



A STUDY OF ESL LEARNERS' LINGUISTIC ERRORS AND THEIR PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: A CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION

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Abstract

The present study explores the learner language problems existing in the ESL classrooms and the meanings of their implications for improving the pedagogical practice. The study is concerned with written production of BS-level ESL learners and the most common linguistic errors that are made in classroom writing tasks. The research utilizes the Error Analysis approach developed by Corder (1967) and Surface Strategy Taxonomy as proposed by Dulay et al. (1982) for categorizing learner errors into grammatical, syntactic, lexical and mechanical errors. Even though these frameworks are developed from previous periods of Second Language acquisition studies, they are very applicable as they offer a systematic and pedagogically sound approach to understanding the common L2 learning problems and developing suitable pedagogical interventions. About twenty five ESL learners are chosen to provide data for the study through an essay writing task in a classroom setting. The results reveal that the most common grammatical and syntactic errors are related to the use of tenses, subject verb agreement, article, sentence structure, and prepositions. The analysis also shows that the influence of the L1 of the learners on L2 is a major factor in error production as well as the influence of intra lingual factors like overgeneralization. The study ends with the conclusion that systematic error analysis is still a valid method to analyze learner language and help in better classroom practices as well as learner-centered ESL teaching in higher education settings.

Keywords

Error Analysis, ESL Pedagogy, Learner Language, Inter-lingual Errors, Intra-lingual Errors, Surface Strategy Taxonomy

Introduction

English is the main language of international communication in education, business, science, and technology, and for communication with the world. Students often face difficulties in acquiring proficiency, especially in writing, in countries where English is a second language. Writing is thought to be one of the most challenging language skills, as it demands that the learner use knowledge of grammar, syntax, and words, as well as mechanical knowledge. As a result, the learners' writing is often plagued with many language and communication problems. In Second Language Acquisition studies, the analysis of learner language has been placed in the middle of research. Errors are no longer to be regarded simply as evidences of failure, but rather as clues to the evolving linguistic system of the learners. Insight into the nature and origin of L2 errors helps teachers and researchers recognize learning problems and provide more effective teaching. Thus, error analysis can be used to provide valuable insights into the language learning processes and to enhance ESL instruction.

Learners often find grammar, syntax, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling challenging in ESL writing contexts. The problems stem from inter-lingual and intra-lingual influences. Inter-lingual influence refers to the transfer of linguistic patterns from the L1 to the L2. However,



intraglingual influence comes about when learners' knowledge of the rules of the target language is incomplete, causing overgeneralization and wrong application of rules. For instance, a learner might write "He go to university every day" rather than "He goes to university every day," indicating lack of understanding of subject-verb agreement. Errors made by learners came to be seen as important when it developed into Error Analysis. Learner errors are systematic and meaningful, according to Corder (1967), and are evidence of stages of language development. In later work Dulay et al. (1982) build on this by introducing a taxonomy of errors, namely Omission, Addition, Misinformation and Misordering for the Surface Strategy.

These theoretical perspectives are developed in earlier years, but do not lose significance in current ESL research. Recent studies still use Error Analysis and Surface Strategy Taxonomy because it offers clear procedures for identifying, classification and interpretation of errors made by the learners. They are still being used and have proven successful as pedagogical and analytical tools in contemporary language classrooms. Therefore the present study has chosen the following classical models not as dead models but as fundamental models which are still important for the analysis of learner problems in a modern ELS context. In Pakistan English is an official language and is important in higher education. Although many students have years of formal training, they still struggle with written communication. Often, in traditional instruction, students are taught to memorize and learn grammatical rules without really using the language. This can make students have a good understanding of grammar concepts but not be able to write them correctly in authentic writing contexts. The differences between knowledge and performance indicate the necessity of classroom-based investigations of learner language. The present study looks at the written production of BS level ESL learners. The study highlights the common errors in the students' L2 writing, categorizes them into grammatical, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical errors and examines the role of inter-lingual and intra-lingual factors on the students' L2 writing. The study aims to make a contribution to the enhancement of ESL pedagogy and classroom practices by studying authentic learner data.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the common error patterns in the written production of the ESL learners?
2. What extent does inter-lingual and intra-lingual factors affect the learner errors?
3. What linguistic areas are the most challenging for ESL students when it comes to writing?

Literature Review

One of the most well-studied aspects of Second Language Acquisition is the study of learner language. It has long been acknowledged that L2 errors contain significant information regarding L2 development, learning strategies, and the problem areas in L2 learning. As a result, systematic study of learner errors is one of the ways of understanding the learner's L2 acquisition process and how teachers can enhance teaching practice. The emergence of Error Analysis is a major change in the study of learner language. Prior to the advent of Error Analysis, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis prevails in language learning studies. Lado (1957) states that the problems learners face are mainly due to the differences between their L1 and L2 structures. The theory implies that most errors that learners make are caused by negative transfer of L1 structures to L2. Although this view offers some insight into language transfer, subsequent studies show that many learner errors can not be traced to L1 interference.

The major breakthrough comes with the work of Corder (1967), who proposes a new perspective of learner language, namely Error Analysis. Corder believes that errors should not be considered as indicators of failure only but systematic indicators of language development.



From his viewpoint, errors made by learners make the learner's hypotheses transparent and evidence his/her growing competence in the target language. This perspective shifts the meaning of mistakes from destructive to instructive, as it becomes an opportunity for teachers and researchers to gain insight from mistakes. The importance of Error Analysis has been underscored in the current SLA studies (Fatima & Mustafa, 2025). Although the framework has been developed early, it is still relevant because it provides a practical way to identify, classify and interpret learner errors. Error Analysis is still being used with modern learners to analyze their writing and to design pedagogical interventions on the basis of common patterns of difficulties faced by the learners. We can see that error analysis has proved to be useful as a linguistic theory and a method for teaching and learning language as a tool, and its usefulness as such has remained unchanged over the years. Another significant contribution to learner language research comes with the theory of interlanguage by Selinker (1972). The learner language is a system of language that is distinct from the learner's L1 and the L2, claims Selinker. As learners gain more in linguistic knowledge, interlanguage continues to change and gradually approaches higher levels of competence. Selinker identifies the effects of language transfer, overgeneralization, communication strategies and developmental processes in learner language. Interlanguage theory is a complete explanation of why errors are systematic in the process of language learning.

Dulay et al. (1982) extend the field by developing the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. This taxonomy categorizes errors made by learners into four types of errors: omission, addition, misinformation and misordering. Errors of omission are when the sentence lacks essential linguistic components. The addition errors are the insertion of additional language elements. Misinformation errors have to do with the use of inappropriate forms or structures, and misordering errors have to do with the ordering of parts of the sentence. The Surface Strategy Taxonomy offers a clear and systematic analysis of learner errors, and continues to be a prominent taxonomy used in research on ESL writing. Grammatical errors are found to be one of the recurring problems of ESL learners as evidenced by the consistency of the findings in the studies. Common difficulties in learner writing that have been pointed out by Ahmed (2021) are tense usage, subject–verb agreement, article usage, and selection of prepositions. The study shows that the problems are frequently due to both poor grammatical knowledge and the interference of the learners' L1. A similar pattern can be found in other L2 settings, following the same observations of the grammatical accuracy difficulty. Amin, Arshad and Mustafa (2025), on the other hand, argue that Pakistani learners find prepositions hard to learn and use in their English presentations. Similarly, Kousar, Mustafa and Fatima (2025) also consider English prepositions a challenge for Pakistani ESL learners.

Nassaji (2020) study on the grammar teaching , writing achievement relationship of ESL learners. The results of their studies show that students often have difficulties in the structure of sentences, using the word articles, and grammatical errors when writing in order to express complex ideas. The researchers believe that students' motivation tends to be to produce content rather than correct language, leading to more errors. They suggest that in order to improve the students' overall writing proficiency, grammar should be taught with a communicative approach to writing. Much of the research on ESL focuses on mechanical aspects of writing also. Fareed et al. (2016) find that the students of universities in Pakistan often face problems in punctuation, spelling and capitalization. The researchers believe that these issues are due to the lack of writing practice, the lack of exposure to authentic English and the traditional teaching approach which focuses on memorization instead of developing writing. Their results



demonstrate that greater attention should be paid in ESL writing teaching to mechanical accuracy. Inter-lingual influence is still considered to be an important factor in L2 acquisition. Studies in multilingual contexts have shown that L2 learners frequently transfer grammatical, lexical and syntactic structures from their L1 to the L2. Mahmood (2022) examine the impact of Urdu on English writing among Pakistani ESL learners and conclude that there is a tendency among them to not use articles in English, use strange word order, and use incorrect words. These findings reveal that the argument for language transfer is supported as it is a major factor in learner errors in writing.

Inner-lingual factors are also very significant in language learning besides interlingual influence. Richards (1971) points out that there are a number of sources of intra-lingual errors: overgeneralization, lack of awareness of the limitations of the rules, incomplete application of the rules and false hypotheses about the structures of the language. Overgeneralization refers to learners using rules too generally, e.g., to form many forms such as “goed” for “went”. These errors reflect developmental processes and not interference from the learner's L1 and show the learner's efforts to build their understanding of the L2. Corrective feedback has also been the subject of much research with regard to its role in minimizing learner errors. Khalid, Mustafa and Anwar (2023) argue that while considerable attention is given to grammatical errors, pronunciation errors receive little scholarly attention. Ellis (2009) states that systematic corrective feedback is beneficial to learners as it enables them to identify any errors they made repeatedly and improve their language skills. With effective feedback, students are able to see the difference between what they say in their L1 and the norms of their target L2. The researchers warn, however, that overcorrection can have a negative impact on student motivation. In these days, it is recommended to consider feedback practices as constructive, contextualized, and learner-centered.

The recent advancement of technology in the field of education also has an impact on ESL writing instruction. When integrated into the classroom effectively, technology can help to improve learner autonomy and writing development, as Hyland (2019) argues. However, teachers remain essential in assisting students to the understanding of the reasons for their errors and certainty in writing in the long term. While there are many studies that have looked at learners' errors in ESL writing, there is a need for classroom-based research in the Pakistani HEIs. Previous research tends to examine either the learner at the school level or general language problems and fails to provide a specific classification of errors. To fill this void, the present study explores authentic writing by BS-level ESL students. The investigation employs the principles of Error Analysis and Surface Strategy Taxonomy, giving a balanced view of the problems of learner language and their pedagogical implications in terms of quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The Corder's (1967) Error Analysis theory and Dulay et al. (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy are used as the theory for the present study. These frameworks have been developed in early stages of Second Language Acquisition research but in the modern empirical Second Language research they are still very useful and applicable in the process of the identification, classification and interpretation of learner errors in systematic way. Research in recent years has relied on these frameworks because they are useful in terms of their applicability for analyzing learner writing as well as designing pedagogical interventions that are based on the observed errors. Error Analysis is a solution in response to the shortcomings of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. Contrastive Analysis was based on the assumption that the majority of



learner errors are a result of L1 interference, whereas Error Analysis acknowledges that many errors may have been made during the developmental learning processes. Corder (1967) claims that learner errors are systematic and meaningful, as they represent the learners' efforts to build up knowledge of the target language. Errors are not failures but proof of language development and indications of the processes involved in the L2 acquisition process.

Corder (1967) suggests that learner errors serve some important functions. First, they give the teacher feedback on the learners' current level of language competency. Secondly, they provide researchers with useful information about learning language processes. Third, they assist pupils to identify areas for development. Errors therefore start to become an important indicator of learning progress, not just a marker of deviation from the language norms.

The second part of the framework is the Dulay et al. (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy. This taxonomy is based on the changes made to the linguistic structures. There are four categories in the taxonomy:

1. Omission Errors – missing of language elements that are required.
2. Addition Errors – unessential language is added.
3. Misinformation Errors – wrong grammatical structure.
4. Misordering Errors – parts of a sentence are out of sequence.

The Surface Strategy Taxonomy offers a comprehensive tool for analysing the structural aspect of the learner errors. The linguist can pinpoint the type of error and therefore get to know the pattern of the errors and thus better understand the language difficulties of students. The concepts of inter-lingual and intra-lingual influence are also integrated in the theoretical framework. Linguistic characteristics that are transferred from the learner's L1 to L2 are called inter-lingual influence. Urdu-speaking learners often adopt Urdu grammatical structures, word-order patterns and expressions into English texts in the Pakistani context. This transfer usually leads to an omission of an article, incorrect sentence structure, and literal errors. Compared to this, the sources of intra-lingual influence lie in incomplete understanding of the rules of the target language by the learners. Learner errors often occur due to overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules and incorrect inferences of grammatical structures. A learner can, for instance, form the past tense of an irregular verb by regularizing it, e.g. by saying “goed.” These would reflect developmental learning processes and not first-language interference. The present study, based on the Error Analysis, Surface Strategy Taxonomy and the concepts of inter-lingual influence and intra-lingual influence, provides a comprehensive framework for the analysis of learner language. This framework allows for the systematic identification of learner errors, classification of error types, analysis of error frequencies and analysis of the underlying causes of errors. Finally, the framework can be used to guide the study's goal of enhancing ESL instruction by deepening the understanding of the language difficulties of L2 learners.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study is a mixed-method approach of classroom-based research aiming to explore the problems of the learners' language in ESL writing. The study adopts the mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a holistic view of the learners' errors. The quantitative part is devoted to determining the prevalence and distribution of different types of errors; the qualitative part is devoted to analysing representative errors and trying to explain their causes. Descriptive research design is used as the main aim of the study is to identify, classify and analyze the linguistic errors that arise in authentic learner writing. The study is



situated in the classroom and the researcher can analyze naturally occurring language from the learners' perspective in an educational context.

Research Setting

The study is carried out in a university English as foreign language (ESL) classroom where English is a required academic subject. The classroom environment allows students to demonstrate their writing skills in a natural setting, and without manipulation of language use. Thus, the data obtained represents the actual performance of the learners in academic writing tasks.

Participants

The participants are around 25 BS students from various disciplines of a university. Everyone is an English language learner, and they have been formally taught English for several years. They have had prior experience of English, but still struggle with written communication. The subjects of the study are selected using a convenience sampling technique as they are easily accessible to the researcher. Information on the purpose of the study and informed consent to participate in the study is given to the participants prior to the start of the data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity is preserved during the research process.

Data Collection Instrument

Data collection is carried out using the main tool that is the classroom-based essay writing task. Students are asked to write an essay on a familiar topic within a given time frame. The selection of the topic is well considered to stimulate natural language and to reduce content-related problems. The essay-writing activity is a good means of eliciting authentic learner language, as it provides students with opportunities to use their knowledge of grammar, syntax, lexicon and mechanics independently. Thus, the essays offer good data to identify common learner errors.

Data Collection Procedure

There are multiple stages of data collection. Prior permission is secured from the appropriate academic officials and classroom teachers. Secondly, participants are provided with information about the study purpose and procedures. Third, the essay-writing task is set while the students are at regular classes to provide them with a normal learning atmosphere. The researcher gathers the essays and scrutinizes each and every script carefully and identifies the errors and mistakes in the language. Errors identified are then classified using the Error Analysis and the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. These errors are analyzed one by one, the linguistic category of each error is determined and the source of each error is examined.

Error Classification Framework

The errors found are categorized as belonging to four broad linguistic types:

Grammatical Errors

Grammatical error refers to issues in:

- Verb tense
- Subject–verb agreement
- Article usage
- Preposition usage

Syntactic Errors

Syntactic errors include problems related to:

- Sentence structure
- Word order
- Run-on sentences



Lexical Errors

Lexical errors include:

- Incorrect word choice
- Literal translation

Mechanical Errors

Mechanical errors include:

- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Capitalization

Data Analysis Procedure

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis are employed in the analysis of the collected data. The quantitative analysis consists of counting the number of errors in each error category and computing the errors distribution between grammatical, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical category. The frequency analysis helps the researcher to discover the most frequently occurring learner difficulties. Qualitative analysis deals with representative examples of learner errors. The following examples are analysed to see why they are errors and whether they are inter-lingual or intra-lingual errors.

Special attention is paid to:

- Urdu-to-English language transfer
- Overgeneralization of grammatical rules:
- Incomplete rule application
- Incorrect lexical selection
- Word choice or structure issues in sentences

The quantitative and the qualitative analysis can be helpful in gaining insight into the learner's language and the factors that lead to errors in language.

The present study has certain limitations. First, the investigation only examines written learner language and does not consider the production of spoken language. Second, the study does not take into consideration the findings from a large number of educational institutions, so the results are not generalizable. Third, the study is based on the language of the learners in a particular classroom setting and thus may not be reflective of the language of all ESL learners in Pakistan. In spite of these constraints, the study offers useful insights on some of the more frequent language problems faced by learners and has implications for the enhancement of ESL teaching in post-secondary institutio

Discussion and Findings

To identify and interpret the major learner language problems that occurred in the classroom-based writing tasks of about 25 ESL learners at the BS-level, the written productions of these learners are examined. The essays are analysed on the basis of the Error Analysis theory of Corder (1967) and the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay et al. (1982). Errors are examined under four headings; grammatical errors, syntactic errors, lexical errors and mechanical errors. Each error illustration below is labeled, explained, and identified as such, to show why it is an error from the norms of standard written English. The results demonstrate that errors are not random but systematic, and provide insights into L2 learning processes.



Overview of Findings

The total number of errors found out of the written responses collected was 1,120 errors. Errors are spread over four linguistic types, with the most frequent errors being grammatical errors, then syntactic errors, mechanical errors and lexical errors. Table 1 gives the number of times each type of error occurred, and the percentage of the total errors that they contributed. The findings of this study confirm the result of Ahmed (2021). According to him, the most common problems for ESL academic writing are grammatical issues such as tense usage, article usage and subject-verb agreement. The data also reveal that writing problems are complex, both grammatical and mechanical, as well as in terms of vocabulary and sentence construction as Hyland (2019) pointed out, the writing problems involve multiple demands.

Error Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grammatical Errors	420	37.5%
Syntactic Errors	310	27.7%
Mechanical Errors	240	21.4%
Lexical Errors	150	13.4%
Total	1,120	100%

Table 1. Distribution of Error Types in ESL Learners' Written Production

Grammatical Errors

The most common error category are grammatical errors which made up about 37.5% of all the errors found in the learners' written production. Article errors, preposition errors, incorrect verb forms, tense errors and subject-verb agreement errors are the most common sub-types. All the sub-types are discussed below and illustrated with examples.

Tense Errors

Learners has great difficulties with verb tenses, especially with keeping tenses consistent and using tenses that were appropriate for the situation. Examples of such errors are:

Example: Last night, he finish his work. The error in this sentence is an incorrect verb tense since simple past is omitted.

The verb 'finish' should be 'finished' because the sentence is about a past event that has been completed, which is clearly indicated by the time adverbial 'last night'. The learner has produced an intra-lingual error because he/she has over-generalized the base form of the verb, a stage of L2 acquisition that has been predicted by Richards (1971).

Example: Every day he goes to college. Misordering: Incorrect word order.

The verb 'go' should be in the third person singular present simple form, 'goes'. The learner has left out the required third person singular -s of the subject. An incomplete application of the rules this represents a "rule error" where the learner knows the present simple tense, but has not learnt the inflectional rule for the third person singular subject.

Example: They used to played cricket. The past tense form of the verb is used incorrectly after semi-modal 'used to'. Correct the incorrect past tense form of the verb after 'used to' (a semi-modal).



The base form of the verb is used, not the past form of the verb. The right sentence is 'In the past they played cricket. The learner has used the past tense inflection '-ed' with the main verb somewhat unnecessarily, and has overgeneralized the rule of the past tense to a context in which it is not required.

The errors tell us that learners have problems in choosing and misusing the right tense in the right context. The tense confusion is also compounded in the Pakistani ESL setting due to the difference between the tense system of Urdu and English. The use of tense in Urdu is very context-dependent and differs from English tense in many respects that may cause difficulties for learners to convert suitable tenses in Urdu into English writing (Mahmood & Murad, 2022).

Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

The most frequent and pervasive error in the essays was errors of subject-verb agreement:

Exemplification : People is learning. A mistake that involves giving the wrong information, in particular a false statement delivered to someone in order to deceive them; false information.

In English the subject 'people' is plural and the verb 'are' is plural, not singular. The proper sentence would be: "People are becoming educated. This type of error is a result of either incomplete knowledge of rules of subject-verb agreement or inconsistent application of these rules while writing; this is what Corder (1967) termed as the transitional stage of L2 competence.

Example : The students was present in class. The number of people online who are misinformed is growing. There are more misinformed people online.

The plural subject 'students' should be followed by the plural past tense verb 'were,' not 'was. Use 'The students were in the class. This error is indicative of problems in number agreement in the past tense, which might be related to Urdu since the equivalent copula does not always agree with number in the L2.

Article Errors

The most common grammatical error committed by learners was the use of articles (a or the), either its omission or misuse:

Example : Sun rises in East.

Because the actual sentence is 'The sun rises in the East. The definite article 'the' is used before the directional noun 'East' and the unique, identifiable noun 'sun'. The absence of both articles is an evident inter-lingual error as, in Urdu, there is no article system like that of English and Urdu learners are used to omitting articles in written English (Lado, 1957; Karim & Nassaji, 2020).

Example : He is intelligent student.

The sentence is supposed to be 'He is an intelligent student. It is an error because 'an' is used with singular countable nouns to refer to a non-specific member of a category. The learner has completely neglected the article, thus showing a direct transfer of the definite/indinite distinction from Urdu where such grammaticalization is not found.

Example : Honesty is a most important virtue.

With a superlative adjective 'most important', the definite article 'the' must be used, not the indefinite article 'a. The correct form should be 'Honesty is the most important virtue'. This is an error that is intra-lingual, meaning that the misconception is likely due to lack of understanding of the definite article rule of the English superlatives.

Preposition Errors

There were many preposition mistakes found in the essays, such as:

Example : 'She is married with a doctor'.



A common error is the use of an incorrect preposition. The correct English word combination is 'married to', not 'married with'. Hence the right sentence should be 'She is married to a doctor'. This is an inter-lingual error: The Urdu version of this expression employs a preposition, which appears to mean 'with' and the learner has transferred this preposition into English.

Example : I am good in English.

The standard English use of the word is to use 'good at' after a skill or a subject area. The correct form is 'I am good at English'. This error occurs when the Urdu prepositional phrase is directly translated into English, giving the sentence the parallel structure but the wrong meaning. James (2013) points out that prepositions are one of the most challenging areas in L2 acquisition because their usage is often in an idiomatic manner and is not consistent across languages.

Example : He talked for the problem.

In English, the word 'talk' requires the preposition 'about' here. The correct form should be 'He talked about the problem'.

Syntactic Errors

The total number of errors in the corpus amounted to about 27.7% syntactic errors. Errors in sentence structure, word order, run-on sentences, and sentence fragments were among the errors.

Sentence Structure Errors

Some students have not produced grammatically correct and complete sentences, suggesting problems with the ability to produce well formed English sentence structure.

Example: I missed the quiz since was absent.

The error is a sentence fragment since subject is missing here.

Correct Form: I missed the quiz since I was absent.

Example: The students in the class noisy.

The copular verb is omitted.

Correct Form: The students in the class were noisy.

This is because the sentence is missing the linking verb "were." In English, a copular verb must be used to link the subject to its complement. The omission is associated with the difficulty of applying syntactic rules of the English language.

Word Order Errors

There is a high frequency of word order errors which are heavily influenced by the L1 structure of the learners' native language.

Example: She every day studies English.

Correct Form: She studies English every day.

Example: She beautifully sings songs.

Proper Form: She sings songs beautifully.

Example: I yesterday went to see my friend.

Correct: I went to see my friend yesterday.

Run-on Sentences

Run-on sentence errors occur when learners do not use the correct punctuation or conjunctions between independent clauses.

Example: I went to the market I bought some vegetables.

The sentence has a run-on structure.

Correct Form: I went to the market and I bought some vegetables.



Explanation: Two clauses that are not connected to each other properly by a coordinating conjunction or a period.

Lexical Errors

Lexical errors constituted about 13.4% of total errors and these errors involved in wrong selection of words, collocation errors and literal translation from Urdu to English.

Incorrect Vocabulary Choice

The learners have chosen the wrong words for the word that they look for.

Example: He did a big mistake.

The following error type is called a 'collocation error'.

Correct Form: He made a big mistake.

Example: She gave me strong advice.

Collocation Error: The error falls under a collocation error.

Correct Form: She gave me good advice.

The word strong is an adjective that doesn't generally co-occur with advice in standard English.

Literal Translation Errors

There have also been literal translation errors committed by the learners, influenced and caused by their first language.

Example sentence: He ate my brain!

Correct Form: He caused a lot of trouble for me.

Explanation: It's a literal translation of an Urdu expression "Usne mera dimagh khaya" that means annoyance.

Mechanical Errors

The mechanical errors comprise about 21.4% of the total errors, and consist of errors with spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

Spelling Errors

It is common to see that learners have made spelling mistakes in their writing.

Example: The enviroment is clean.

Here, the letter 'n' is missing in the word 'environment'.

Example: The air is poluted and causing diseases.

Here, again there is a spell omission mistake as the letter 'l' is missing in the word 'polluted'.

The errors are related to the spelling omission.

The correct form of the word would be "environment" and 'polluted'

Punctuation Errors

The limited awareness of sentence boundary conventions has also been observed in the assignment causing punctuation errors.

Example: When I arrived home my mother was cooking.

Correct Form: Whwn I arrived home, my mother was cooking.

Explanation: After an introductory subordinate clause, use a comma.

Example: Since he was under the weather he could not attend the ceremony.

Correct Form: Since he was under the weather, he could not attend the ceremony.

Capitalization Errors

There have also capitalization issues observed in the student papers. This is due to the first language influence because there is no concept of capitalization in the Urdu language.

Example: The delegations have recently arrived pakistan.

This is an error that indicates that a proper noun is not written with a first capital letter.



Right Form: The delegations have recently arrived Pakistan.

In English writing, countries names are to be written with capital letters.

Example: He has learned English language.

Correct Form: He has learned English language.

Explanation: The names of languages are proper nouns, which must be capitalized.

Inter-lingual Influence

The most important finding of the study is that the first language of the learners has significant and systematic effects on L2 written production. The inter-lingual influence is very much visible in the case of omission of articles, word order mistakes, errors in the selection of prepositions and literal translation of Urdu idiomatic expressions into English. Learners often literally translated Urdu sentence patterns into English literally, resulting in sentences that were syntactically incorrect in English with articles missing and Urdu prepositions no longer idiomatic in English. One of the patterns confirms Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis which states that the differences between L1 and L2 in structures will cause the learning difficulty. They also lend support to Selinker's (1972) interlanguage theory that posited learner language is a transitional, dynamic system influenced by L1 transfer and the learner's developing competence in L2.

In the Pakistani ESL context, however, the structural differences of article use, word order and the use of idioms present some clear patterns that are especially persistent. This finding is also supported by Mahmood and Murad (2022), who conclude that in most cases, Urdu-speaking learners tend to produce NTS English sentences by direct transfer of L1 syntactic and lexical patterns in English.

Intra-lingual Influence

Pertinent to the findings is the function of intra-lingual influence, which is the errors that are produced due to the learner's developing, incomplete knowledge of the target language even without L1 interference. One of the most common sources of intra-lingual error that occurred throughout the essays was overgeneralization. Learners regularly used regular grammatical rules with irregular forms, and made errors like 'goed', 'did not went', 'used to played'. They also did not use the -s inflection regularly for the third person singular subject in positive and negative sentences. Such mistakes are the result of the learners' efforts to form and to test their hypotheses relating to L2 rules, and they are a stage which Richards (1971) described as a predictable and common L2 development stage.

There was also some confusion about the application of rules, especially in relation to embedded question syntax, articles with superlatives, and compound sentence punctuation. The learners frequently showed that they knew something about a grammatical construction, but they could not use it in all sentences. This pattern is similar in nature to that of Corder (1967), who believed that the systematic errors are representative of the L2 learner's current interlanguage system, and that they represent identifiable phases of L2 development. The analysis shows that the highest frequency of errors is grammatical errors (37.5%), and then syntactic errors (27.7%), mechanical errors (21.4%) and lexical errors (13.4%). The tense usage, co-ordination of subject and verb, use of articles and choice of prepositions are the major trouble spots within the grammatical category. The results are similar to those of Ahmed (2021) and Karim and Nassaji (2020) who found that grammatical accuracy is the most common problem in the context of ESL writing. As for the learner errors, this study finds that the errors are formed as a mixture of inter-lingual and intra-lingual factors. The most prominent way in which the inter-lingual influence becomes apparent is: article omission, violations of word



order, wrong use of prepositions, and literal translation of Urdu idiomatic expressions. Intra-lingual influences are seen in overgeneralization of regular grammatical rules to irregular forms, and incomplete or inconsistent application of the regular rules. The results of this study corroborate the findings of previous research that L1 interference is not the only source of learner errors, but the interaction of L1 transfer and developmental L2 processes. The results of analysis show that the grammatical category and syntactic category give the greatest difficulty to the learner. The most frequent problem areas are tense consistency, subject-verb agreement, article usage and sentence boundary recognition. These results indicate that students need significantly greater explicit assistance in building grammatical correctness and sentence organizational skills in writing, which is not always adequately supported in the current writing instruction in ESL environment of Pakistan.

Conclusion

The present study examines the learner language problems in ESL writing in terms of Error Analysis and Surface Strategy Taxonomy. The results indicate that grammatical errors and syntactic errors are predominant in learner writing and lexical errors, mechanical errors are also affecting the difficulty of the learner's writing. The study again shows that learner errors do not reflect the failure of a learner, they rather signify his/her language development. The ongoing application of classical theories like Corder's Error Analysis and Dulay et al.'s Error Taxonomy underscores the timeless significance of these theories in contemporary ESL teaching. In the pedagogical part, the study highlights the use of the grammar approach in context, process approach to writing and constructive corrective feedback. It also shows that there is a need to be aware of L1 influence and to provide programmed practice to prevent frequent errors. The study, although conducted with a small sample of respondents and with written data, is nonetheless of value in understanding some of the ESL learner's problems in an academic setting in Pakistan. Expansion of scope to include spoken data, larger numbers, and cross-institutional comparisons is suggested for future research. The overall findings of the study are that systematic error analysis is very important in the improvement of ESL teaching and in the improvement of the learner's writing proficiency.

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