

Error Analysis of English Paragraphs by Pakistani Undergraduates

Master Hamza, Rooman Khan and Dr. Abdul Malik Abbasi

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Abstract

The present paper aims to investigate the errors of Pakistani learners of English in their write-ups. The major goal of this research is to figure out common errors which students make during extemporaneous writing. This research was intended to identify, classify, define & then explain causes behind this lack of skill among students. To do this research, quantitative method was used. 20 participants (10 males & 10 females) were recruited from the department of Computer Science, Sindh Madressatul Islam University Karachi and Orasoft Training Institute, Karachi. The participants were asked to write a paragraph (questionnaire attached in Appendix-1) which was used as a tool of data collection in this research and to identify the classification of errors which students make in their writings. For this research, the researchers analyzed each questionnaire and marked the errors and then formed the tables for each category of error comprising of number of students made this error which was used for conclusion and leading to the root cause of errors made in their write-ups. During analysis of their write-ups, the study was able to point out 111 errors (in 11 different categories), it was also found that the most common type of error which participants made during writing was punctuation (36.93 % of total errors). There was no major difference between error pattern of male & female students since frequency of errors made by them was just a slightly different (61:50).

Keywords:

Introduction

The present study aims to investigate writing errors made by undergraduate students at SMIU Karachi. Language is a means of communication. It is a way to share your thoughts, feelings, and ideas to others. English Language is most common foreign language all around the world. Owing to

its popularity & being common, it has become common medium of communication around the globe. English language has become necessity in learning phase as well. It is being taught from Pre-School to Masters and Doctorate level. Due to its generality in communication, many people are willing to enhance or improve communication skills in English Language by different means.

There are basically 4 pillars of any language: reading, writing, listening and speaking. A person who want to share his/her ideas/thoughts to other, he/she may say it or use a pen to note it down on a paper. We all possess different level of communication skills in language (either English). Some of us would might have better speaking ability than others, several of us would be stronger in writing skills than rest of us. So, it depends on mentality, way of thinking, confidence, knowledge etc. of a person.

As discussed above, writing needs at least a pen & a paper. But what actually writing is? Writing is sharing or noting down a thought which is readable by another person(s). Writing is a permanent sort of sharing thought. But question arise here, is it enough to have a pen & paper to write? Answer is NO! Writing requires knowledge, understanding the linguistic rules & syntax, vocabulary of words, emotions & most precious time to think what to write. Therefore, writing is not just making lines of sentences without inter - connection b/w them & topic of discussion but it is an art of making readers fully understood what a writer actually intended to say!

As a student (especially in Pakistan) from school level rather than developing our skills to learn & implement, they are being just treated as a memory testing creatures i.e. who can memorize more. Criteria of student's intelligence are just about examining how much a student can remember. The current syllabus of English courses being taught at Pakistani schools and colleges are inadequate to train students with the proficiency to write logical, efficient, error free English language texts; that's why there's a presence of poor communication skills in university level students (especially undergraduates), they are not even able to write a proper summary or essay/letter. Main causes include lack of knowledge, less vocabulary, etc. which is really a major setback or a thing of embarrassment. This research paper/thesis will be focusing on "Error Analysis in the write-ups of undergraduate students".

Research Questions

1. What types of common errors do undergraduate level students make in their extemporaneous writing?
2. Why do these mistakes still occur even after 12 years of formal classroom learning?
3. What can be done or what are the solutions to improve the writing skills of students?

Hypothesis

If the Undergraduate students write extemporaneous paragraph, then they make some errors in their write-ups.

Purpose of the study

Key purpose of the study is to investigate the errors analysis of English paragraphs of undergraduate students and suggest them fast ways to improve them and excel.

Literature Review

Pit Corder is known as the “Father” of Error Analysis. Corder (1967) wrote an article about the error analysis on the topic “The significance of learner errors”. Errors need to be eliminated from the write-ups. Corder (1967) argues that the errors are important for learners to know their errors and to improve upon them. Gass & Selinker (1996) (as cited in Richards, 1974; Taylor, 1975; Dulay and Burt, 1974).) Stated that the errors as “red flags” giving strong evidence of the writers’ knowledge of English as a second language. Teachers should be interested in errors because these are considered to carry valuable information on the skills that learners use to acquire a language. Corder (1974) suggests that there are two objectives i.e., a theoretical and applied. Since the first will serve to make clear how the learner should study English as a second language and the former make the learners more efficient through the knowledge of his/her native language. The investigation of errors can be diagnostic and prognostic. Diagnostic since it may give information about the state of learner’s language (Corder, 1967) and prognostic since it may give the information to reorganize language learning skills the findings of issues encountered by the students.

Xiaoli (2015) argues on the basis of principles of error analysis, discourse analysis and language transfer, this theory targets to explore the discourse errors made by English majors' in their English writing. Discourse errors are examined at micro- level, cohesion. Cohesion errors are studied from four phases: reference, conjunction, substitution and ellipsis, lexical cohesion. The outcomes indicate that the students' papers comprised of some common flaws in terms of discourse errors at the micro- level, which consist of uncertainty in reference, misappropriation or overuse of conjunction and repetition, misappropriation of verbal items, etc.

Summaira (2011) argues that the research goals to observe the errors in amount of 50 English essays written by 50 applicants (undergraduate Pakistani students). These applicants are non-native speakers of English language and all of them are from 'Intermediate background with weak English writing abilities. The occurrences of two kinds of errors; Inter- language errors and mother tongue (MT) interference errors have been matched and the outcomes show that the ratio of the occurrences of Inter-language errors is greater than those of errors causing from the interference of mother tongue (MT). The research has provided an awareness about language learning issues which arise when L2 learners assume the rules of target language (TL) in its construction at a certain point causing into errors in an unidentified and a more natural way. These errors serve as a beneficial guide for English teachers to strategy more effective syllabus for teaching and learning of English as a second language'.

Bustomi, (2009) argues that the errors analysis on students' descriptive writing, (2009), the focal point of this research is to identify the common mistakes that students do in writing English. After analyzing the mass of the records, the writer initiate that there are 3 types of errors made by the students. In using the articles the writer found 15.47 % errors, while using of verb tense he found mistakes of 15.07 % and last but not the least is the using of word choice with 15.07 % of 100 % from all errors done by the students, though it is the same percentage as the using of verb tense but it is less in frequency.

Hourani (2008) argues that the 'most common and prominent grammatical mistakes which were found in the students writing included: subject-verb agreement with 25%, verb tense and form with 22%, word order with 11%, prepositions with 15%, articles with 10%,

plurality with 8%, passive voice with 6%, and auxiliaries with 3%. These errors were categorized and charted according to their number of frequency in the students' essays. The outcomes and the effects of this study also presented that the English writing skill of the secondary male students in the UAE state schools needs more strengthening and development'.

Methods and Procedures

Participants

Twenty undergraduate students (10 Males and 10 Females) out of which 15 were from Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi and 5 students were from Orasoft Training Institute (An affiliated institute of Federal Urdu University of Arts Sciences & Technology, Karachi). Most of them were from the age group of 18-25 years. Majority of them were Urdu as native speakers, while others were Pashto, Punjabi and Sindhi as their mother tongue.

Material

In order to analyze the data, a questionnaire was developed and an activity was conducted. A topic of common interest was given to the subjects to write a paragraph on the "Importance of Education".

Data Collection

Participants were asked to fill the questionnaire at Sindh Madressatul Islam University. Similarly on next day at the same time, participants of Orasoft Training Institute were asked to write English paragraph for our data collection.

Data Analysis

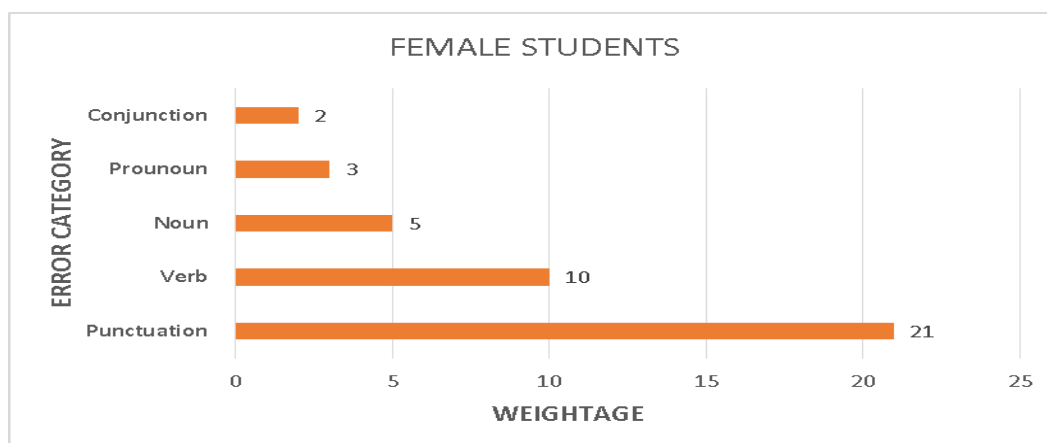
Three tables of errors analysis were analyzed as illustrated in Table. 1 for female students and Table. 2 illustrates for male students while Table. 3 is generated from total frequency of both tables. Each table comprises of Errors (Noun, pronoun, adverb, adjective etc.) and Frequency for each error. This data analysis was further utilized as a tool of research discussion and conclusion.

Table 1. illustrates the frequency & percentage of female errors

ERRORS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Punctuation	21	42
Verb	10	20
Noun	5	10
Pronoun	3	6
Conjunction	2	4
Phrase	2	4
Spelling	4	8
Preposition	1	2
Adverb	1	2
Adjective	1	2
Article	0	0
Total Errors	50	100

The above table shows the frequency & percentage errors in the writing skills of female students.

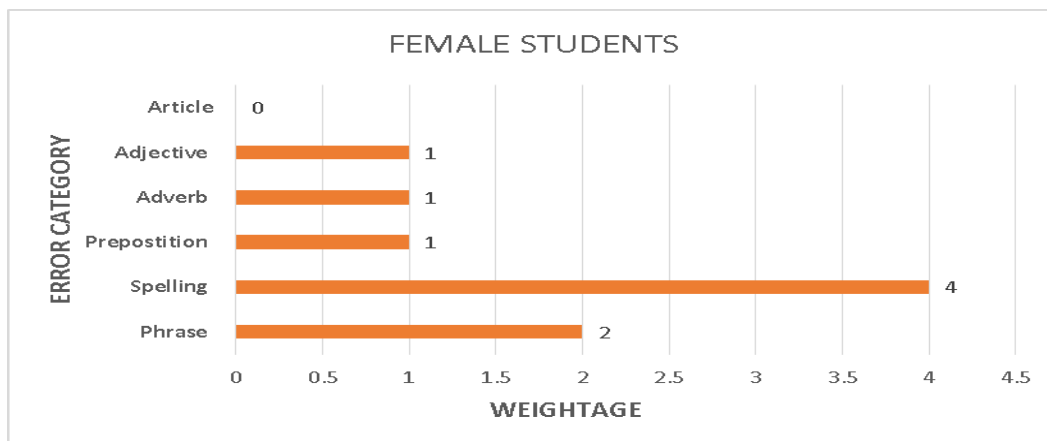
Figure 1. Illustrates the bar chart horizontally the percentage of errors across female students



1- The above graph shows that conjunction error in female students is 2%.

- 2- As shown in the graph female students have 3% frequency in making errors of pronoun.
- 3- We can see that female students make approximately 5% errors while using nouns.
- 4- The graph shows the frequency of 10% errors while using verb which are made by the female students.
- 5- Female students make 21 % frequency errors while using punctuation.

Figure 2. Illustrates the bar chart horizontally the percentage of errors across female students



- 1- The graph shows female students make 0% errors while using article.
- 2- Female students make 1% of errors while using adverb, preposition & adjective.
- 3- As shown in the graph female students make 4% of errors in spelling & 2% in phrase.

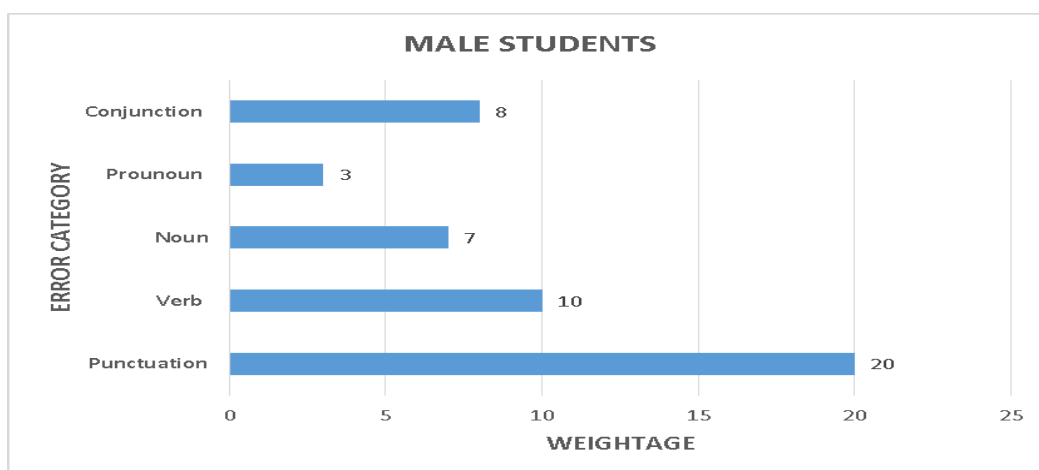
Table. 2 illustrates the frequency & percentage of male errors

ERRORS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Punctuation	20	32.79
Verb	10	16.39
Noun	7	11.48
Pronoun	3	4.92
Conjunction	8	13.11
Phrase	1	1.64

Spelling	4	6.56
Preposition	1	1.64
Adverb	0	0
Adjective	4	6.56
Article	3	4.92
TOTAL		
ERRORS	61	100

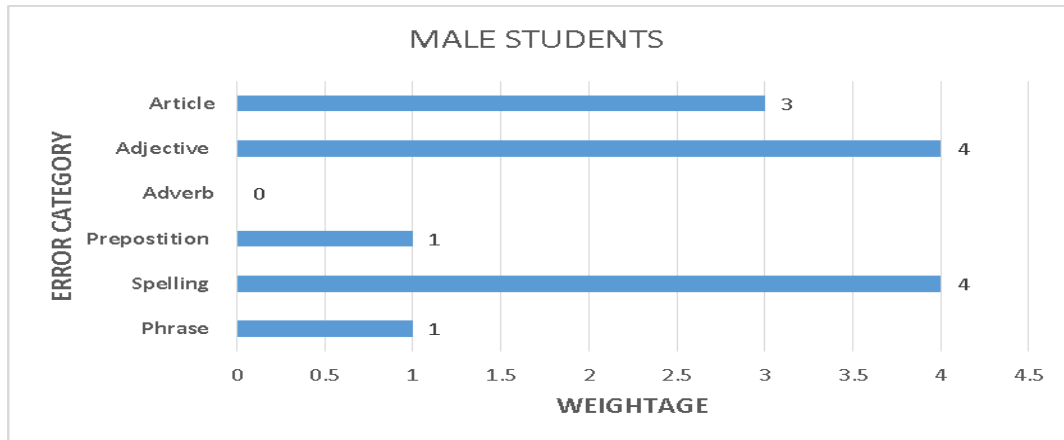
The above table shows the frequency & percentage errors in the writing skills of male students.

Figure 3. Illustrates the bar chart horizontally the percentage of errors across male students



- 1- The above graph shows that conjunction error in male students is 8%.
- 2- As shown in the graph male students have 3% frequency in making errors of prounoun.
- 3- We can see that male students make approximately 7% errors while using nouns.
- 4- The graph shows the frequency of 10% errors while using verbs which are made by the male students.
- 5- Male students make 20 % frequency errors while using punctuation.

Figure 4. Illustrates the bar chart horizontally the percentage of errors across male students



- 4- The graph shows male students make 3% errors while using article.
- 5- Male students make 4% of errors while using adjective.
- 6- They make 0% errors in the use of adverb.
- 7- As shown in the graph male students make 1% in the use of preposition.
- 8- Male students make 4% of errors in spelling & 1% in phrase.

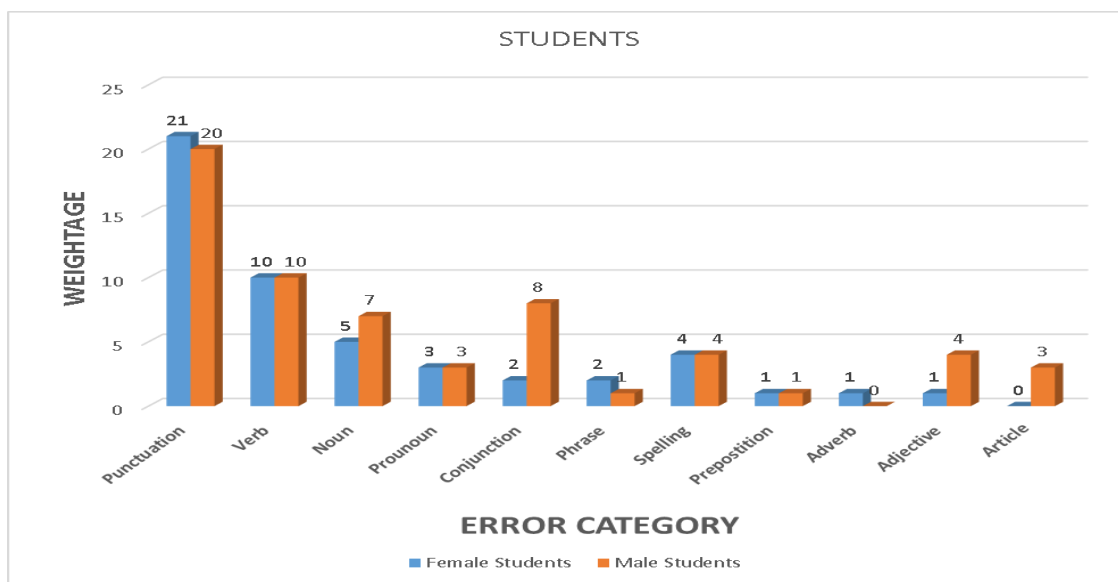
Table 3. illustrates the frequency & percentage of across speakers

ERRORS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Punctuation	41	36.94
Verb	20	18.02
Noun	12	10.81
Pronoun	6	5.41
Conjunction	10	9.01
Phrase	3	2.7
Spelling	8	7.21
Preposition	2	1.8
Adverb	1	0.9
Adjective	5	4.5
Article	3	2.7

TOTAL		
ERRORS	111	100

The above table shows the merged frequency & percentage errors in the writing skills of students.

Figure 5. Illustrates the bar chart horizontally the percentage of errors across female and male students



- 1- The graph shows the difference of 1% errors of punctuation in the write-ups of undergraduate students both female s & males. It shows that female students make more mistakes of punctuation as compare to male students.
- 2- This is clearly shown in the graph that both the students obtain same frequency of errors in the use of verb.
- 3- The difference of noun is 3%. We can say that in the use of noun female students are more efficient.
- 4- This is clearly shown in the graph that both the students obtain same frequency of errors in the use of pronoun.
- 5- The graph shows the difference of 6% errors of conjunction in the write-ups of undergraduate students both females & males. It shows that male students make more mistakes of conjunction as compare to female students.

- 6- The difference of phrase is 1%. So we can say that in the use of phrase male students are more efficient.
- 7- This is clearly shown in the graph that both the students obtain same frequency of errors in the use of spelling.
- 8- This is clearly shown in the graph that both the students obtain same frequency of errors in the use of preposition.
- 9- The difference of adverb is 1%. We can say that while using adverb male students are more efficient. Because male students didn't make any mistake while using adverb.
- 10- The graph shows the difference of 3% errors of adjective in the write-ups of undergraduate students both females & males. It shows that male students make more mistakes of adjective as compare to female students.
- 11- The difference of article is 3%. We can say that while using article female students are more efficient. Because they didn't make mistakes in the use of article.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that most common type of error which participants made was punctuation (36.94% out of all errors) while the least common type of error made by participants were adverb & preposition. According to the findings of this study, there was no major gender difference between kinds of errors which they were making in writing. For example frequency of errors of pronouns, verbs, spellings, nouns & phrase errors were almost congruent (similar) for both male & female participants. Although the male students made more conjunction errors as compared to female students i.e. 8 conjunction errors ~ 2 conjunction errors respectively. The table 1 signifies classify writing errors in male participants according to these frequencies (Punctuation: 32.79, Verb: 16.4%, Conjunction: 13.11%) while the remaining 37.7% were from different categories like phrase, usage of pronoun, adverb adjective, articles etc.. The table 2 shows errors of different types as per this frequency (Punctuation: 42%, verb: 20%, noun: 10%) while remaining 28% were different types errors including phrase, spelling, usage of preposition, adverb, articles etc.

Conclusion

From the interpretation of the data findings, it can be concluded that after analyzing & doing the research, the researchers were able to classify & elaborate different kinds of common errors the participants were making during English writing. It can be stated that participants made significant number of errors i.e. 111 errors (in 11 different categories). It is also proved from the findings from all 11 categories of errors, the frequency of punctuation & usage of verb errors is highest. It was also established that all 20 participants made errors while writing which is a bit alarming for an undergraduate level student. The causes behind this finding are either failure of our schooling system in which student's abilities are tested by their memorizing capability rather than their intellect & skills. On the other hand students are also responsible for their errors, negligence of importance of writing skills & lack of self-learning capabilities are also root foundations of these findings. The awareness of importance of writing skills is mandatory.

Suggestion/Recommendation

Due to natural norms, it is concluded that being human everyone can make mistakes or errors either in writing or other walks of life. No one is that perfect in this real world. Even students of undergraduate level made errors although they must be involved in academics for at least 12 years. Now after whole research & analyzing, researches would recommend that the students should focus on their writing skills & try to overcome the most significant kind of errors including punctuation, usage of verbs etc. some key points to both students & their English instructors which are:

- The students should be habitual of writing on daily basis, it should not be restricted to assessments only.
- The instructor should make the class so expectant of writing that they will be ready to write something anytime during class hours.
- Do most of the writing in class.
- The students should try to improve their writing skills through different mediums including books, internet, expert's advice etc.
- Teacher should encourage students to work by their mutual help as well.
- During writing tasks, the teacher should walk around the class to testify the progress of student(s).

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APPENDIX-1

Hello & kind greetings there! We are preparing a research paper named "Error Analysis in write-ups of undergraduate students" through this questionnaire. You are humbly requested to write a short paragraph on "Importance of Education" randomly according to your visions. It will be highly valued if you do this without anyone's help/opinion. Your need to fill these fields for data collection process. Your privacy will also be kept confidential. We are grateful to you in anticipation.

NAME:- _____
ID/ROLL NO:- _____ GENDER:- _____
SEMESTER:- _____ SECTION:- _____
UNIVERSITY:- _____

IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

FOR ANY HELP/QUERY, ASK US WITHOUT ANY HESITATION.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR EFFORTS & TIME

Master Hazma
Student of the Department of Computer Science
Sindh Madressatul Islam University
Karachi
Pakistan
mhali@stu.smiu.edu.pk

Rooman Khan
Student of the Department of Computer Science
Sindh Madressatul Islam University
Karachi
Pakistan
urooman@stu.smiu.edu.pk

Dr Abdul Malik Abbasi
Assistant Professor of English
Department of Allied Subjects
SMIU, Karachi
Pakistan
amabbasi@smiu.edu.pk