such as a few systems, modify some softwares....' (BZ20)	(9b) '...I am also empowered to run and develop company's business such as a few systems, modify some software'

Table 6. Examples of numeral errors due to wrong assignment of the noun countability

The above texts show that Vietnamese EFL speakers made errors in wrongly assigning the noun countability to the uncountability. Syntactically, “feedback” in (6a) should have been used instead. This error occurs due in part to the appearance of the indefinite article “a”, which is quite close to the Vietnamese equivalent of “môt” (one), and the Vietnamese EFL speakers sometimes arbitrarily use it without being aware of “feedback” as an uncountable noun. Other nouns like “research” instead of “researches”, “all the stuff” instead of “all the stuffs”, and “software” instead of “softwares” should be used in (7a), (8a), and (9a) respectively. These nouns are modified by quantifiers of “many”, “a few”, and “all” conveying plural meaning, and therefore, as prompted by inertia, Vietnamese EFL speakers use the plural form when using these nouns in English without knowing that they are uncountable nouns, and therefore have no plural form.

Cognitively, systematic incongruence of countable/uncountable nouns in English and Vietnamese. While most English nouns referring to objects, animals, and people are countable, and nouns indicating material and concept or abstractness are uncountable, their counterparts in Vietnamese are uncountable and countable, respectively. This shows there is a difference in the cognition of countable/uncountable nouns in English and their counterparts in Vietnamese, which prompts Vietnamese and English speakers two different pragmatic habits about the behavior of nouns. Therefore, when Vietnamese EFL speakers use English, encountering such asymmetries, along with the inertia of Vietnamese, they are more likely to “translate” countable/uncountable properties of nouns from their Vietnamese into English incorrectly.

Numerical errors related to keeping the same property of countable- uncountable nouns

Vietnamese EFL speakers made errors in keeping the same countable-uncountable properties of nouns even though the nouns have changed their referents/meanings. Following are some extracts from the survey results:

Errors of keeping the same property of the nouns when they change their referents/meanings	Texts extracted from respondents' writing	Texts corrected
Keeping nouns countable instead of using uncountable nouns to indicate a general meaning	(10)* '...it stays on whether the young really care and step up to some levels of <u>changes</u> .' (ED04)	(10)'...it stays on whether the young really care and step up to some levels of change .'
	(11)* '... they need to benchmark the <u>compensations</u> and benefits budget of these jobs with the peer group of competitors ...'(ED09)	(11) '... they need to benchmark the compensation and benefits budget of these jobs with the peer group of competitors ...'
	(12)* '...Each customer has their own working style and requires different <u>supports</u> so it's extremely important for me to understand their needs and provide on-time <u>supports</u> .' (BZ14)	(12)'...Each customer has their own working style and requires different support so it's extremely important for me to understand their needs and provide on-time support .'
Keeping nouns uncountable instead of using countable nouns to indicate a particular meaning	(13)* '... The human life on the earth is full of <u>pleasure</u> and sorrows, ups and downs, <u>strength</u> and <u>weakness</u> , and health and illness like day and night... (11L02)	(13) '... The human life on the earth is full of pleasures and sorrows, ups and downs, strengths and weaknesses , and health and illness like day and night...'
	(14)* '... Learn gardening, weigh (how much a kg ?), watch cooking as <u>pleasure</u> instead of boring housework. (11M47).	(14)'... Learn gardening, weigh (how much a kg ?), watch cooking as a pleasure instead of boring housework.'
	(15)* '...I am able to help workers to find their jobs, receive useful training and get worthy <u>benefit</u> for their work.' (BZ12)	(15) '...I am able to help workers to find their jobs, receive useful training and get worthy benefits for their work.'

Table 7. Examples of numeral errors due to keeping the same noun countability properties

In (10), (11) and (12), such nouns as “*change*”, “*compensation*”, and “*support*” as uncountable nouns, instead of “*changes*”, “*compensations*”, and “*supports*” should be used respectively when these nouns have changed their referents, indicating a general meaning. In contrast, such nouns as “*pleasures*”, “*strengths*”, “*weaknesses*”, “*a pleasure*”, and “*benefits*” should be used in (13), (14) and (15) respectively to indicate specific meanings of the target nouns. Syntactically, when referring to the entities represented by nouns, Vietnamese EFL speakers are more interested in the entities themselves rather than their number or quantity. Therefore, when a noun changes its referent/meaning instead of having its common referent/meaning, the Vietnamese EFL people do not worry about numerical expression of that noun, and tend to keep the same countable-uncountable attributes of the noun as it is commonly known and used, leading to errors. Error making is highly likely to occur for Vietnamese EFL learners when some English nouns (crossover nouns) are countable when used in one sense, and uncountable when used in another sense.

Such differences in the behavior of Vietnamese nouns and their English equivalents when changing from referring to one referent/meaning to another create two different habits in use for Vietnamese and English native speakers respectively. Vietnamese EFL speakers often get influenced by their usage habit of expressing noun countability ambiguously, and they transfer that habit when using English, leading to numerical expression errors.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

To cope with numerical errors, two types of solutions, including theory knowledge and practice solutions are suggested. The theoretical measures aim to provide knowledge and inculcate an awareness of numerical expression principles and characteristics in English to learners. More specifically, learners need to be aware of the importance and compulsion of expressing number of the entities represented by English nouns, so they can reduce or avoid the use of general number. Also, the countability-uncountability properties of English noun classes should be systematically overviewed so as to help learners master the countability of English noun classes, thereby limiting and eliminating errors in wrongly assigning countable/uncountable attributes to English nouns by Vietnamese EFL speakers. Furthermore, a list of conversion between English countable/ uncountable nouns ought to be systematically made to help learners overcome the errors of keeping the same attributes of noun countability-uncountability when referents/meanings have been changed. Along with the theoretical solutions, practice solutions including numerical error identification, analysis, prediction, and correction need to be carried out to develop learners’ various capabilities in an attempt to overcome numerical errors. The theory and practice solutions are suggested to be implemented synchronously and complementarily where the former lay the foundation of numerical usage, and the latter offer specific learning strategies.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study of interference errors in the number of entities represented by nouns used by Vietnamese EFL speakers has provided useful insights in terms of numerical expression and cognition in English. While the numeral meaning of a noun is syntactically important and marked in English, it is not syntactically, but only lexically relevant in Vietnamese. In all situations, a numerical meaning of nouns in Vietnamese is not mandatorily expressed, and it is optional, numerically unmarked, and not grammaticalized. It is more widespread for the Vietnamese to use a noun with a general number or a number-neutral noun from the Vietnamese language’s ternary-numeral system instead of using a binary-numeral system in English. The different cognition of the countability-uncountability of English-Vietnamese nouns gives Vietnamese and English native speakers two different usage habits about the behavior of nouns in English and Vietnamese. Therefore, Vietnamese people learning English should be aware of the big difference in noun usage in English and Vietnamese. In order to minimize and avoid errors in numerical expressions, theoretical and practice solutions are suggested, and they should be implemented complementarily and simultaneously.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to record his indebtedness to Prof. Nguyen Cong Duc for his academic supervision. The author also owes his gratitude to Mr. David Sinkinson, Mr. Noah Keogh, and Mr. Robert Goldberg, and Mr. John Baratki for their spending invaluable time helping identify and rectify the errors at issue.

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