An Error Analysis of Students' Paragraphs and Essays: A Case of First-Year Students of an English Medium University in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Writing is deemed an enticing task in second language learning. Most researchers reason that second-language speakers of English not only find difficulty in writing tasks but speakers whose first language is English also face problems in writing. Therefore, the ability to communicate viably in English by both second language speakers and native speakers requires comprehensive and specific instruction. It is obvious that writing plays an integral role in student's academic life, and academic writing in English has brought considerable attention in English medium universities in Bangladesh. So, the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT) is no exception. This university, a non-government tertiary level and English medium institution in the country emphasize English's importance in producing its graduates from its inception. Writing is a productive skill; as an instructor at this university, I identify students' difficulty writing compositions. In this paper, I explored the writing errors in a corpus of 30 paragraphs and 15 essays written by first-year students of IUBAT. The findings revealed that students have to face the serious challenges of writing error-free compositions even after completing the two English proficiency courses. Out of the 45 scripts that were analyzed, 96 errors were identified. The study further revealed that 66 of these total errors were related to grammatical errors and poor structuring of sentences. 28 errors were related to the mechanics of writing. The findings of the study direct recommendations and implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers. This study has repercussions for pedagogy and future research in error analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is considered one of the most distinctive features of each discourse community. Through speaking, writing, or other non-verbal forms of communication, individuals utilize language to convey their ideas and express their opinions to one another. According to Gumperz

(1968), not all communication is linguistic, yet, language is undoubtedly the most impressive and flexible means of communication. According to Corder (1974), who founded error analysis (EA) in the 1960s, writing is thought of as the most tedious aspect of the language proficiency students must acquire. It is an overwhelming fact that writing is one of the most dominant forms of communication using language. This type of communication is deeply regarded as an overwhelming aspect in both first and second languages. Therefore, errors in writing are inevitable. Ellis (1997) found that grammatical petrification in learners does not occur in second language (L2) acquisition but is specific to L2 acquisition. Additionally, one of the challenges EFL/ESL teachers may face in the classroom is teaching writing. Learners, in particular, are becoming more and more digital and visual learners.

Writing has always been difficult and challenging for EFL learners because the writing process involves many facets. Moreover, creating coherent, cohesive, and well-organized text can be daunting. Writing problems are believed to be significantly exacerbated when students can express themselves in a second language, such as English. The reason is that most students cannot communicate effectively in English. English is considered the world language and is adopted as the language of instruction in non-governmental universities in Bangladesh. In contrast, public universities use a combination of Bengali and English as the language of instruction. English is considered a foreign/second language in the country. IUBAT-International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, a non-government university in the country, emphasises English's importance since its inception in 1991. The medium of instruction of this institution is English. The university offers four English proficiency courses designed for students who study their bachelor programs in arts, science, business, and engineering disciplines. Three proficiency courses: ENG-101, ENG-102, and ENG-203, consist of essential language and writing skills. Out of these courses, one course is designed to focus on writing skills. However, it is observed that students still find challenges in writing error-free texts after completing these English courses.

1.1. The Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to investigate the competence level of first-year students' written compositions at the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT) after they have taught English proficiency courses. In particular, the specific objective of this study is to investigate and analyze the types of errors that they commit in their compositions. The study also identifies the type of errors that typify their writing.

1.2. Definitions of Errors

Errors are a necessary component of learning. Some pedagogical reasons have been suggested for the errors made by learners of a foreign language or second language. However, the most crucial factor is that errors may be a requirement for language learning in and of itself (Norrish, 1983). According to Brown (1994), errors are defined as a clear departure from the adult grammar of a native speaker that reflects the learner's interlanguage proficiency. Errors and mistakes are not

the same terms, as has been explored and proven in the literature. Ellis (1997) makes a distinction between "errors" and "mistakes." Errors, in his opinion, reflect knowledge gaps in the learner because they happen when the learner doesn't know what is right.

Errors are infrequent gaps in performance; they happen when a learner is unable to apply what they have learned in that specific situation (Ellis, 1997). According to Brown's theories (Brown, 2000), an error is an obvious departure from the mature grammar of a native speaker, demonstrating the learner's interlanguage competence. A mistake, on the other hand, signifies a performance error, which is a failure to apply a recognized system correctly. According to Hourani (2008), which referenced Corder (1967), James (1998), and Norrish (1983), a mistake can be fixed by oneself, but an error cannot. They refer to errors as "systematic" and mistakes as "inconsistent deviations." According to Brown and Harmer, who are referenced by Andrian (2015) and share the same perspective, a mistake is not very harmful because the retrieval is flawed rather than the knowledge it is founded on. Errors are "red flags," as defined by Gass and Selinker (2008). (i.e., warning signals that provide evidence about the knowledge of L2 learners).

According to James (1998), mistakes are examples of language that self-corrects without being actively changed. The deviation is either intentional or inadvertent, but it can be self-corrected. Errors can be significant in three ways, according to Corder (1967): errors notify the teacher about the student's level of learning. They serve as a way for learners to understand the rules of the target language and give researchers proof of how it was taught. According to Corder (1967), there are four primary sorts of errors: omissions, additions, substitutions, or errors related to word order. Language-level classifications of errors include phonological, vocabulary or lexical, syntactic, and other types of errors (Corder, 1967). Norish, as described in Hamada (2008), views errors as helpful learning tools, and errors may even be a required component of learning a language.

1.3. Definition of Error Analysis

Over the past two decades, error analysis has captured the interest of the majority of academics. This results from the fact that it is viewed as a methodical tool used by students to learn (Khansir, 2013). Corder's perspective was the first to draw attention to the significance of examining students' errors (1967). According to Khatter (2019), citing Corder (1967) and Brown (1994), language learners' errors are an important component of the study since they help determine the level of their understanding. They claim that errors (not mistakes) committed in both learning a second language and learning a child's language provide proof that a learner uses a crystal-clear language system at every stage of his development. Corder (1967) and Brown (1994) view that a "built-in syllabus" offers a more effective sequence than the instructor-generated sequence because it is more important to the student.

Alobo (2015) concurs with Corder's assertion that errors are an essential component of learners' language and emphasizes their importance. The phrase "transitional competence" was first used by Corder in 1967 to describe the dynamic nature of the language learner's developing system. The discrepancy between a learner's transitional competence and the target language, according to Corder (1967), is characterized by the learner's errors. Error analysis, as defined by Brown as described in Mourssi (2013), is the process through which researchers watch, examine, and categorize learners' errors in order to elicit some information about the system functioning within the learner. Ellis (1994) proposes a procedural analysis of errors which comprises four stages: 1. collection of a sample of learners' language, 2. identification of errors, 3. description of errors, and 4. evaluating the errors identified in the data.

1.4. Types of Errors

Linguists have traditionally tried to categorize the different kinds of errors that language learners make. That is the ideal place to start because it enables the applied linguist to pinpoint the issue. Errors happen when the learner modifies the surface structure in a highly methodical way, according to Dulay et al. (1982). Errors are divided into two categories by Richard et al. (2002): the interlingual error and the intralingual error. These two factors allude to the detrimental effects of the target language and the speaker's native tongue. James (1998) adds the term "induced errors," which refers to mistakes made due to misinterpretations of definitions, examples, explanations, and practice opportunities provided by teachers. "Unique errors" recognized by Dulay and Burt, as cited in Bagheri (2012), are neither developmental nor interfering. According to Olsen, who is referenced in Somchai and Siriluck (2013), errors might be caused by a lack of adequate lexical and syntactic knowledge. Similarly to this, Weigle (2002) argues that the limitations of limited L2 knowledge may impede L2 writing since it forces writers to pay more attention to language than the topic. Johansson (2008) distinguishes between equivalency errors and lexical errors, which entail the misuse of specific words in the target language.

2. A REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES ON ERROR ANALYSIS

The insightful work of Quibol-Catabay (2016), who examined the frequency and the types of sentence errors that characterize the writings of 30 second-year students from the College of Business, Entrepreneurship and Accountancy of State University, Andrews Campus, dominates among the research works in error analysis in the ESL (English as a Second Language) setting. The information for the inquiry was specifically made up of sentences that the respondents had submitted after seeing various media briefs named as "Bunny and Turtle Story." The analysis of the study identified three main categories of errors: mechanical, grammatical, and structural errors. Although the incorrect use of tense was a prototype error in the domains of grammatical classification, Qui-Catabay further concentrated on those punctuation mark errors that were associated with the mechanical classification.

At King Khalid University, Ahmed (2016) conducted research on the writing errors of 20 Saudi EFL university students. The study studied the elements that contributed to the errors' occurrence, identified the errors' causes, and proposed workable remedies to the issue. The results showed that, in addition to insufficient activities and practice of fundamental writing procedures, writing errors were made as a result of interference from L1.

Seitova (2016) looked at typical grammatical errors committed by Kazakh and Russian L1 speakers in a corpus of 32 original compositions and 32 participant-translated compositions. Pluralization, subject-verb agreement, omission or misuse of articles, incorrect word choice, omission or misuse of prepositions, spelling, and improper use of linking form were the top seven errors made.

Sermsook et al. (2017) investigated the sources used and looked at the grammatical errors made by 26 English majors in a Thai institution. Writing samples totaling 104 were gathered and examined. The findings indicated that punctuation, articles, subject-verb agreement, spelling, capitalization, and fragments were the most often made errors. Interlingual and intralingual interference, a lack of vocabulary and grammar expertise, and students' carelessness were the main causes of the errors.

A study by Mencias and De Vera (2018) examined errors in "verb tenses," in the sentences of Japanese ESL learners. The researchers adjusted for inaccuracies in certain verb tenses based on their study of the errors in the learners' written conversation. According to Corder's taxonomy, the errors were dispersed across the three types of errors. The majority of the learners' errors, according to the study, fell into the area of "selection," which was followed by the frequency of their errors in "omission."

Chan (2004) looked into the grammatical errors made by Hong Kong Chinese students to determine how syntactic transfer impacted the quality of the students' writing. Chan's study identified five syntactic structures that were problematic: the copula, placement of adverbs, relative clauses, and verb transitivity.

Zheng and Park's (2013) study found errors in 168 English essays submitted by Chinese and Korean university students. The study revealed that learners' creative construction led to the distortion of verbs and nouns. In contrast, learners' negative transfer from their L1 generated run-on sentences, the deletion of articles and plural suffixes, and sentence disordering.

Sarfraz (2011) applied the error analysis principle from the perspective of Ellis's (1994) procedural analysis of errors (collection of a sample of learner language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and evaluation of errors) in analyzing 50 essays written in English by Pakistani undergraduate students. The study aimed to provide an insight

into language learning problems that occur when L2 learners in the context of Pakistani undergraduate students try to internalize the rules of the target language (English Language).

To analyze 50 essays written in English by Pakistani undergraduate students, Sarfraz (2011) used the error analysis principle from the perspective of Ellis' (1994) procedural analysis of errors (collection of a sample of learner language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and evaluation of errors). The purpose of the study was to shed light on the difficulties encountered by L2 learners to internalize the rules of the target language in the context of Pakistani undergraduate students (English Language). According to Sarfraz's emphasis on the study's findings, interlanguage errors and mother tongue interference errors were the two main categories of errors. Sarfraz also contended that interlanguage errors outnumbered those brought on by mother-tongue interference in terms of frequency.

Karim, Shah Mohammad, et al. (2015) carried out a study to examine the errors in the usage of verbs in an English essay of comparison and contrast method written by 36 tertiary-level EFL learners at the International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), Bangladesh. This study looked at errors, such as verb agreement, missing verbs, incorrect verb tenses, incorrect past tenses after infinitives, and incorrect use of the verb "to have."

Khansir (2013) compared written errors in the English language made by EFL and ESL learners at undergraduate levels in the context of ESL or EFL. The study also aimed to provide a solution to the problem by detailing and recommending actions that can be taken to reduce those errors that were found in the student's written writings. Khansir observed that the Iranian students made 3,045 writing errors. In comparison, their Indian counterparts had 3,274 errors using 200 non-native English Speaking students from two main geographic contexts (India & Iran) at the undergraduate levels. Khansir further confirmed that most of the errors found in the essays of students from two distinct cultures were "punctuation" errors.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
3.1. Research Design

The research was based on using the qualitative research design because the analysis was purely descriptive. Though there were a few instances whereby the study used some frequency counts to rate errors identified in the students' paragraphs, it is undeniable that the research was skewed towards the descriptive approach. In conclusion, the study adopted the qualitative research design because the qualitative research design typically provides the use of in-depth and verbal descriptions instead of numerical data.

3.2. Samples

The samples of the study were the written paragraphs and essays of the students of the different undergraduate programs (Agriculture. Business, Engineering, Economics, Hospitality Management, and Nursing) of the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT) in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Specifically, the investigation of a corpus of 30

paragraphs and a corpus of 15 essays was the extent of the study. The students were first-year students who went through the two English proficiency courses for two semesters. As an instructor of a course (ENG-203-Advanced English Compositions), I selected 45 scripts of 15 participants of my one class (one section) for this study, and a total of 15 students registered for the course (ENG-203-Advanced English Compositions) for Summer Semester-2020. Out of the 30 paragraphs, 15 paragraphs were selected from the students' first term exam. On the other hand, the other 15 paragraphs were from a class test of students. 15 essays were selected from these students who participated in their mid-term exam. The topics of the two paragraphs were *'IUBAT: My University*' and "*My Primary School Life'*. The topic of the essay was "*Bangladesh*". I checked both of these paragraphs and essays.

3.3.Procedure

The research employed the use of the procedural analysis of errors by Ellis (1994). The research explored the errors in the university's first-year students by the following steps as used by Ellis (1994). Ellis's (1994) procedural analysis comprises four stages: 1. collection of a sample of learners' language, 2. identification of errors, 3. description of errors, and 4. evaluating the errors identified in the data.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents an analysis and discussion of errors that were identified in the selected paragraphs and essays of first-year students of the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology in Dhaka, Bangladesh. After carefully examining the 45 scripts for this study, nine types of writing errors were found. Out of these errors, six types of errors were categorized as grammar and structural errors. On the other hand, three types of errors were errors related to the mechanics of writing. Table 1 provides a fair description of errors that were realized in the students' paragraphs and essays.

Table 1: Frequency and Rank Distribution of Total Errors in the Students' Paragraphs and Essays

Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Plural Errors	26	27.0%	1
Concord Errors (subject-verb disagreements)	20	20.8%	2

Poor Capitalization	13	13.5%	3
The Use of Fragments	10	10.4%	4
Poor Spelling	8	8.3%	5
Poor Usage of Punctuation Marks	7	7.2%	6
Missing of ('be') verbs	6	6.2%	7
Poor Usage of Prepositions	4	4.1%	8
Wrong Tense Usage	2	2.0%	9
Total	96	100%	

4.1. Plural Errors

Plural errors were the most dominant grammar errors that were identified in the students' paragraphs and essays. According to Table 1, out of the total 96 errors, 26 (27.0%) errors were related to plural errors as the grammatical errors. Students erroneously omitted the plural morpheme 's' even in the presence of plural quantifiers such as 'many' and 'all' as in 'This university has many lab [s] and playground [playgrounds].' 'All the faculty member [members]. are qualified.' 'There are 12 teacher [teachers] and 50 student [s]'. 'All the student [s] play together.' 'Those student [students] do not get chance for higher study.' 'My school is one of the best school [schools]'. 'The Padma, the Meghna and the Jamuna are the big river [rivers].' 'There are many interesting place [places]'.

4.2. Concord Errors (subject-verb disagreements)

Errors related to concord were the second most dominant grammatical errors, identified in the students' paragraphs and essays. As shown in Table1, Out of the total 96 errors, 20 (20.8%) errors were related to concord errors as grammatical errors. The analysis confirms that concord errors were mainly linked to subject-verb disagreements. Here are some samples: 'My university are [is] conducted by qualified and experienced faculty.' 'My university give [gives] many facilities.' 'IUBAT have [has] 8000 students.' 'IUBAT have [has] own campus.' 'The teachers of my primary school was [were] very friendly.' 'The joys of school was [were] valuable.'

4.3. Poor Capitalization

Errors in relation to capital letters were the third most dominant errors in terms of the mechanics of writing. Table 1 provides a fair view of errors related to the inappropriate use of capital letters as indicated in the paragraphs and essays of the students. 13 (13.5%) errors were noted as the poor use of capital letters. Students did not use capital letters where they were supposed to use

capital letters. On the contrary, they used capital letters where they were not supposed to use capital letters. The findings indicate that students did not know the rules of capitalization. Here are some examples of poor capitalization: 'My university name is iubat [IUBAT]'. 'My school name is kapatia [Kapatia] high [High] school [School].' 'I would like to describe My [my] University [university].' 'There is a Green [green] Campus [campus]'.

4.4. The Use of Fragments

Sentence fragments were noted as the fourth most errors in students' written compositions. 10 (10.4%) errors were sentence fragments as sentence structural errors. The findings reveal that students missed writing proper sentences, complying with the orders of sentences as in 'There [are] fees under deadline'. 'Culture of Bangladesh, main crops and fruits, natural beauties of Bangladesh' [are the examples]. After nine month bloody war' [Bangladesh became independent]. 'Kazi Nazrul Islam, Sufia Kamal and Shamsur Rahman'[were the famous poets and writers in the country].

4.5. Poor Spelling

Errors related to poor spelling were noted to be the fifth highest error types as the errors in terms of the mechanics of writing. As shown in Table 1, 8 (8.3%%) errors were related to poor spelling. This indicates the limited English Language vocabulary at the students' disposal and that students did not spend time reading other books that can help them build enough vocabulary. If they learned enough vocabulary, they could know proper spellings. Here are some examples of spelling errors: 'The environment is specially designed [designed]'. 'I want to descibe [describe]'. 'IUBAT is one of firstest [fastest] privete [private] university in Bangladesh'. 'The nature is ful [full] of green plants and trees.'

4.6. Poor Usage of Punctuation Marks

As evident in Table 1, poor usage of punctuation marks was the sixth-highest-ranked error in term of mechanical inaccuracy. 7 (7.2%) errors were identified as punctuation marks related. A detailed analysis of the data reveals that this form of error was linked to the inappropriate use of the comma, period and the apostrophe sign. Students lacked knowledge in the correct usage of these punctuation marks in their paragraphs and essays. Here are some examples where students faltered with the use of punctuation marks: It's [its] name is IUBAT university'. 'I am proud of it's [its] beautiful campus'. 'So [So,] rice, jute sugarcane and tea grow abundantly here'. 'However [However,] our government has started a campaign for poverty'. 'At last [At last,] the people of this country know how to live happily and peacefully with national hazard'.

4.7. Missing of (be) verbs

Errors related to missing (be) verbs were the seventh type of error as the rank order in the students' paragraphs and essays. 6 (6.2%) errors were found in relation to missing (be) verbs. This indicates that some students lacked the use of (be) verbs while writing. Here are some samples for missing of (be) verbs: 'It [was] established in 1991'. 'The homework [was] done by my father.' 'This university [was] founded in 1991'. 'It is the school life that [was] blessed with best ever friends.'

4.8.Poor Usage of Prepositions

Wrong use of prepositions was the eighth-ranked error as the grammatical inaccuracy in the 40 scripts that were analyzed. The findings reveal that only 4 (4.1%) instances out of the total 96 errors were related to the wrong usage of prepositions. There were instances where very few students could not demonstrate competence in the appropriate use of prepositions. Some of these instances are highlighted in this analysis: 'This university was founded on [in] 1991'. 'It is one of the most beautiful countries of [in] the world'.

4.9.Wrong Tense Usage

This type of error was the least ranked error type in the grammatical category of errors. According to Table 1, out of the total 96 errors, only 2 (2.0%) were linked to errors in the wrong use of tense as well as wrong words. Here are the two instances from the data: 'This country achieve [achieved] his victory from Pakistan in 1971'. 'If you saw [see] the beauty of Bangladesh, you also love this country'.

Table 2: Frequency and Rank Distribution of Errors under Grammatical and Structural Category

Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Plural Errors	26	39.3%	1
Concord Errors	20	30.3%	2
The Use of Fragments	10	15.1%	3
Missing of ('be') verbs	6	9.0%	4
Poor Usage of Prepositions	4	6.0%	5
Wrong Tense Usage	2	3.0%	6
Total	66	100	

As evident in Table 2, plural errors were the highest ranked errors under the grammatical and structural category. Concord errors (subject-verb disagreements) were noted to be the second-ranked errors and errors related to the use of sentence fragments were the third-ranked errors under this category. Errors related to missing of (be) verbs were the fourth-ranked errors and errors in relation to wrong usages of prepositions were identified as the fifth-ranked errors. Finally, errors concerning wrong tense usage were the least errors under the grammatical category

Table 3. Frequency and Rank Distribution of Errors under the Mechanics of Writing

Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Poor Capitalization	13	46.4%	1
Poor Spelling	8	28.5%	2
Poor Usage of Punctuation Marks	7	25%	3
Total	28		

As shown in Table 3, errors related to capital letters were the first ranked errors under the mechanics of writing. Spelling errors were noted to be the second-ranked errors under this category. Errors related to poor usage of punctuation marks were the third-ranked errors.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be assumed that nine different types of errors were identified in the written texts of first-year students of the International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT). These errors include plural errors, concord errors, poor capitalization, use of fragments, poor spelling, poor usage of punctuation marks, missing of (be) verbs, poor usage of prepositions, and wrong tense usage. This error analysis reveals that plural errors were identified as the most dominant errors out of the total errors in the paragraphs and essays of the students. On the other hand, errors related to wrong tense usage were the least errors, identified in students' written compositions. The findings further reveal that plural errors were the highest-ranked errors under the grammatical and structural category. On the contrary, errors concerning wrong tense usage were the least ranked errors under this same category. Errors related to capital letters were the first-ranked errors under the mechanics of writing. In contrast, wrong punctuation marks were identified as the least ranked errors under the same category (mechanics of writing).

As the analysis reveals nine different types of students' written errors in the forms of grammar, structure, and mechanics of writing, I would like to put forth some recommendations. These nine types of errors should be emphasized categorically in the writing skills-focused course, ENG-203-Advanced English Compositions in terms of revision and teaching. This course, along with the other two English courses, is designed for first-year students of the International

University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT). As an instructor and a member of the development of the course, I am aware that this course consists of these topics of grammar, structure, and mechanics of writing which are similar to the areas of the first-year students' errors, identified by this error analysis.

From a pedagogical perspective, EFL/ESL teachers should be constantly aware of the types and sources of their students' errors as well as be able to respond to them positively and efficiently. EFL/ESL teachers should be aware of the areas where teaching and developing syllabuses for L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) differ and overlap. With some TL (target Language) challenges, educating students about cross-linguistic variances might be helpful. Teachers should place an emphasis on students that literal translation from or into L1 is usually not correct since L1 and L2 sentence construction rules differ from one another. In the process of SLA, a lot of focus on language learners' errors may result in the proper utterances. Therefore, the most crucial point for us as ESL/EFL teachers to consider is how to assist language learners in correcting their mistakes. Despite the fact that various techniques/methods help language learners in noticing the language. Sometimes, a teacher's correction can keep language learners from noticing their mistakes. It can negatively impact their self-confidence. Additionally, it impairs their capacity to determine why something is incorrect. Therefore, teachers should assign students the primary duty for error-correction. Self-correction, group correction, and student-to-student correction are all effective ways to accomplish this. The research focused on the students' writing errors at the tertiary level, where the students are mature learners. Such students should be provided teaching and learning spaces for flexibility so that they can learn the target language; they can self-correct and identify their mistakes in various academic written compositions.

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