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Error Analysis on the Written English of Students in Grade 8 at Orr's Hill Vivekananda College, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study attempts to identify and analyze “The errors in the written sentences produced by the students in grade 8 of Orr’s Hill Vivekananda School, Trincomalee”. The study begins with a systematic review of the concepts and theories concerning Error Analysis, which sets the platform for the theoretical base. Subsequently, the Error Analysis focuses on finding the syntactical errors under the selected grammatical categories while searching for the possible reasons causing errors. Eventually, the researcher suggests some of the complications involved in language learning and language teaching process. Understanding grammatical rules and applying them in sentences without making mistakes is what the teachers expect from the students in the school. However, it does not happen in the way it is expected. In other words, making grammatical errors can be

assumed to be part and parcel of the language learning process. There are many linguistic aspects governing this learning process. Therefore, this research examines the type of errors the students make and why they make such errors in their writing. This dissertation is an eye-opener for teachers, with as they should understand the root causes of errors while attempting to find treatment for them. It is paramount that with teachers approach error corrections based on the student’s linguistic competence and their affective factors embedded with different socio-ethnic backgrounds. This error analysis has been undertaken with to with raise awareness among the teaching staff and help students produce better writing with fewer or no grammatical mistakes.

Keywords: Syntactical Errors, Error Analysis Language Learning, Inter and Intra-Language

1. Background of the study

Learning the English language becomes an obligatory matter since the English language is considered a universal language. English, the second language and the foreign language is learned by millions of people worldwide. It is natural to make syntactical and spelling errors in diverse language users, including native speakers and learners while attempting to create sentences under various contexts. Understanding the nature and prevalence of these errors is crucial for effective communication and language education. This research seeks to establish a comprehensive foundation by reviewing existing literature on syntactical errors in English, examining previous studies & identifying the grammatical error patterns encountered. Building upon the insights gained from past research, this study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to language educators, learners, and linguists, ultimately facilitating improved language instruction and enhanced language proficiency. In this study, Orr’s Hill Vivekananda College students were selected to analyze the patterns in their errors in written language. They learn English from grade 3 to 13. During my internship, when I taught grade 8 in this school, I traveled with them as they struggled to produce sentences incorporating grammar rules taught in the classroom. I found three major types of problems in studying English as a subject.

1. Understanding the content of the subject.
2. Understanding the English vocabulary and grammar rules.
3. Writing the answers to the questions in the production stage.

This research attempts to caution undergraduates to pay more attention to areas where they may be tempted to make mistakes in their English writing.

2. Introduction to error analysis

The students are expected to construct sentences in English without grammatical errors for the exams and assignments. However, the current situation is grave & critical at school regarding proficiency. Thus, this research aims to collect errors in students' written language and categorize them under various syntactical patterns, analyze the possible causes behind those errors, and suggest how they can be averted or minimized as they further progress in mastering the English language.

At the outset, I would like to mention the difference between mistakes and errors, which will be very important for this dissertation. What is an error? An error is an inaccurate form in learner language, which differs from the forms used by competent target language speakers. Error analysis is a method used to document the errors that appear in learner language, determine whether they are systematic, and explain what caused them. While native speakers occasionally make unsystematic 'performance' errors (like slips of the tongue), second language learners make more errors and often make errors that no native speaker ever makes. An error analysis should focus on errors that are systematic violations of patterns in the input to which the learners have been exposed. Such errors tell us something about the learner's interlanguage or underlying knowledge of the rules of the language being learned (Corder, 1981, p. 10).

Most language teaching lecturers/teachers think that they should not tolerate any errors and tend to correct them as soon as they find them in the class when the students deliver their presentations or write their assignments. As a result, although they think they have been working hard enough and spending much time and energy working on error correction, their effort is not effective, and the students do not believe that they have benefited a lot from it since the causes of errors are not exposed to them.

On the contrary, students often feel discouraged and lose confidence if their errors are openly corrected in front of other students. Therefore, it is important to rely on the theoretical foundation of error analysis before administering treatment or errors. If the mistake is unsystematic and not regular, it is called a mistake, not an error.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the most common syntactical errors made by students?
2. What are the causes of making errors?

4. Research hypothesis

1. Students frequently make syntactical errors in their writing, including sub-verb agreement, sentence structure, and punctuation issues.
2. Lack of knowledge/understanding of rule patterns of the target language.

5. Objectives

- To identify the errors in the written language on the syntactical categories.
- To categorize the errors under the linguistic category to which they belong to.
- To find out the causes of the problems.
- To suggest alternative means to minimize errors.
- To develop error correction strategies.

6. Theoretical framework

In the middle of the twentieth century, Contrastive Analysis (CA) became the first major theory for applied linguistics dealing with the relationship between two languages. Lado (in Saville-Troike, 2006) proposed a contrastive method to study the different languages. Lado (in Brown, 2007) suggested that if two languages have similar language components, it would be easier for learners to learn the target language from the native one. However, if the components were different, it would be difficult for the learners as their first language interferes with acquiring the foreign language.

Ciesielkiewicz and Marquez (2015) stated that contrastive analysis was like behaviorism, as behavioral linguists claim that habits acquired while learning native languages are transferred into the acquisition of a target language. Furthermore, Saville-Troike (2006) stated that contrasting the first and the target language results in positive and negative transfers. A positive transfer occurs when the native language rules can be used to acquire the target language.

On the other hand, a negative transfer or interference occurs when the native language rules cannot be used to acquire the target language. Errors can be caused not only by the influence of the first language (inter-language) but also by the target language itself (intra-lingual). Rustipa (2011) showed that sometimes, even a contrastive analysis done on the native and target languages cannot predict the cause of the errors.

This investigation primarily deals with detecting common errors among learners. Therefore, this research is relevant to grammatical error analysis, which comes under applied linguistics. Errors occur when learners cannot respond correctly to a particular stimulus in the second language. Error is defined as a clear deviation from the expected or targeted form of the target language. For example, an English learner may say, "He make a goal." This is an error. There are at least two possible ways to reconstruct this error: (1) He COOKS rice, and (2) He IS COOKING rice. In this first step of an error analysis, it is pertinent to note that there may be more than one possible way to reconstruct a learner error.

Types of errors:

Dulay *et al.* (1982) categorize language errors into four taxonomies. They are

- (1). The linguistics category,
- (2). The surface structure taxonomy,
- (3). The comparative taxonomy, and
- (4). The communicative effect taxonomy.

This research only uses the surface structure taxonomy to explain the error phenomenon. He wrote that learners might omit necessary items, add unnecessary items, misfire the items, or disorder the items. Ellis (year) also added that omission indicates the omission of a certain linguistic in the target language utterance, and disordering indicates the incorrect arrangement of a certain linguistic in the target language.

7. Methodology

7.1 Identification of errors:

The target was to identify the errors and not the mistakes, as there is a difference between errors and mistakes. Error is a

systematic deviation when the learner has not learned something and constantly gets it wrong. 'Mistake' is described as a deviation in the speakers' language, although they know the rules and fail to perform according to their competence. Therefore, the focus was to identify the systematic errors in the writings of the grade 08 students of Orr's Hill Vivekananda School. To find the errors, 4 assignments of each student were analyzed. The four assignments are the following.

Descriptive essay

Narrative essay

Formal letter writing

Informal letter writing

Since there were 30 students in the class ($30 \times 4 = 120$), a hundred and twenty assignments covering the entire class were analyzed.

7.2 Grouping the errors under the selected grammatical categories:

After identifying all the errors, the next step was to group the errors under the selected 10 grammatical categories.

7.3 Finding the percentage of errors in all 10 selected grammatical categories:

This is to find where the student makes the most errors and which grammatical category.

7.4 Analysis of errors for the entire class in each selected grammatical unit:

After analyzing the grammatical errors in all ten categories for each student, the next step was to find the percentage of the errors in each category for the entire class. This will clearly show the errors committed by the entire class in each selected grammatical category. So that remedial teaching can be initiated to rectify the errors committed.

7.5 Identification of causes for errors:

It is a process where scrutiny will be applied to all the identified errors to determine what could have pushed the undergraduates to deviate from the standard or proper English usage. It may be an overgeneralization, or an incomplete application of rules, or false concepts hypothesized while learning English, or even Ignorance of rule restriction, and there can be many more reasons behind the errors committed.

In summary, the steps of error analysis in this research were:

- Collecting samples
- Identifying the errors
- Classifying and describing the errors
- Explaining the causes of errors

- Evaluating and correcting the errors.

In this research, the researcher gave the students many activities for written assignments. These assignments and the exam answers are the data for error analysis. Nearly 120 assignments were selected to identify errors in the students' writing.

8. Results and Discussion

In the in-depth analysis of errors, it became obvious that the students struggled to produce grammatically correct sentences when they tried to coin two or three ideas into one long sentence. Further, they were not sure of applying the third form of verb –past participle in passive-voice application. It was further complicated when they were unsure of applying the singular or plural of auxiliary in making passive voice. The rules studied in previous occasions mingled with the rules studied later, thus, they breached the grammar rules. Furthermore, the carelessness on the part of students also contributed towards making errors. The following sentences can be shown as examples.

1. I doesn't care of you.
2. They are expect to welcome everyone.
3. I am going to say why I am suspected.
4. I have a dog his name is Max.
5. Because she was tired.
6. She found her lost dog in a colorful dress.
7. Your a great friend.
8. He enjoys teaching and to attend conferences.
9. Can you tell me please you agree 8% increase in the year-end bonus?
10. I didn't buy nothing at the store.

The findings indicated that the students made different types of errors due to four sources: Inter-lingual interference, intra-lingual inference, limited knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, and their carelessness despite knowing the correct rules. From these findings, limited understanding of the target language and carelessness in applying grammatical rules are the major factors that force them to commit errors. Further, the students' lack of clarity in thought patterns also led them to coin jumbled sentences, breaching the grammatical rules embedded in the English language. This lack of clarity in thought produced chaotic sentences, affecting the expected meaning. The students created sentences in English by translating them from their mother tongue. Finally, the researcher would like to emphasize that the errors found in the school students' writing are not mere errors but useful tools for the teachers to help the students reduce the errors and write better in English in the future.

Grammatical units	Number of errors	Example of errors identified in each category	Possible cause/s of error
Sub-verb agreements	381	1. I doesn't care of you. 2. They is going to the store. 3. The cat and the dog fights often. 4. The dog bark loudly. 5. She don't like curd.	Ignorance of rule restriction.
Verb tense errors	404	1. They are expect to welcome everyone. 2. The sun rise in the eastern. 3. I will goes to the store tomorrow. 4. She has already leave when I arrived. 5. They was playing in the ark yesterday.	Intra-lingual inference and carelessness.
Passive voice errors	346	1. I am going to say why I am suspected. 2. She is asking by me. 3. I waited by her.	Ignorance of the rule restriction.

		4. I have waited by you. 5. It has been waiting.	
Run-on sentences	341	1. I like pizza it's my favorite food 2. The sun was setting I had to hurry. 3. We went for a walk it was beautiful. 4. I have a dog his name is Max. 5. Sarah went to the store she bought it.	Ignorance of the rule restriction and carelessness.
Sentence fragments	287	1. After the rain stopped. 2. Because she was tired. 3. With a big smile. 4. Due to the heavy storm. 5. After the game ended.	
Misplaced modifiers errors	298	1. Running down the street, the car hit a tree. 2. Jumping in the middle, my shoes got well. 3. Waiting for the bus, the rain started to fall. 4. After eating the pizza, oven was turned off. 5. She found her lost dog in a colorful dress.	
Confusing Homophones	304	1. Their going to the park. 2. I'll meet you hear. 3. She wore a plain dress. 4. Your a great friend. 5. Its' a waste of time.	
Parallelism errors	224	1. I like to spend my winter holiday skiing, and skate. 2. I also enjoy snowboarding and to travel. 3. She likes hiking and to ride a bike. 4. He was willing to cooperate and helping each. 5. He enjoys teaching and to attend conferences.	
Jumbled sentences	321	Can you tell me please you agree 8% increase in the year-end bonus?	Intra-lingual inference and incomplete application of rules.
Double negative errors	279	1. I didn't buy nothing at the store. 2. I don't have no money. 3. She didn't say nothing. 4. They can't find no clues. 5. I don't need no additional help.	Ignorance of the rule restriction

9. Causes of errors

1. **Causes of errors:** Causes of errors entail linguistic backgrounds. The errors posed a question why and how the students fall into it. The potential reasons behind these syntactical errors are of multifaceted. Mother tongue influence, inter-language and intra-language influence, the ignorance of students to apply the correct rules in every occasion and etc. might have been the reasons causing errors. On top of it, the influence of the writer's background, education, or the specific context of their writing also would have contributed for making errors.
2. **Impact of errors:** The impact of these errors significantly influenced the clarity and comprehensibility of the text, thus marring the overall quality of communication.
3. **Teaching & learning:** The error analysis is made to take a closer look at the teaching and learning styles of the teacher and students. It further leads to consider the strategies that can be developed to help individuals recognize and correct these errors.
4. **Language variations:** The textbook uses various forms of English, from formal to informal. Dialogues, where the rules are relaxed, could have exposed the students to confusion in discerning the proper rules. Are some errors more acceptable in particular dialects or contexts?
5. **Comparative analysis:** The students are in the same class with the same teacher. However, the errors are

different from student to student. When some students follow the rules correctly, why are the rules broken in their writings?

6. **Limitation & future research:** This research is limited to finding errors in the ten selected grammatical units. Other rules are not applicable to it. Further, the researcher has not included spelling and pronunciation mistakes in the research.

10. Conclusion

Considering the overall analysis, the researcher could find out that most students do not have explicit knowledge to classify and use clear grammar. Given that this research delves deep into syntactical errors in the English language, the research findings indicate that the teaching methods and learning strategies must be improved to get the targeted results in mastering the English language, particularly grammar. I have explored various aspects of these errors, including their types, causes, and the impact they have in hampering effective communication. Through extensive analysis and examination of numerous examples of errors, it is evident that syntactical errors are prevalent and can significantly hinder and hamper the clarity and coherence of written English. On top of it, this research has highlighted the importance of addressing syntactical errors, particularly in educational settings and professional communication, to enhance language proficiency. It's imperative to recognize that such errors, if not corrected by the students, may end up in fossilization where future improvement is impossible.

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