ERROR ANALYSIS: A STUDY OF PAKISTANI SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' WRITTEN COMPOSITIONS

Fasih Ahmed[1], Rooh Ul Amin[2] & Abdul Waheed Qureshi[3]

[1]Department of Humanities, COMSATS Institute of IT, Islamabad, Pakistan
[2]Department of English, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan
[3]Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This study investigates grammatical errors via analyzing second language learners' written compositions. 522 written compositions have been reviewed and the errors have been identified via the frequency of occurrence in the selected writing samples. Results show that agreement-based errors have the highest frequency followed by spelling errors, sentence structure, and word choice. The study concludes that a greater part of these errors is related to interlingual competency that is learners' first language is the primary cause for such errors.

Keywords: *Error Analysis, Second Language Learner, Written Composition*

INTRODUCTION

In second language learning, writing is considered as an important aspect as it plays a significant role in the learning progress especially in English as a second language (ESL) context. Moreover, errors consideration in written texts is a useful way of improving learner's written language. In this perspective, a process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language can prove helpful for learners (James, 1998). In case of written language, the errors committed by learners are classified into two types that is, errors based on organization, and errors based on grammar (Kroll, 1994). Errors based on organization are related to the form of written content whereas errors based on grammar are concerned with the grammatical incorrectness that leads to unsuccessful language. The present study focuses only on errors based on grammar. In this perspective, this study is an endeavor to answer following questions.

- ➢ What type of errors L2 learners make in written composition?
- ➢ What are the frequently made errors in L2 learners' written composition?
- ➢ What might be possible reasons for frequent errors in L2 learners' written composition?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Error analysis is commonly defined as a way of identifying, classifying, and systematically interrupting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language,

using any of the principles and procedures provided by the linguistics" (Crystal, 2003, p. 165). James defines error analysis as "a process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language" (James, 1998, p. 1). Error analysis is also regarded as "a procedure used by both researchers and teachers which involves collecting samples of learners' language, identifying errors and classifying them according to their nature and causes and evaluating their seriousness" (Keshavarz, 1999, p. 168). Ellis (1997) defines four main steps concerning error analysis; identification, description, explanation, and evaluation. It is also important to describe the difference between errors and mistakes. According to Ellis (1997), the clear distinction between errors and mistakes is that "errors reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge. They occur because learner does not know what is correct. On the other hand, mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance, they occur because in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows" (Ellis, 1997, p. 17).

According to Kerra (2006), error analysis has multiple implications for teachers, pedagogists, and researchers (Karra, 2006). The analysis is significant in three main ways; first, they are significant to teachers as they show students' progress. Second, they are also significant to the researchers as they show how a language is acquired and what type of strategies learners use. Finally, they are also significant to the learners that they can learn from their errors and develop their language keeping in view the errors that exist in their language. Research on error analysis has a long history. Contrastive Analysis (henceforth, CA) is the first way, which was introduced to deal with errors. CA revolved around the degree of similarity between Mother Tongue (henceforth, MT) and Target Language (henceforth, TL) (James, 1998). CA analysis was highly criticized due to its association with behaviorism. In contrast to CA, Coder (1967) is considered as the pioneer who introduced the concept of Error Analysis (henceforth, EA) in reaction to CA. Corder (1975) argues that errors are neither random nor best explained in terms of the learner's L1; errors are indications of learners' attempts to figure out an underlying rule-governed system (Corder, 1967, 1975). Corder (1975) in the perspective of EA rejected the assumption that errors are solely because of learners' mother tongue.

James (1998) is of view that error analysis first involves independently, or objectively describing the learners IL (Individuals' Language, their own version of TL), and the TL itself followed by a comparison of two, so as to locate the mismatches. The method is again questionable that though there is many other reasons for language deviations even then the presence of language deviations relating to mother tongue cannot be denied. Burt and Kiparsky (1972) suggest identifying errors by reference to the TL. In this perspective Yang (2010) describes two reasons for why the standard EA practice of describing learner's errors should be in terms of the TL. Firstly, learner's language and TL are co-dialects of

the same language, so they should be describable in terms of same grammar and secondly, EA is TL-oriented. (Yang, 2010, pp. 266-268). Error analysis has been done keeping in view the different perspectives concerning language learning (Dagneaux, Denness & Granger, 1998; Khansir, 2012; Protopapas, Drakopoulou, Skaloumbakas & Mouzaki, 2013). However, research of error analysis is scarce in Pakistani context. The present study therefore, aims in viewing errors both in the perspective of learners' first language and the target language. Moreover, this study views learners' errors in relation to their L2 learning in Pakistani context.

The Pakistani Context

In order to explain English language-learning context in Pakistan, it is important to consider the situation of English in the country. English is learned as a second language, and it is also official language of country. Most of the official and private documentation is done in English. Moreover, all the work is conducted through written English. In this context, proficiency in written English is the key to success and passport to privilege (Rahman, 2003, 2005). This study is also significant in the way that it aims to highlight multiple aspects of errors and addressing that may prove helpful for language learners in Pakistan. Keeping in view the importance of English, the present study focuses on L2 learners' writing errors in tertiary level of education in Pakistan.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study concerning errors applies Corder (1975)'s approach to analyze learners' errors. Corder way of analyzing errors has been summed up in the following diagram.
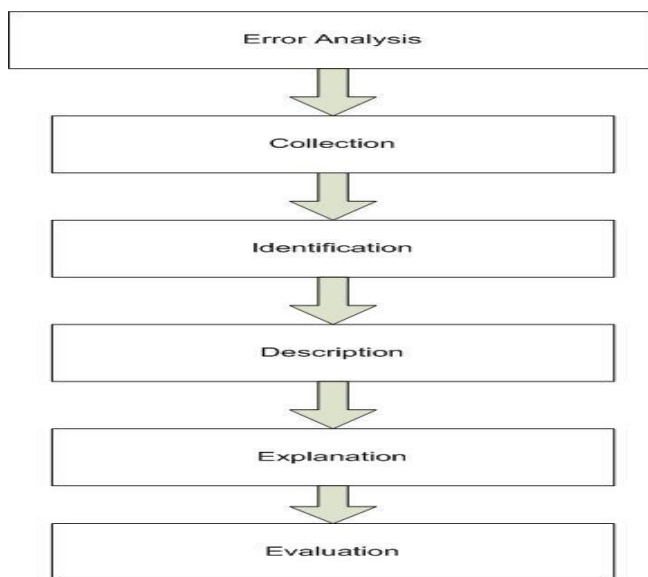

Figure 1 Error Analysis Model

Data for this study are collected from 522 students pursuing their master degree at university level. Data collection involves the four phases. In the first phase we selected a range of topics (see Appendix A). Moreover, 20 students from different disciplines rated the selection of essays with respect to their preference. Based on their rating four topics were finalized for the study (see Appendix A). The rationale behind the selection was to select the general topics that students of different disciplines could write on. In the second phase, students from different disciplines and from different universities were invited to write an essay of 250 words on the selected topics (see Appendix A). The main purpose of this phase was to collect the samples of written composition in order to evaluate the nature of errors. In the third phase, collected data were written in Microsoft word along with the errors. The rationale behind this phase was to rewrite the data in Microsoft word so that the data could be analyzed with the help of NVivo. In the last phase, errors were categorized with the help of NVivo. The rationale behind this phase was to study the nature of errors that most commonly occur in learners' writing in L2.

Following is the table that explains the classification of errors that were found in the written compositions of the learners.

Table 1. Error Analysis Frequencies

Types of Errors	Frequency
Agreement Based Errors	151
Spelling Errors	111
Word Choice Errors	66
*Miscellaneous Errors	146
Total number of Errors	474

*The category of miscellaneous errors includes abbreviations, articles and prepositions.

RESULTS

Based on the above categorization, the following types of errors have been found from the written compositions of the L2 adult learners.

Agreement Based Errors

Agreement based errors are those that do not follow the rules based on tenses or singular plural distinction in a written sentence. Some of the examples concerning the agreement based errors are as follows.

➢   Child **are** equal in all areas.
➢   Transport system **play** an important role in the development of country.
➢   The chemicals get mixed with water and **harms** the marine life.
➢   We **needs** more and more trees.

- ➢ The gases which are released directly or indirectly from factories affect the environment.
- ➢ The pollution which **destroy** the environment.
- ➢ Most of the diseases in humans **is** caused by water.
- ➢ The unwanted material should be **burn**.
- ➢ Some material which are able **to use** again should be **recycle**.
- ➢ Burning of fosil fuel **produce** oxides of nitrogen and oxides of sulphur.
- ➢ We can say that google search **make** study easy for our youth.
- ➢ UNO **have** issued certain guidelines.
- ➢ Our youth **are** deeply ingrained in these two sites and their lives would undergo drastic changes.
- ➢ The word pollution **consist** many **type**.
- ➢ Millions of fake account **exists**.

The above errors reflect gaps in learners' grammatical knowledge. Some of these errors are due to L1 language transfer such as the difference of singular and plural patterns are quite different with respect to Urdu (i.e., Learners L1) and English. The sentence (We **needs** more and more trees.) is an evident example of interlingual error such as in English the verb need is inflected based on singular or plural nouns, whereas in Urdu language it remains same in case of singular and plural nouns. Therefore some of these errors are interlingual and due to the interference of learners' first language. Moreover, in Urdu language there are no inflections with verbs with respect to pronoun no matter the pronoun is singular or plural. The analysis of the above sentences reflects that the learners have applied their first language pronoun pattern to English language compositions.

Spelling Errors

A wide range of spelling errors was found in the written compositions. Some of the examples concerning these errors are:

Mediem, helth, ,brething, release, demege, diseal, kdney, socity, envirement, sivierge, achived, ozen, voilating, invironmental, extream, pathetic, valume, consequencies, conquering, similearly, realy, , specialy, westing, , , idees, sence, , , occurs, , comical, concist, , erradication, libray, desision, connest, scane, vichles

An analysis of the errors based on spelling reflects that most of the errors are because of double vowel sounds in words. Moreover, the spelling confusion has occurred in words where two or more vowel sounds are combined. One aspect of spelling errors is that the vowel sounds are comparatively difficult to master as compared to the consonant sounds and this confusion is also reflected in their compositions as well (Lecumberri & Gallardo, 2003).

The other category of spelling errors has been found relating to consonants in words. At some places the consonants with double sounds are missing such as in case of *really, especially* etc. There are also some other consonant spelling errors, which reflect no specific pattern. These spelling errors reflect learners' lack of knowledge about the target language vocabulary.

Errors Based on Word Choice or Contextual Errors

Errors based on word choice are related to the appropriate use of words and phrases according to the context. Some of the examples concerning word choice are as followed.

> - People are having **rough** time
> - Roads are not properly **furnished**
> - This was the deadly smog **who** killed the human
> - Similarly by using Facebook **those youth which** are involved in business can advertise
> - It have become the **headache** for Pakistan
> - Awareness is increased but **understanding is downed**
> - Scientist of the world pay a great **intention** to their problems.
> - The access of knowledge is quite **very easy now a days**.
> - The ocean of Pakistan is **very very** dirty

These errors also reflect learners' limited range of vocabulary in terms of expressions. The contextual use of language demands a wide range of vocabulary. Moreover, the limited range of vocabulary results in overgeneralization of the use of one word to many other contexts as has been seen in the above examples. The aspect of overgeneralization takes place when learners pick up the easiest ways to communicate in order convey the meanings (Al-Baldawi & Saidat, 2011).

Miscellaneous Errors

The category of miscellaneous errors includes the types of errors based on adverbs, abbreviations and prepositions. The examples of errors based on adverbs reflect that most of the errors are made due to overgenralisation. Overgeneralization is the phenomenon when one overextends one rule to cover instances to which that rule does not apply. (Al-Baldawi & Saidat, 2011). The most repeated example in case of adverbs was observed in the case of the word "fast". The analysis reveals that most of the learners used the word "fastly" instead fast. The word "fastly" is an overgeneralization of the rule this is applied in case of forming adverb from the word "slow" to "slowly". The other example of misappropriation of adverbs was seen in the case of the word "easy" and "easily". The analysis reveals that most of the learners were not aware of the rule concerning the above-mentioned adverbs.

The other category of errors was related to abbreviations. The analysis based on examples reveals that the leaners coined their own ways of forming abbreviations. Some of the examples are as followed.

PK (Pakistan), Fb (Facebook), Bc (Because), 1slty (Firstly), 2ndly (Secondly)

The errors reveal that the learners have not made the difference between formal and informal writing. Formal language writing requires a style that differs from informal language. Moreover, the rules of forming abbreviations have also not been followed.

The fourth category in miscellaneous errors includes the errors based on prepositions. Some of the examples are as follows.

➢ The use of coil **into** homes
➢ **In the map** of the world.
➢ **Enter in** the water
➢ The government has been trying to overcome the problem of pollution **since** two years.

The errors based on prepositions are an example of interlingual errors. In Urdu language the prepositions have a different pattern as compared to the use of prepositions in English language. The last sentence is an example of interlingual error. In Urdu language there is no distinction in case of "since" and "for" regarding time expression. Therefore L2 learners, because of having no time distinction in case of "since" and "for", apply their first language pattern of time in case of English language.

DISCUSSION

In the light of these data, following is the information related to research questions that this study endeavours to answer. The questions and discussion is as under.

What are the major types of errors in the written composition made by L2 learners?

Results presented above show that written compositions made by learners reflect errors are mainly related to agreement-errors, spelling errors, word choice or contextual errors. The other category is based on a miscellaneous group of errors which includes errors based on adverbs, abbreviations, capitalization, articles, possessive noun, and prepositions. The results are in line with some of the research works done by (Corder, 1975; Dagneaux et al., 1998; Hendrickson, 1978), who have explained some of the sources of language errors.

Which types of errors have the highest frequency in the written compositions made by learners?

The errors based on agreement have the highest frequency as compared to other categories. The other categories that have also the highest frequency are based on spelling and contextual errors. Most the agreement-based errors have been noticed as interlingual that are caused by the interference of learners' first language.

What are the possible reasons behind these errors?

The analysis of the results shows that most of the errors are interlingual and they are caused by the interference of the learners' first language. However all of the errors are not based on language transfer, there are some of the errors that reflect learners' lack of knowledge with respect to the target language. There the results support the view that learners' individual versions both MT and TL influence IL. Findings in this respect are in line with James (1998)'s research.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the major types of errors reflected in writings of ESL learners are related to agreement-based errors, spelling errors, word choice errors and a mixed category of miscellaneous errors that includes errors based on adverbs, abbreviations, capitalization, articles, possessive noun, and prepositions. Moreover, the highest frequency of errors is related to agreement-based errors. The study also concludes that some of the errors are intralingual that is they occur due to the influence of MT but MT is not the complete source of language errors. Some of the errors are also because of learners' lack of linguistic knowledge of the target language. Therefore, errors have their relation to both learners' MT and TL. The present research is limited only to adult learners at university level and only focuses on errors in relation to their L2 writing. Therefore, this study recommends investigating the nature the errors with respect to spoken language at under graduate as well.

References

Al-Baldawi, Wasan, N., & Saidat, A. M. (2011). Linguistic Overgeneralization: A Case Study. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 1*.

Burt, M., & Kiparsky, C. (1972). *T*he Gooficon: A Repair Manual for English: Newbury House, Rowley, MA.

Corder, S. P. (1967). The Significance of Learners' Errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching,* 5(1-4), 161-170.

Corder, S. P. (1975). Error Analysis, Interlanguage and Second Language Acquisition. *Language Teaching, 8*(04), 201-218.

Crystal, D. (2003). Dictionary of linguistics and phonetics *John Wiley & Sons.,* 30.

Dagneaux, E., Denness, S., & Granger, S. (1998). Computer-aided error analysis. *System,* 26(2), 163-174.

Ellis, R. (1997). Second language acquisition: Oxford University Press.

Hendrickson, J. M. (1978). Error Correction in Foreign Language Teaching: Recent Theory, Research, and Practice. *The Modern Language Journal,* 62(8).

James, C. (1998). Errors in language learning and use: exploring error analysis. London; New York: Longman.

Karra, M. (2006). Second Language Acquisition: Learners' Errors and Error Correction in Language Teaching. *Translation Theory , Translator Education*.

Keshavarz, M. H. (1999). Contrastive analysis and error analysis.

Khansir, A. A. (2012). Error Analysis and Second Language Acquisition. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies,* 2(5), 1027-1032.

Kroll, B. (1994). Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom: Cambridge University Press.

Lecumberri, M. L. G., & Gallardo, F. (2003). English FL Sounds in School Learners of Different Ages. In M. d. P. G. Mayo & M. L. G. Lecumberri (Eds.), Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language. Sydney: Multilingual Matters.

Protopapas, Athanassios, Fakou, Aikaterini, Drakopoulou, Styliani, Skaloumbakas, Christos, & Mouzaki, Angeliki. (2013). What do spelling errors tell us? Classification and analysis of errors made by Greek schoolchildren with and without dyslexia. *Reading and Writing, 26*(5), 615-646. doi: 10.1007/s11145-012-9378-3

Rahman, T. (2003). Language-teaching and power in Pakistan. *Pakistani languages and society: problems and prospects*, 1-18.

Rahman, T. (2005). Passports to privilege: The English-medium schools in Pakistan. *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, 24-44.

Yang, W. (2010). A Tentative Analysis of Errors in Language Learning and Use. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research,* 1(3), 266-268.

Appendix A

Initial Version   **Time: 1 hour**

Write an essay on any one of the following.

- ➢ Environmental Pollution and its Consequences
- ➢ Life without Google and Facebook
- ➢ The Spirit of Nationalism
- ➢ The causes of Poverty and its Eradication
- ➢ The importance of Women Education
- ➢ The promotion of Sports

Final Version

Write an essay on any one of the following.
- ➢ Environmental Pollution and its Consequences
- ➢ Life without Google and Facebook
- ➢ The Spirit of Nationalism
- ➢ The causes of Poverty and its Eradication