



Error Analysis of Online Academic Material Submitted for Continuous Assessment at Undergraduate Level

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ABSTRACT

This research study attempted to highlight English language errors committed by undergraduate students in their academic material. English is not the native or local language of citizens of Pakistan, it is taught in educational institutions as a compulsory subject. The learners of the English language often make errors in using the English language. The primary goal of this research study was to highlight the common errors committed by the undergraduate students of BS English and MA English. For this purpose, the research framework of Error Analysis, initiated by Corder (1979) was followed. This research study was limited to the public sector universities in Pakistan. The researchers collected the assignments of students, analyzed, and counted the possible occurred errors in the assignments, and presented the results quantitatively. Moreover, the possible solutions for the errors are also given in this research article. Eight different categories of errors were found from the academic assignments of the students in which punctuation and capitalization errors were found in the highest percentage. The study revealed that the learners are not aware of the correct grammatical rules, and they use them incorrectly in their academic works. This research study is significant for the learners, instructors, and language researchers as they can better understand the weak areas of students and it also provides some recommendations for the learners and teachers that can help them minimize the language errors.

Keywords: academic assessments, Error Analysis, grammatical rules

Introduction

It is a natural phenomenon that human beings make errors. English is not the native language of Pakistan so, there are more chances that the students commit errors in acquiring and speaking English language. There can be miscellaneous reasons behind committing errors. Error Analysis is one of the significant tools for the teachers that can assist them in analyzing the errors of the students and finding the remedies to minimize the risk of the errors. According to Michaelides (1990), Error Analysis “can be of great value to all those concerned, i.e., teachers, students, and the researchers. For teachers it can offer clear and reliable picture of his students’ knowledge of the target language” (p. 30). The English language students need to be mastered in all the aspects of the English language including syntax, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics, etc but unfortunately, students are not successful in fully grasping the English language. This



research study aims to investigate the frequently produced errors by the English language learners in their academic material, submitted for continuous assessments, and give an opportunity to English language learners to know about their weak areas of English language and find out remedies to overcome their errors.

Background of the Study

Stephen Pit Corder, an applied linguist, is known as the founder of the field of Error Analysis since the late 1960s. Before the field of Error Analysis, the researchers and linguists used to believe in the behaviorist approach towards learning the second language, and errors were not given any significance. The researchers used to compare mother tongue and target language using Contrastive Analysis approach for analyzing the errors and there was the technique of drill exercises to deal with all categories of error.

The term Interlanguage, coined by Selinker (1972) developed the interest of linguists towards exploring and providing strategies to the language learners to overcome the disabilities through which they suffer while learning the second language or target language. Corder in 1967 gave great emphasis to the field of Error Analysis with the publication of his work “Error Analysis and Interlanguage” and other researchers and linguists started working in this field (James, 2013). The corpus for the Error Analysis from the 1960s to 1970s was kept small and only the selected aspect of language was used to be investigated due to limited sources, the rest of the aspects were left unidentified (Kotsyuk, 2015). With the passage of time, there came advances in methods and technology, and in the contemporary era, we find great research work in the field of Error Analysis and the researchers can freely take assistance from electronic tools for the analysis.

English is considered as an international and co-official language of Pakistan (Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973). It has been extensively used around the world as a second language because it is the lingua franca of the world. The policymakers along with the teachers usually try to discover the strategies to be more systematic and well organized in English language teaching. Error analysis is widely used around the world to highlight the weak areas of language. The Error analysis is the technique to highlight the errors and it also provides possible corrections and solutions to overcome such errors. The researchers have been utilizing observational and experimental techniques to point out the weak areas of the language learners. After reviewing the previous literature and research on Error Analysis, it has been observed that researchers around the world have taken engineering students, business students, secondary school students, and postgraduate students as samples and aimed to analyze their written material, highlighting their frequently produced errors and proposing the remedial action for the errors. However, there is scarce research conducted specifically on English language students in Pakistan. Moreover, the academic material of the undergraduate English language students submitted to the teachers for continuous assessment has been analyzed for this research instead of just following the traditional way of assigning tasks to the students and then analyzing it. This research article has considered the academic material of undergraduate students of the English department as a sample and analyzed it for evaluation.



This research study responded the following questions:

- What are the common grammatical errors English language students commit in their academic material submitted for continuous assessment at the undergraduate level?
- What are the possible corrections to the errors English students commit?

Literature Review

Error Analysis

Error Analysis is the branch of applied linguistics that aims to highlight the errors occurring in second language learning. Corder (1967) has highlighted two roles of error analysis: theoretical and practical. The theoretical role is to relate the learner's knowledge of the target language with the source from where he/she has learned the target language and find out the gaps in his target language learning. The practical role is to provide the remedy to upgrade the methodologies that should result in productive target language learning and teaching (Corder, 1981). Error Analysis at any point in learning a second language is vital in three ways: it is significant for teachers because they can find out that how much the learners have grabbed and how much is left for them to learn; it is significant for researchers as Error Analysis highlights the strategies and procedures used in language learning; in the last, Error Analysis is significant for the learner itself as a learner can self evaluate his/her knowledge of the language and he/she can test either their learned structure of language is acceptable or not (Corder, 1967).

If applied linguistics research is taken under consideration then, it defines Error Analysis as an outcome of Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence in which application of language acquisition can result in errors (Corder, 1967). Error Analysis aims to attain linguistic competence in the target language (Richards, 1980) but, reviewing Chomsky's concept of competence, learners cannot attain proficiency in the second language because second language competence is built up on the variable set of rules (Corder, 1979).

Error Analysis opposes Contrastive Analysis theory which describes the transfer of knowledge as a compulsory element in the target language learning, but Error Analysis also considers the cognitive abilities of learners during learning the target language. Error Analysis provides the underlying processes that occur while learning the target language and highlights the weak areas of learning (Keshavarz, 2012). Keshavarz (2012) has given three premises of Error Analysis:

1. Language cannot be learned without committing errors
2. Errors are important for the research
3. The entire origin of committing errors is not from the native language of learners.

Errors Vs Mistakes

Corder (1967) was first to distinct the terms “error” and “mistake” in linguistic context. According to him, errors are the consequences of lack of competence, and mistakes are caused due to lack of performance. The logic of performance and competence can be significant for researchers to distinguish between errors and mistakes. Mistakes are likely to slip into the language



by native speakers (Johnson, 1988). Whereas the learners of the target language perform errors because they are vulnerable in the proficiency of the rules of the target language, and they need to learn those rules and strategies to use the language correctly according to the context to attain competence in the target language (Shaughnessy, 1977). The native speakers of a language utter numerous mistakes while delivering a random speech; the reason behind mistakes is not the lack of knowledge but there can be slip of tongue, tiredness, or strong emotions. Moreover, the speakers know the core language and correct themselves if they realize their mistakes (Corder, 1967).

James (2013) defines error as aberrant use of language, instigated unintentionally and not amenable by the instigator itself. Conversely, a mistake can be instigated intentionally or unintentionally and amenable by instigator. Mistakes are of no importance to the manner of language learning. Nevertheless, the trouble of figuring out what is a learner's mistake and what a learner's error is one in every of a few troubles and requires effort to examine the errors that are typically accorded them (Corder, 1967).

Research in the field of Error Analysis

Nzama (2010) from the University of Zululand investigated the errors committed by Isizulu speakers and the reasons behind committing errors in learning the English language. She analyzed the essays written by learners of 10th, 11th, and 12th class and the errors she found from the essays were of auxiliary verbs with past tense, use of wrong tense, articles were used inappropriately, singular, and plural forms, incorrect use of prepositions and pronouns, mother tongue interference and infinitives. The significant cause the researcher found out behind the errors is the fault in teaching structure: the teachers are not highly qualified and trained, they lack experience of teaching English language and there is absence of libraries in rural areas' schools. Amiri and Puteh (2017) from University Teknologi; Maylsia, investigated errors of post-graduated Malaysian students committed in their academic writing. The participants were asked to write an assignment according to their study's topic. After analyzing the corpus 389 errors were detected in which sentence structure error was of high percentage: 32.90%. Moreover, articles, punctuation and capitalization were also committed greatly in the academic assignments.

Talpur (2017) from Mehran University of Engineering and Technology proposed a case study in their research work entitled "Error analysis of the English essays of the undergraduate engineering students in Pakistan". The experimental technique was opted, and the students were asked to create an essay of 200-300 words. The researcher concluded that the undergraduate engineering students commit grammatical mistakes the most. The spelling and word order errors were also detected frequently in sample.

Research Framework

The data collection and analysis for this research follows the traditional approach that has been utilized in the field of Error Analysis by language researchers for many years, initiated by Corder (1975):

- Classification of errors.



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- Evaluation of errors.
 - Explanation of errors.

The first step in conducting the Error Analysis is to classify the errors from the sample, specified for the research. There are various techniques to classify the errors, the researchers can utilize any of the techniques as per need. One of the techniques is to classify the errors as: omission, addition, substitution, and word order but this classification is not specified as beneficial by Corder (1972) for explaining the complications in the learning process. The other category of errors, specified by Corder (1975) is to organize the errors “to levels of language description, i.e., errors of orthography or phonology, of morphology or syntax, of vocabulary, and within each level according to systems, e.g., vowel or consonant systems, tense, aspect, number, gender or case” (p. 205-206).

The second step is to evaluate the errors. Corder (1975) describes two rationales that justify the significance of the evaluation of errors: one is to examine the linguistic competence of the learners in their educational environment and the other rationale is to underline the remedial plans for modifying the language performance. There are many ways for the evaluation of errors proposed by different linguists. The two above-mentioned steps deal with linguistics whereas, the explanation of the errors is connected with understanding the phenomenon of language learning specifically second language. Corder(1975) highlights the significance of underlining the causes behind errors in order to take remedial measures for them and performance analysis has to be conducted to evaluate the learners’ language.

Population and Sampling

The population for this research study comprised of the English department students of three universities in Lahore. As the time and resources were limited for the accomplishment of this research study, 50 academic assessments of undergraduate (BS English, MA English) students submitted to their teachers for continuous assessment were taken as samples. This research implied on simple random sampling technique for the collection of samples.

Data Collection

The data for this research was collected by the spontaneous procedure. Spontaneous procedures include the collection of data from the learners when they are focused more on the content rather than the grammatical style. Academic assignments, examination papers, and essays can be taken as sources for data collection. The topics for collecting data by the spontaneous procedure can include “personal information, future plans, religious, social, and political issues, and the like” (Keshavarz, 2012, p. 80). A total of 50 academic assignments of students were collected and the subjects of the assignments were distinct because they were collected from different teachers.

Data Analysis and Findings

The frequencies and percentage of each category of errors are given in the following table:

Table 1 Most common errors committed by the students.



Serial No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Punctuation and Capitalization	289	31.6%
2	Article	164	17.9%
3	Tense and Subject-verb agreement	154	16.8%
4	Preposition	81	8.87%
5	Singular/ Plural form	79	8.6%
6	Redundant words	64	7.009%
7	Wrong spellings	58	6.3%
8	Pronoun	24	2.6%
	Total	916	100%

The above drawn table gives the number of each category of errors found in the academic assignments of undergraduate students. Moreover, the percentage of each category of errors is also mentioned in a separate column. The results say that the top three errors committed by students most frequently are: punctuation and capitalization, tenses including subject-verb agreement, and article.

Punctuation and Capitalization

Findings reveal that the students committed punctuation and capitalization errors the most i.e. 31.6%. Some of the examples of this category, taken from the sample are as follows:

1. Sr, Shehzad mostly follows the authority, or lecture style with proper time management and precise wording.
2. Above all she listens to her students like a spiritual mother.
3. Students are very polite, obedient, and formal with teachers.
4. While talking with them we use nonverbal language (signs, gestures etc).
5. A domain can be different according to social situations.
6. In this category we may call those Relatives with Whom we met rarely.
7. With my close cousins, I speak with freedom.
8. According to pervaiz iqbal, testing a phase of teaching is an art.
9. We speak punjabi at house and urdu at university.

Corrections

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9. We speak Punjabi at house and Urdu at university.

Articles

The second most committed error is of articles i.e., 17.9%. Some of the examples, highlighted from the assignments, are as follows:

1. It's a tool instrument in order to check the understanding of mental abilities.
2. In this process, there is encoder and a decoder.
3. She engaged students by doing the different tasks in the class.
4. Her methodologies are combination.
5. Ma'am Sidra Ahmad is a best teacher.
6. That was a best experience.
7. She was an enthusiastic about her job.
8. Teacher is a backbone of a society.

Corrections

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2. In this process, there is an encoder and a decoder.
3. She engaged students by doing different tasks in the class.
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6. That was the best experience.
7. She was enthusiastic about her job.
8. A teacher is the backbone of any society.

Tense and Subject-verb Agreement

This category includes the errors related to the syntax of the English language. 16.8% of the errors, committed by students belong to this category. Some of the examples, brought from the assignments of the students are as follows:

1. She always make a balance between the two.
2. She had assign us a task.
3. There are a lot of teachers who has taught me.
4. We were afraid that we will not be able to pass that subject.
5. We will be lucky if she see us in the next semester too.
6. A person who teaches and help people to learn.
7. I will be show respect towards my parents and siblings.



8. I have to bought stationary.
9. They sings about their battles.
10. They did not bothered to the rules of the game.

Corrections

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Prepositions

Students feel difficulty in using the correct preposition in the sentences. Some of the examples of such errors are as follows:

1. I met her at a park.
2. We cannot use it by class fellows.
3. I do not get angry any teacher by misbehaving.
4. We use to call each other “tum” instead “ap”.
5. Try speak to them formally with a good choice of words.
6. We can order, scold, and laugh each other.
7. There is a limit of sharing with them.
8. We will interact with different society who has different language.
9. Why language changed time to time?
10. They are respected to us.
11. She is never biased for any student.
12. At the end, it is to say that Madam Sidra is the best teacher.

Corrections

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3. I do not get angry at any teacher by misbehaving.
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6. We can order, scold, and laugh at each other.
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8. We will interact with different society that has a different language.
9. Why did the language change from time to time?



10. They are respected by us.

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12. In the end, it is to say that Madam Sidra is the best teacher.

Singular Plural Form

Findings show that the students committed errors in quantifying the verbs as singular and plural. Some of the examples of the errors, committed by students are as follows:

1. All the teacher who taught us were remarkable and fabulous.
2. Her method of teaching and encouragements for class participation encourages you to think critically.
3. How can we reveal different sort of thinkings?
4. We talk to our teachers in a respectful manners.
5. The purpose of all type of testing is the same, to access the basic ability of students.
6. (...) battles, Gods, and heros.
7. One of the childrens had arrived from the earth.
8. One of my friend used the word "tum".

Corrections

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6. (...) battles, Gods, and heroes.
7. One of the children had arrived from the earth.
8. One of my friends used the word "tum".

Redundant Words

Students have often used the words that are not necessary to use in sentences. Some of the examples of such errors are as follows:

1. She used to give detail of each and every point.
2. I realized that many teachers convey their knowledge in their own particular way.
3. It is nice when a professor really enjoys a subject.
4. But in the matter of father, we behave very, very, very much formally.
5. The assigning of marks can be quantitative or it can be qualitative.
6. Who knows me even more than my own self.
7. So, personally I believe that we address our family according to moods.
8. I have a really soft-tone voice.



9. Actually it varies from person to person.
10. Novel is basically a fictional work which is written in prose style.

Corrections

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2. I realized that many teachers convey their knowledge in their particular way.
3. It is nice when a professor enjoys a subject.
4. But in the matter of father, we behave very much formally.
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7. So, I believe that we address our family according to our moods.
8. I have a soft-tone voice.
9. It varies from person to person.
10. A novel is a fictional work that is written in prose style.

Wrong Spellings

Students get confused in spelling a few words. Some of the examples of such errors are highlighted from the assignments and stated as follows:

1. The varied pattern of bilingual competency that characterized young children in dual language environment is not well understood.
2. I am going to explain my ways while taking to a teacher.
3. For exampe, the schema for my friend might include information about her appearance.
4. All of them try there level best so that each of us is satisfied.
5. She made us able enough to speak English in a very good way by using interesting techniques like playing drama, script writting, and lyrics of the song etc.
6. We miss Mdm Sara.
7. Social context recognises that people use language and that language is a part of society.
8. Scimming is gaining the main idea or gist of the text.
9. Measurement can also have the collection of data of both: the performance of teacher and performance of carriculum.
10. All the students were very exited to see the sun.

Corrections

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5. She made us able enough to speak English in a very good way by using interesting techniques like playing drama, script writing, and lyrics of the song, etc.
6. We miss madam Sara.
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8. Skimming is gaining the main idea or gist of the text.
9. Measurement can also have the collection of data of both: the performance of teacher and the performance of the curriculum.
10. All the students were very excited to see the sun.

Pronouns

Students have used the wrong pronouns in some of the sentences. Few examples are as follows:

1. Formative assessment refers to the understanding level of the student that how much he is getting.
2. This article tells about reading comprehension, strategies, and skills from which a reader can improve their reading skills.
3. He proposes Luccetta but she denies to marry her.
4. Every teacher teaches us in their best way.
5. She motivates their students through active learning.

Corrections:

1. Formative assessment refers to the understanding level of the student that how much he/she is getting.
2. This article tells about reading comprehension, strategies, and skills from which a reader can improve his/her reading skills.
3. He proposes Luccetta but she denies to marry him.
4. Every teacher teaches us in his/her best way.
5. She motivates her students through active learning.

Discussion

The analysis of the academic assignments of the students revealed that the students are not compatible enough to use the English language with correct rules. They have frequently committed eight different categories of errors. Extensively committed error is punctuation and capitalization. The rationale behind committing this category of error can be the lack of knowledge of the students. Most of the students are unaware of the usage of the punctuation marks and they do not put punctuation marks at many required places. Most of the students do not know the rules of capitalization and erroneously either capitalize wrong words or do not capitalize the alphabets where required.

The second category of error is the incorrect use of articles. Students do not use articles at appropriate places. Some of the students do not know the use of the article “the” and they often



get confused in the use of “a” and “the”. Other types of error include singular/ plural forms, incorrect use of prepositions, redundant words, incorrect spelling, and pronouns. The third frequently produced error by the students is tense and subject-verb agreement. Students have not mastered the tenses and they use incorrect sentence structures. Most of the students are unaware of the rules of conditional sentences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

English is the medium of instruction in educational institutions of Pakistan, but students lack the mastery of the English language, and it is evident from the analysis done for this research study. The frequently found errors from the assignments of the students include punctuation and capitalization, tense and subject-verb agreement, articles, singular/ plural forms, prepositions, redundant words, wrong spellings, and pronouns. There can be many reasons behind committing errors in English language. English is not the native language of Pakistanis, but it is used as the official language in Pakistan. Children who grow up in Pakistan do not have exposure to the English language at an early age. This results in the lack of English language skills in students. In this regard, some recommendations are given below:

- The students should utilize time in mastering the grammatical rules of the English language.
- The students should read English newspapers and books besides course books. It will help them understand the sentence structures.
- The students should frequently visit libraries, learn new English words from reading the literature pieces, and use them in their routine. It will help them enrich their vocabulary.
- The students should speak English for communication in their educational institutions.
- The students should listen to English news and watch English TV shows.
- The students should write their everyday routine or thoughts in English daily.
- The teachers should focus on polishing the English language skills (both written and spoken) of the students.
- The teachers should assign students extra writing tasks for the improvement of sentence structure.
- The teachers should focus on the errors of the students and try to help students in overcoming those errors.
- The teachers should highlight and give feedback on the grammatical errors of the students.
- The teachers should upgrade their teaching strategies from time to time.
- The teachers can utilize remedial teaching strategy that can assist students in modifying their language errors.



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