

Investigating Errors in the Written Composition of Undergraduate ESL Learners at Aligarh Muslim University

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated common English writing errors made by undergraduate ESL learners at Aligarh Muslim University whose first language is Urdu-Hindi. The study is carried out with the help of written compositions from 20 participants. The data were analyzed within a broader framework propounded by S. Pit Corder. The researcher concluded that the study's errors were in the form of spelling, copula, word choice, prepositions, verb tenses, plural formation, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and articles. The reasons behind these errors were identified as interlingual and intralingual causes, whereas intralingual was the most significant factor, which indicates their inadequate knowledge about grammar. The findings of the study were spelling (19.35%), copula (14.51%), word choice (12.90%), prepositions (11.29%), verb tenses (9.67%), plural formation (19.13%), punctuations (8.60%), subject-verb agreement (8.06%) and articles (6.45%). So, based on above data analysis the most common type of errors was spelling that is 19.35% and the least common one was article that is 6.45%.. The findings of the study have implications for the researchers of scientific papers, especially in the realm of English as a Second Language learning.

Keywords: *Error Analysis; Interlingual Error; Intralingual Errors; Transfer.*

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a lifelong process and it is often a challenging experience for learners. English is a second language in the education system for Indian people. However, learning English as a foreign language is a challenging task. Acquiring English is difficult among second or foreign language learners ESL, especially Indian learners. According to Brown (Brown, 2000), in order to master English language, learners have to be adequately exposed to all four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. English Language teaching is currently focusing on the teaching and learning of the four language skills. Research shows that learners' writing performance poses specific challenges for English second language teaching and learning contexts across the globe, particularly in higher education institutions (Munro, 2003).

Writing is a crucial act in the process of learning any foreign language, but more so in English since it has become the language of global communication. According to Tribble (Tribble, 1997) writing skill is more and more important nowadays. Becoming

a proficient writer is one of the major objectives of many students, especially for those who want to become members of international business, administrative or academic communities.

Writing skill, one of the productive skills of human language, plays a significant role in second language learning (Zuraidah & Purba, 2019). Good English writing competence is widely recognized as an efficient skill for education, business, and personal purposes. Writing is a difficult process that demands cognitive analysis and linguistic integrity. Writing in a foreign language is twice harder, and becoming skilled in writing takes time and effort.

Tangpermpoon in Rahman, (Rahman, 2018), defined that writing was known as the most complicated skill to master for language learners because they need to have several background knowledge of L2 about the rhetorical organizations, proper language use or specific lexicon with which they want to deliver to their readers.

The present study is carried out to examine the writing composition of undergraduate students as ESL learners; it is supposed that they also came across the hindrances posed by writing skills. This study will be examined with the undergraduate students, whose mother tongue is Urdu-Hindi. These students have been studying English for a long time, and still, they are continuing to commit multiple errors. Hence, we have decided to conduct a study on Error Analysis to locate the sources of their errors and the various reasons behind them. Having reviewed the literature, we noticed that only a few such studies have been done in terms of error analysis for undergraduate students studying B.A. honors English at Aligarh Muslim University. Hence, it is a first-of-its-kind attempt. The present study seeks to explore ESL learners writing difficulties by analyzing the nature and types of their writing errors. Instructional strategies then suggest that teachers can adopt a much more effective approach to enhance students' writing proficiency, and they also act as an emancipator of errors for students since they can introspect themselves by using blueprint remedies. This study explores and analyzes all-embracing errors committed by Undergraduate ESL learners in their writing composition and helps them overcome their mistakes. The following research questions were addressed in the present study: a) What types of errors are committed by Undergraduate ESL learners in their writing compositions? ,b) what are the most and least common types of error in their writing compositions?, and c) what are the causes (*interlingual or intralingual*) of these errors?

METHOD

As the descriptive qualitative research, the following section considers the various methodological issues:

Participants

The participants of the study were 20 Undergraduate ESL learners, who are Pursuing B.A. (honors) English in 3rd semester at Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh. The average age group of the participants was 23 years with Urdu-Hindi as their mother tongue.

Instrument and Procedure

Questionnaires were used as a tool for collecting the data, all the 20 participants, who were chosen randomly, were asked to write an essay of around 150-200 words followed by various steps of error analyses specified by Corder (Corder, 1974). These steps are the collection of errors, identification of errors, and description of errors.

Data analysis

The following is an account of various steps followed in data analysis. Firstly, all essays were examined linguistically word by word and sentence by sentence, after that the researcher has categorized the error types, extracted from the samples. The study then counted the numbers of errors and converted them into a percentage in order to approach the findings statistically. It has helped the researcher to display the error's pattern frequencies and percentages in table, figure, and graphs meticulously.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the discussions and the findings of the study, reflecting on its objectives spelt out at the beginning. The following is an account of the discussion and findings.

Types of error

Moving on to the very first question that is *what types of error are committed by Undergraduate ESL learners in their writing compositions?*

The following types of errors and percentages have been categorized from the data. These range from spelling, copula deletion, word choice, prepositions, verb tenses, plural formation, punctuations, subject-verb agreement, and articles. The aforementioned errors are presented below in table1.

Table 1. Types of errors committed by Undergraduate ESL learners

Items	Types of error	No. of errors	Percentage
1	Spelling	36	19.35%
2	Copula	27	14.51%
3	Word Choice	24	12.90%
4	Prepositions	21	11.29%
5	Verb tenses	18	9.67%
6	Plural formation	17	9.13%
7	Punctuations	16	8.60%
8	Subject-verb agreement	15	8.06%
9	Articles	12	6.45%
Total		186	100%

Frequency of errors

The following graph 1 was drawn based on table 1 which was pointed out above. The graph represents the error in a top to bottom manner whereby the spellings are seen more liable to mistake and the article was found as less frequent one.

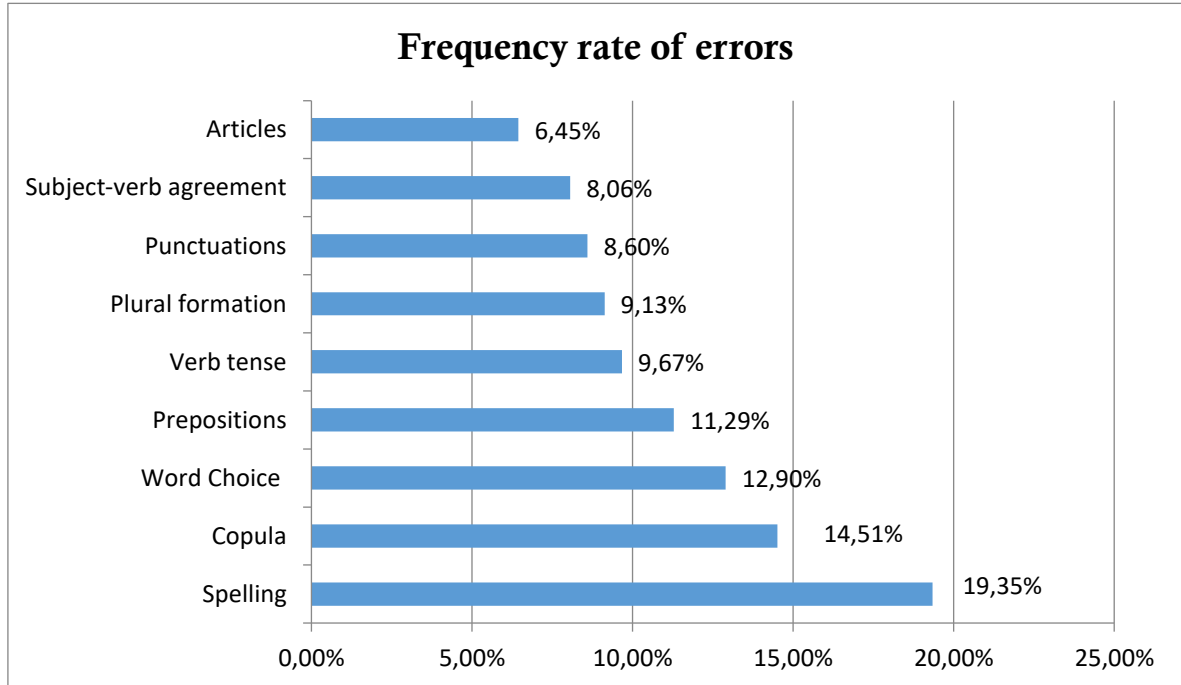


Chart 1. Frequency of errors

Taking the second question into account, what *do Undergraduate ESL learners commit the most and least common types of error in their writing compositions?*

The researcher came across 186 as total number of errors that were considered as (100%) errors, extracted from the data. Graph 1 illustrate nine types of common errors have been identified which subsumes the highest to lowest number of frequencies. To exemplify, there were: spelling (19.35%), copula (14.51%), word choice (12.90%), prepositions (11.29%), verb tenses (9.67%), plural formation (9.13%), punctuations (8.60%), subject-verb agreement (8.06%) and articles (6.45%). So, based on the above data analysis the most common type of errors was spelling that is 19.35% and the least common one was article that is 6.45%.

Causes of errors

The following table (no. 2) shows the examples of errors which account for various possible sources and causes of errors.

Table 2. Causes of errors

No.	Examples	Correct (expected) forms	Causes	
			Intralingual errors	Interlingual errors
1	Spelling Error That day I was geting* late for my exam.	Getting	Intralingual	
	I was shure* about him.	Sure		
	My country giving me free electriscity* and gas	electricity		
2	Copula omission Error I __ very happy for it.	Am	Intralingual	
	He __ trying a lot for getting job from last one year.	Was		
	One of my brother __ yonger then me.	Is		
3	Word Choice Error My little* sister is very intelligent.	Younger		Interlingual
	My big* brother gives financial support to us.	Elder		
	I also have so much* hobbies for my free time.	Many		
4	Preposition Omission Error Hobbies are very important _ everyone.	For	Intralingual	
	Sports is important __ our fitness.	For		
	I live __ my family	With		
5	Verb tense Error He marry* when I was child.	Married	Intralingual	
	I eat chicken an drank coke in the party.	Ate		
	she come* to me when I was crying alone.	Came		
6	Plural formation Error He has two child* in his house.	Children	Intralingual	
	We have oils and natural gase* resources	Gases		
	There were many peoples* around us.	People		
7	Punctuation Error The country is rich in oil __ coal and natural gase resources and these are the major source of income.	(,) comma	Intralingual	
	My father is working as a manager .* in a company.	Ø no punctuation		
	He played game 6 to 8 hours during exam and it wasn't* good.	Wasn't(') apostrophe		

Subject-verb agreement		
8	I were playing football at that time.	was
	She are* my favourate teacher.	Is
	We was* duing hard work in those days.	Were
Article omission		
9	He is working in __ company.	A
	I wish to become __ teacher of English.	A
	My father is __ accountant.	An
Total : 9 = 8+1		8 1

Total cause of errors: 9 = 8+1 (intralingual + interlingual)

8 out of 9 intralingual in percentage = $8 \times 100 \div 9 = 88.88\%$

1 out of 9 interlingual in percentage = $1 \times 100 \div 9 = 11.11\%$

The above table (2) shows that the total number of errors are of 9 types, where 8 are intralingual these are spelling, copula deletion, prepositions, verb tenses, plural formation, punctuations, subject-verb agreement, and articles and there is only one type of error exhibits interlingual i.e. wrong word choice. Hence, quantitatively we can say that 88.88% are intralingual and 11.11% are interlingual error, shown below in pie chat 1 to make a clear distinction between interlingual and intralingual error, which are the main causes of errors.

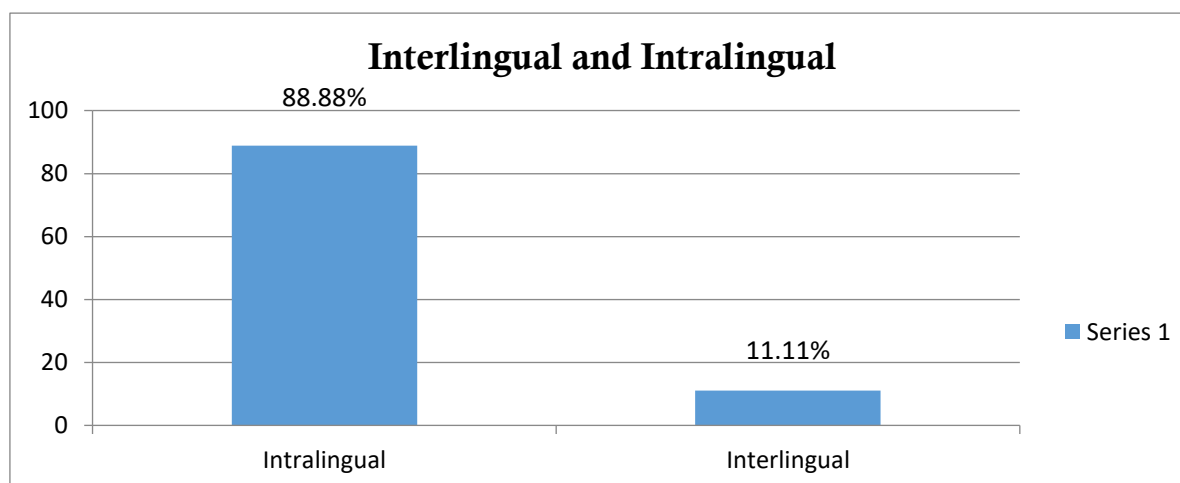


Chart 2. Interlingual and Intralingual

Dealing with the last question is *what are the causes of these errors (interlingual or intralingual)?*

The types of error committed by Undergraduate ESL learners in their writing compositions shown in chart (1) that many errors are due to interlingual and intralingual errors. Most of the errors that occurred are of intralingual error that is

(88.88%) because of lack of language rules and the interlingual (11.11%) are very less in number of errors due to the error that is wrong word choice. We can conclude by saying that the learners need competence in English grammar to turn themselves into proficient writers.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore and analyze all-embracing errors committed by undergraduate ESL learners at Aligarh Muslim University. The error type categories discussed in this study were limited to nine error types: spelling, copula, word choice, preposition, verb tenses, plural formation, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and articles. Interlingual and intralingual factors were the main causes of these errors, especially intralingual factors, which delineate incomplete application rules of the target language.

The researcher also found that undergraduate ESL learners need help with their writing due to incorrect use of grammar. Thus they should be assisted and helped to write coherently and accurately by comprehending the grammar of English. Thus, it is the key responsibility of teachers and syllabus designers to utilize the best procedures and techniques to address learners' needs and problems. The study supports the assumption that error analysis indicates a learner's language development. Therefore, error analysis is essentially vital for language teachers, as they can build up their teaching techniques and methods in light of the errors committed by the learners.

Finally, as long as students continue to commit errors, the research on error analysis is ongoing. So, this study is only one chain of this continuous quest. This study is hoped to have provided insights into the type and frequency of errors committed by undergraduate ESL learners. Although much work and research are still needed in this area, especially with undergraduate ESL learners, the researcher hopes that this study will greatly benefit language teachers, students, and syllabus designers.

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