

Error Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Essay Writing

Subtitle : Error Analysis

Ayesha Hafeez Butt

Lecturer

University of the Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

The present paper is an error analysis research of written errors committed by ESL learners at BS level who use Urdu as L1. The study aimed to explore the sources and frequency of errors of grammar of target language (TL) in a writing test. The categories of grammar were pre decided by the researcher. The sample of this research were BS level students in University of the Lahore, Pakistan. Brown's model of error analysis was applied on the errors in written tests. Identification of errors was made leading towards next steps of classification, analysis and explanation of those errors. This research presents a good example of theory and practice. Analytical approach is the need of the hour which will be helpful not only for the teachers to improve their teaching methodology but also for the students to know more analytically about their weak areas to improve target Language TL (English).

Key words:

Error: incorrect form of language, **Error analysis:** an analysis and study of errors, **TL:** target language, **Interference:** influence of one language on the use of another language, **L1:** mother language

Introduction

This paper deals with the analysis of the idea of error. Errors can be easily identified by language teachers, but those errors are not always deduced in the equivalent way. This paper attempts to illuminate phenomena that occur when confronted with what are called errors. Error analysis is a valuable foundation of information for teachers. It enables teachers to identify and correct students' errors it also becomes a source to improve the practicality of their teaching.

Literature Review

Error analysis (EA) is a form of linguistic analysis that pays attention on the errors learners create. It comprises of interference between the errors caused by L1 in the Target Language (TL). Pit Corder is the forerunner of Error Analysis. His article 'The significance of Learner Errors' gave a new turn to EA. It was a general conception that errors are "flaws" that must be exterminated. Corder offered a different idea that errors are important as errors can be considered a device to learn from them.

Models for Error Analysis

Corder identified a model for error analysis which included three stages:

1. Data collection
2. Description:
3. Explanation

Brown (207-211) elaborated steps for analyzing errors on this model:

Identification

The initial step requires the recognition of errors.

Classification

This step includes the classification of errors according to decided category.

Analysis

Grammatical analysis of each error is the next step at this stage.

Explanation

At this final stage explanation of different errors related to different processes is stated.

Purpose of Error analysis

The inquiry of errors has diagnostic purpose when it identifies about learner's language system during learning process at a given point. The same inquiry becomes prognostic when it is done with the purpose to gain guidelines for course organizers keeping in view the learners' current problems. It helps to redesign language learning materials.

Objectives of the research

This research aims to:

- identify areas of weakness in grammar in L2 writing.
- provide frequency of common grammatical errors in L2
- determine which grammatical error is most frequently committed by students
- explore possible sources of errors

Research Questions

- Are there any common grammatical errors found in L2 writing?
- How frequently those common grammatical errors in L2 writing occur?
- Which error most frequently occurs in L2 writing?
- Why these errors occur most frequently?

Research Methodology

This inquiry has a characteristic as a systematic process to explore and look into the frequency of errors occurrence. The present investigation is exploratory in its nature. The main focus of the researcher is to identify, classify explain errors, and to explore the frequency of the errors.

Sample

Twenty students were chosen randomly from University of the Lahore as the subjects of this research. It was specified that the subjects should be having Urdu as their mother tongue and they must be studying in first semester at BS level.

Data Collection Instrument

The frequency of most commonly found errors in L2 writing by students of BS level was determined by conducting a written test on the topic “The most exciting experience in my life” The topic is creative in its nature and students are supposed to put in writing a paragraph containing 150 words.

This topic was preferred because it is creative and students of this level can write on it easily and in this way the researcher got a chance to check whether they are able to express their thoughts in English language. It was conducted as routine task by their class instructor.

Data collection

To collect the data the researcher decided to take a paragraph writing test .All the students were informed to write a paragraph of 100 words on the mentioned topic and 45 minutes was their time limit to complete the test. The students were not informed that their tests will be used for any research work; as it was necessary to ensure reliability of the research.

Application of Brown Model of Error Analysis in four steps

At this practical stage when data was collected, the researcher analyzed these errors by applying Brown Model of Error Analysis (207-211) elaborated in four steps:

1. Identification

At the initial step effort was made by highlighting errors on the scripts of the students. So that it may pave the way for counting and categorizing these errors. The researcher checked those tests two times and third time a colleague checked them so all the mistakes might be identified.

2. Classification

At this stage the errors were classified. For this purpose the researcher made a list of ten types of grammatical areas in order count them research focus (e.g. Noun ,verb, Pronoun , Conjunction , Adjective, Adverb, Preposition, Article Sentence structure, Subject verb order)

3. Analysis

The next step grammatical analysis was given for each type of error.

4. Explanation

Then an explanation for various errors that explore different sources behind the occurrence of that error was explained.

Applying Error Analysis to Sample Errors in Students' Writing

The examples are given below to present the sample of applying the Brown's Model of error analysis in the current study.

Sample: 1

Identification

They picked all the equipments from the ground.

Classification

Noun

Analysis

needless addition of -s

Explanation

'Equipment' is uncountable noun and does not require the plural marker -s:

(They picked all the equipment from the ground.)

Sample: 2

Identification

A large number of cattle was hungry.

Classification

Verb

Analysis

subject and verb disagreement

Explanation 'A large number' suggests more than one cattle so that is why plural subject requires plural verb.

(A large number of cattle were hungry.)

Data Analysis and Interpretation

All errors were calculated in grand total as well as according to each category individually. Through total frequency of these errors percentage of these errors was obtained. All the results are ordered in the form of table to make it possible to highlight most frequently occurring errors.

Table showing category, sum and percentage of errors

Category of error	Sum of error frequency	Percentage of error
Preposition	122	23.87%
Article	95	18.59%
Sentence structure	82	16.04%
Verb	65	12.7%
Subject verb disagreement	45	8.80%
Noun	31	6.06%
Adverb	22	4.30%
Adjective	22	4.30%
Conjunction	17	3.32%
Pronoun	10	1.95%

Grand total of all the errors is 511.

In this formula n =sum of the errors of related category and $\sum N = 511$ represents the grand total of errors in twenty paragraphs and it was multiplied by 100 % and P = percentage.

For example in the category of verb

$$n=122$$

$$\sum N=511$$

$$P=?$$

According to formula

$$P=n/\sum N \times 100\%$$

$$=122/511 \times 100\%$$

$$=23.87\%$$

According to the calculated results of the research the hypothesis that students of BS level while writing L2 paragraph do grammatical errors which vary in their frequency of occurrence has proved true.

Possible sources of Errors

According to this research Verb, Preposition, Article, Sentence Structure and Subject verb disagreement are the five most frequently found errors and possible sources of these errors are given below in detail.

- Preposition is the most commonly found error in tests of paragraph writing. In L1(Urdu)learner do not have variety of preposition but in L2 (English)learner find many

prepositions .In L2 with the change of preposition ,meaning also gets change e.g. looked up ,looked over , so with this change learner gets confuse with the use of preposition. It can be said that complexity of L2 is the source of prepositional errors.

- Article ‘the’ is also second most commonly found error faulty teaching seems to be the source of it because there are rules for use of article ‘the’ and learners seem unaware of them that is why they use articles carelessly e. g .^S un provided us light. Here ‘the’ article is missing. The sun provided us heat (correct).
- Sentence structure is the third most commonly found error in L2 writing, Interference (negative transfer) is the cause of creating wrong sentence structure. As sentence structures of Urdu and English language are far different from each other.
- Verb is the fourth most frequently found error in L2 paragraph writing of BS students. The sources of these errors may be over –generalization of rules e.g. We swim med on the beach (incorrect).We swam on the beach (correct). Here L2 learner has over-generalized the rule of regular verb forms.
- Subject verb disagreement is fifth commonly found error in L2 learners writing. Here L1 interference becomes the cause of error for this type as sentence structure of L1 differs from L2.

Conclusions

The inquiry is an attempt to identify, describe and diagnose the grammatical errors in writing by L2 learners at BS level. On the basis of my study it can be concluded that L2 learners are very creative with grammar errors while writing as their frequency of errors vary according to category .Errors like noun conjunction, adjective are not very common in students but preposition, article, sentence structure, verb (form and tense) noun are top five errors which were made by students of BS level while writing paragraph on the given topic.

The application of Browns Model of error analysis in this study and its results empower teachers to identify errors and investigate their sources to help students to improve their writing skill based on the evident errors. It is a systematic textual error analysis which proved beneficial as it presented calculated results.

Recommendations

- Teachers with the help of error analysis can get command over the sources of errors and areas of difficulty in writing skill of their students.
- English writing for many Pakistanis students till their higher secondary level is a process of translation only. That is why students get used to this method .The process of translation from L1 becomes a cause of interference and negative transfer in TL. This study and its findings can be used to improve teaching and its methods.
- Mostly occurrence of these errors are due to interference of L1(Urdu) .For example the top most occurring error is preposition and its source is short range of prepositions in L1(Urdu).Students find always difficult to use a vast variety preposition in TL. In error analysis teachers as well as students get to know the areas of interference to eradicate them.
- Diagnosing learning difficulty is a crucial stage in any language teaching .Analyzing errors by instructors can facilitate learners to master this skill. Teachers should focus

those are by explaining rules and its usage .teachers should also use comparative approach for both languages to smooth the ways of learning.

- Students face individual difficulties teachers especially at school level should focus on individual weak areas to eradicate them by explaining then individually and give them practice work.
- It is desperately required to upgrade curriculum containing more activities and based on real life.
- Teacher training programs should be promoted.
- Need is to explore more futuristic research areas to improve teaching skills.
- New educational policies should be designed by government.

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