

Error Analysis In Academic Writing Of Post Graduate Engineering Students Of Sindh

¹ Sajid Ali Magsi , ² Paras Niaz Khaskheli , ³ Abdul Rasheed Soomro , ⁴ Ajab Ali Lashari

¹Lecturer, MUET SZAB Campus, Khairpur.

²Assistant Professor, IELL, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur.

³Lecturer, IELL, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur.

⁴Lecturer Department of Education Sindh Madressatul Islam University Karachi.

Corresponding author email: ajablashari@smiu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This paper includes the investigation of various types of errors in academic writings of postgraduate students of MUET SZAB Campus Khairpur (Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Campus Khairpur). It is mandatory for the enrolling students to pass either the GAT (General Aptitude Test) or university admission test to achieve admission in the post graduate program. In this research study, 15 students from the said campus were involved to write an assignment of 2000 words on the topic of “My Previous Education and Future Career Plan”. The employed methodology in this research was mixed one. The error in the assignments were recognized and categorized according to Corder’s Model of Error Analysis. The results of the current study discovered that three most common errors in the selected population were articles, sentence structures and capitalization. This study also opens further to the assumption of the rules of English by the participants under the effect of those in their native language. Such deeper insights allow for further research in the field of error analysis in terms of the issues in the instructions from the teachers and their reception on the part of students. This research produces significant discoveries from the teaching and learning of English at engineering universities.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Academic Writing, Postgraduate Students, English Language Learners.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is highly challenging and complex process, particularly, when it comes to writing. Relatively, learning English in Pakistan has always been a tough task. The process of language learning requires students to practice in all four skills of language. In this research, writing skill is selected for it is the absolute skill to master a language formally. For foreign language learners, writing large texts without committing errors is almost inevitable. Even the students at postgraduate levels commit many errors in writing their academic scripts in

English. Error analysis has proved, during the last two decades, to be the most effective method of learning and improving foreign language learning process through trial and error method in writing.

In the 1970s, Corder pioneered the field of error analysis (Sawalmeh, 2013). According to Khan and Khan (2016), error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis and a qualitative technique that is a trustworthy method due to its focus on the linguistic interference of errors happening in the learner's language usage while learning a second language. Brown (2000) defined error analysis as the process of monitoring, assessing, and

categorizing variations between the learners' and standard language use. In other words, error analysis is the process of assessing second language learners' errors and then providing the error system to teachers and teacher educators. Crystal (1987) described error analysis as a strategy and method for discovering, classifying, and correcting errors.

By comparing the language produced by the learners to the accepted standards of the target language, error analysis seeks to explain the errors that exist within the language of foreign language learners (James, 1988). Furthermore, AbiSamra describes error analysis as a linguistic analysis with a focus on the analysis of the learner's error (as cited in Sawalmeh, 2013). As a result, in order for teachers and instructors to help the students, it is now crucial to examine the grammatical understanding of language learners through analysis of their writing. Also, by analyzing the grammatical knowledge of language students, language teachers and instructors are better able to foresee and correct difficulties that may arise during the language learning process. According to Corder (1967), categorizing the mistakes made by language learners can teach researchers a lot about how second languages are acquired by revealing the techniques that language learners use. Since mistakes are seen as a tool that learners utilize to learn, he also believed that faults serve essential functions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The major function of error analysis method is the analysis and diagnostic check of second/foreign language learners' progress in learning the target language. Different perceptions to error analysis have been approached and analyzed through a large body of research works. Corder (1967) and Brown (2000) emphasized on the adoption of error analysis as an effective teaching and learning method of second/foreign language.

They intensified the notion of its importance to diagnose the language learners' state of knowledge through the identification and classification of the errors they commit during the use of target language. In Corder's (1967) point of view, spotting errors in the learners' ability of second language is not merely the elimination of the traced errors. He pleads that it is a diagnostic method that helps teachers catch the method of learning from learners' point of view. Hence, error analysis offers much more than just errors in the progress of target language teaching and learning.

According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), error analysis is a process based on the four steps which include obtaining a piece of composition or speech of language learners, finding the error in that speech or text, describing the errors so the understanding of researcher/teacher may be well directed, and explaining the errors from grammatical and logical point of view.

The four processes of error analysis are as follows: gathering a sample of learner language; identifying errors; describing errors; and explaining errors, according to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). Richards (1974) came up with a developmental contribution in the research area of error analysis. He introduced the categorization of errors into three major themes: i) interference errors are those which are imported from the mother tongue of the language learners, ii) intralingual errors which emerge as faulty understanding of rules of the target language by the language learners, and iii) developmental errors are the ones which take place due to learners' failure in learning the circumstance where certain rule is applied, and others may not.

In order to provide insights for instructors, researchers, and students as noted before, numerous studies were undertaken to examine students' errors in the English as a second or foreign language environment. For instance,

Katiya et al. (2015) looked over and analyzed a corpus of essays written by first-year Chemistry students. The researcher found that the quality, meaning, and rhetorical aspect of the contents were affected by mother tongue interference, punctuation and spelling errors, improper application of essay construction standards, and syntactic and morphological errors. Taher (2011) looked into the mistakes that Swedish junior high school pupils made the most frequently. Verb tense, verb inflection, and subject-verb agreement were all frequent problems. The author explained that the mistakes resulted from poor grammatical expertise and poor translation from Swedish to English.

Heydari and Bagheri (2012) offered a thorough analysis of the mistakes made by second language learners. The authors provided taxonomies of the frequent intralingual and interlingual errors made by Iranian students and those of other countries, as well as their causes. The complexity of the English language, the influence of spoken English on written English, students' incomplete or ignorant knowledge of specific structures, the transfer of training, unfamiliarity with the demands of written English, a lack of sufficient practice informed writing, memory lapses, and the pressure of communication were found to be among the major causes of errors. Similar to this, Agha (2007) assumed: "interference of conversational English with written English, interference from Persian, the students' inadequate knowledge regarding certain structures, the sheer complexity of the English language, the transfer of training, lapses in memory, insufficient practice in formal writing, lack of familiarity with the rules regulating written English, and the overwhelming pressure placed upon students to focus their efforts and energy primarily on communication at the expense of grammar" (p.1).

According to a survey of the literature, there has been a plethora of study on the examination of

writing errors made by second- or foreign-language learners in various circumstances. Yet, the majority of these studies concentrate on different types of essays that are prepared in class for an exam or specific study and are brief in length. However, this study examines term papers written by graduate students, which are longer and related to thesis topics. Furthermore, term papers are created using participants' comparative summaries of in-depth readings. Hence, it is thought that mistakes made when writing term papers differ slightly from mistakes made when writing essays in terms of length, subject matter, and significance to the students.

2. METHOD

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study included 15 postgraduate students from a public engineering university of Sindh. It is mandatory for these students to have mastered English language so that they may intelligently write their dissertation in a well organized and well composed form. By the end of their postgraduate studies, the students are expected to be able to write large and errorless texts so that their dissertations may be processed for further evaluation and assessments. Simultaneously, they are also required to write a research paper and get it published in a well-ranked research journal.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The essays on the given topic, excluding the particulars of the students, were collected which were already marked by the respective examiners. Table 1 is the guideline on which the respective examiners allocated marks to the students.

The three categories (shown in Table 1) were chosen based on the marks that the course examiners, who also marked the students' papers,

assigned to each category. In order to identify several types of errors, two samples of text from each of the three categories—content, language, and organization and format—were chosen.

The procedures of error analysis laid out by Corder (1974) were adhered to for the purposes of data analysis. Each script was first read through word by word and sentence by sentence. All written examples were used to create the coding categories. To assess the frequency, the

numbers of errors were tallied and converted to a percentage also.

The language error analysis is shown in Figure 1. Interpretive practice was used for the other performance indicator components (content, language, organization and format), which are listed in Table 1. The class professor who examined the essays calculated the categories in Table 1 based on the marks given. To emphasize the classifications, a few examples of sentences from each category were picked.

Table 1. Level Description and Marks Distribution

Performance Indicator	Description
Content 20%	The logical treatment of the title and adhering to the topic. the development of the title, idea expansion, connecting contents and relevant information about the major theme and passionately elaborated supporting sentences
Language 20%	Correct grammar and spelling, diversified sentence structure, a suitable vocabulary with a wide range of words, and the ability to connect concepts using transitional phrases and cohesive techniques.
Organization and format 10%	A paragraph's coherence and arrangement, which includes an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, demonstrate planning and careful organization.

3. RESULTS

4.1 Content Errors

Writing by students demonstrates intralingual and developmental errors. Several errors were made, despite the pupils' awareness of the issue and the development of their views. The following excerpt, for instance, shows a student's thesis statement:

"The challenges caused by the increased number of private cars on Sindh province roadways are increasing in number. These issues must be resolved swiftly and in great quantity. The study efforts on how to address these issues brought on by Sindh's high private vehicle usage are still insufficient".

The student explored issues brought on by an increase in automobiles in the second and third paragraphs, then three more paragraphs give answers to the issues raised. Unexpectedly, the student veered off topic, and in the final paragraph, he contrasted the public transportation in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. He concluded by saying:

"Finally, the aforementioned example is what I have experienced during my time living in the United Arab Emirates, so when I compare these two countries I make believe that..."

The student attempted to support the points with examples, but was unable to remain focused on the subject and make connections between the contents and the main idea. This demonstrates how short the student was with academic writing. This is unmistakably an intralingual error that

reflects the overall characteristics of the rule, showing that the learner generalized incorrectly while failing to apply the rules completely.

According to the examiners' comments, the following common mistakes were found in students' writing with regard to the subject matter: a) meaningless or ambiguous statements; b) sentence fragmentation; c) failure to provide

clear, detailed information regarding the subject under discussion; d) integration of irrelevant information to the subject under discussion; e) failure to separate additional ideas into different paragraphs; and f) instances of plagiarism and copy-and-paste.

4.2 Language Errors

Figure 1 depicts the analysis of errors on the basis of two types: 1) type of errors, 2) number and percentage of errors.

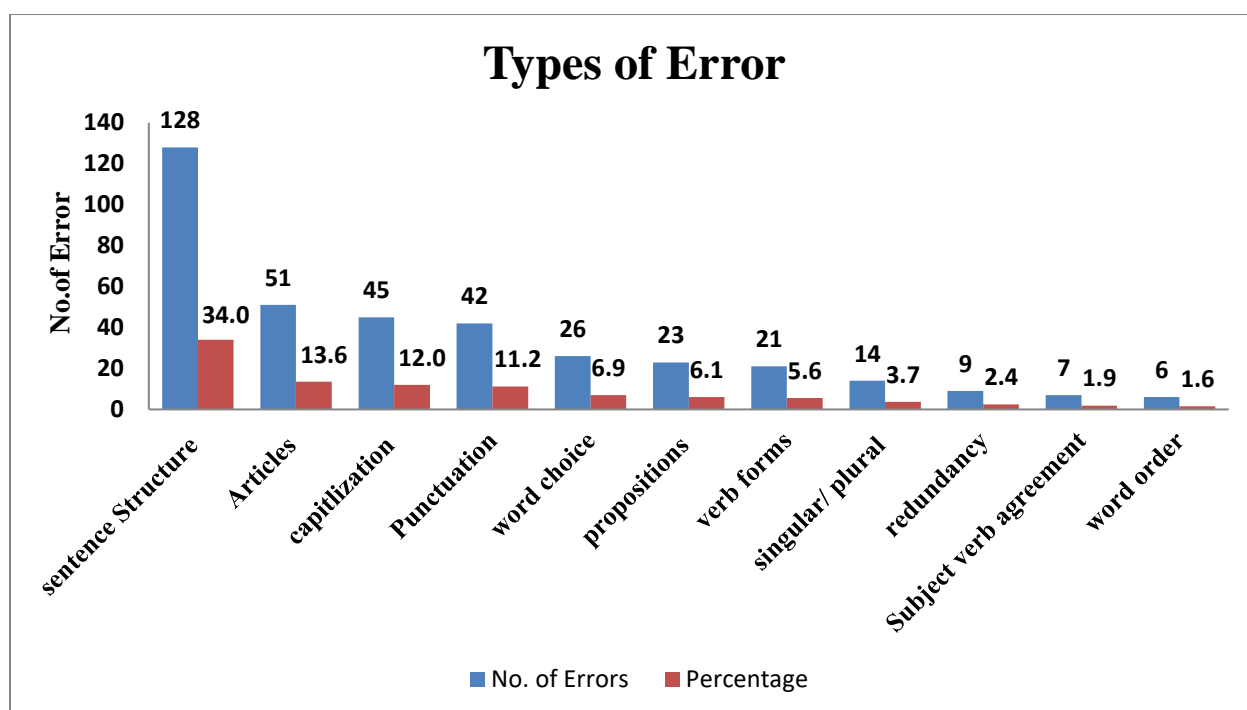


Figure 1. Types of Error with Numbers and Percentage

The depicted results reveal that four common errors that the students performed were: Sentence Structure (34%) followed by Articles (13.6%), Capitalization (12.2%), and Punctuation (11.2%). The four more common errors and their examples from the corpus are illustrated in the next sections.

The other noticeable errors included Word Choice (6.9%), Prepositions (6.1%), and Verb Form (5.6%) respectively. Next were

Singular/plural (3.7%) and Redundancy (2.5%). Then are the errors that counted least among all. These were Subject-Verb Agreement (1.9%) and word order (1.6%).

The three types of errors, including interference, intralingual, and development faults, account to major areas of error analysis. Students generally tend to convert the target language into their native one at the sentence and paragraph levels while paraphrasing in order to grasp the material,

as seen by their inaccuracies, particularly in sentence structure. Then, in order to paraphrase, they translate it back to the original language. As a result, they made a variety of grammatical, lexical, semantic, and mechanical mistakes that led to interference, improper rule application, overgeneralization, and the construction of incorrect notions, as shown in the examples that follow:

1. The host-based IDS is better than any other security elements in detecting such events when an unauthorized user attempts to log into a computer.
2. The method and elements used to measure intellectual capital are one of the factors affecting the findings of these studies. There are around 28 distinct ways to gauge intellectual capital, and depending on which one researchers use, their conclusions may vary.
3. Describe the lack of ties to specific operating systems or applications that operate at the packet level.
4. Also, they operate and provide the desired results without the requirement for the required operating system, programs, or licensing.

It should be noted, nevertheless, that the primary cause of errors at this level is low experience of academic writing.

4.3 Organization and Format

The essay scripts of the students show that they are aware of the many parts of academic writing, such as the introduction, body, and conclusion. Nonetheless, some writing samples show shortcomings in the creation of cogent paragraphs or the use of suitable cohesive elements. As was previously noted, students may deviate from the thesis statement's ideas, include extensive information that is unrelated to the topic phrase, or present a novel concept in the conclusion part.

Such events are caused by developmental and intralingual issues.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of the errors made by EFL students in their essay writing offers insights into how the academic language proficiency of students reflects crucial issues in academic writing, specifically their writing difficulties and advancement in learning various academic English abilities. The identification, classification, and evaluation of the potential effects of these errors on students' performance and their capacity to communicate meaning in term papers were done using the error analysis categorization (interlingual, intralingual, and developmental errors) introduced by Corder (1974). The study gives professors feedback on how writing errors may impact the methods used for teaching and learning. Also, foreign students who begin writing their theses in English might be better conscious of the factors that need to be taken into account. According to the data, the students showed the most difficulties in language and substance when they created meaningless sentences and applied haphazard punctuation, capitalization, and articles. The impact of their first language in general and their lack of prior academic writing experience in particular may be the cause. The findings of this study support Katiya et al(2015) .'s study in that intralingual (incomplete application of rules, flawed generalisation, and failure to understand conditions under which rules apply) and developmental errors were two of the most common errors found (making hypothesis about the target language based on the limited experience). Also, it is consistent with Ahmadvand (2008), which Heydari and Bagheri (2012) highlight as a source of foreign language students' inaccuracies.

The study also showed that it will be difficult for students to write their theses successfully if

linguistic and conceptual barriers are not removed. It is important to note that the pedagogical implications of the current study suggest that foreign language courses should place a greater emphasis on the nature and substance of grammatical faults in academic writing.

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