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**Syntactic Errors Made by Science Students
at the Graduate Level in Pakistan –
Causes and Remedies**

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Abstract

This article presents an overview of the errors committed by the students of science subjects. These students are predominantly concerned with the concepts of basic sciences like Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics. As a result, they fail to concentrate on the other subjects like English which is an integral part of their studies. The researchers took thirty samples of papers conducted in the internal examination of the Bachelor of Science degree students from the University of Sargodha. The researchers analyzed, evaluated and identified the errors committed by the learners on Pit Corder's (1981) model of error analysis, with slight changes, and elaborated them with tables and diagrams. Finally, on the basis of findings, certain recommendations are given for effective second language teaching to the students of sciences at graduate level.

1. Introduction

This study traces the reasons and causes of errors committed by the students of science subjects in learning their second language, i.e., English. The main aim of the study is to point out the

errors made by the undergraduate science students and then suggest some remedial measures to correct those errors, and to facilitate the learners as well as the subsequent researchers to open some new venues of error analysis.

The study further aims to give some suggestions and recommendations for the effective second language teaching at undergraduate level so that the research may render valuable service to the field of error analysis in Pakistan.

Moreover, the researchers aim at identifying the types of problems and errors made by the learners on S. Pit Corder's (1981) model with slight modifications, for it is of great importance in the field of error analysis.

This introductory part provides a short sketch of the aims of the present study. Section 2 provides the literature review based on error analysis, types of errors and procedure of error analysis. The main focus is on the model given by Pit Corder as mentioned earlier.

In section 3, we have discussed the methodology of the study. Section 4 shows the analysis of the data. We have applied a five-point procedure of error analysis in this section. Graphs and tables are used for explanation. The discussion portion in section 5 provides some points regarding various phonological, morphological and syntactic errors of the students. We have also given some recommendations based on the findings of the study.

Section 6 concludes the discussion. The sentences of the students are given at the end as annexure A.

2. Literature Review

Error analysis is an important field of ELT (English Language Teaching) which is an emerging field of Applied Linguistics. In the recent decades, ELT has been the most frequently studied field throughout the world. In this section, we have reviewed some of the important works conducted in the field of ELT generally and error analysis particularly.

2.1. Background

English came into the sub-continent through the trade and commerce as the merchants of East India Company were given a charter by Queen Elizabeth on December 31, 1600 to trade with India (Rehman, 1990). English was deliberately promoted for various reasons in the Indian subcontinent under the British rule. Apology for the introduction and propagation of English came in different arguments. (See Thirumalai (2002) <http://www.languageinindia.com/april2003/macaulay.html> for information on Lord Macaulay, who played a major role in the propagation and teaching of English in the Indian subcontinent.) English became necessary for all in the subcontinent very soon as they could not get jobs without knowing it.

After the creation of Pakistan, Pakistanis realized, though a bit late, that it is an important way of communication, especially if they want to survive in the international community. Now the status of English is different than what it was a century ago. In Pakistan, English is used as a compulsory subject till graduation and it has got a place even in the primary education. ELT is an independent discipline in the universities and subjects specialists are also inducted for the teaching of English in schools and colleges. However, there is a great need for the learners to acquire it adequately in its full spirit but, unfortunately, due to various reasons like intervention of L1, wrong teaching methodology, overgeneralization, redundancy, slip of the tongue, incomplete application of rules, fossilization and carelessness, learners tend to make many mistakes.

2.2. Error Analysis

Error Analysis is a branch of applied linguistics which involves collecting errors, studying them, classifying them in various ways and suggesting the possible causes and then giving some possible solutions. It is an approach to understanding second language acquisition. There are different perspectives for language acquisition, and some psychologists say that language is acquired in the same way as children learn how to ride a bicycle (e.g. Anderson 1983). Another alternative perspective is that the human activity for language is the product of a mental organ or faculty (Chomsky, 1980: Fodor, 1983), and thus there is no learning of language, just the growth of this faculty under certain environmental conditions.

Error Analysis was started when a need was felt to construct texts for the students and the students of L2 produced a lot of mistakes. Once the corpus is compiled, the errors are classified into types. This grouping, labeling sub-groups within a corpus is known generally as taxonomy. Various taxonomies for second language (L2) learners are used for errors. Richards (1971) classifies errors by their linguistic type.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 138-199) describe three other major types of taxonomies which classify errors by specific linguistic type and its a surface strategy taxonomy, a comparative taxonomy where a second language learner errors are classified by similarity with children's first language or by similarity with the errors made by L2 speakers from different L1 backgrounds. The third type is communicative effect taxonomy. Here errors classified by the effect they have on native speakers, whether in terms of comprehension or in terms of the way that non-native speakers are perceived by native speakers.

Salinker (1972 : 216-21) suggests five processes involved in the production of errors of second language learning, strategies of second-language communication and over generalization of target-language linguistic material. So, the error analysis is multifaceted, being an area of interest for language teachers and linguists, it brings practical and theoretical outcomes. The emphasis

placed by error analysis on the learners' power of hypothesis formation in the process of L2 acquisition was part of the trend towards a more student centered approach (Candlin, 1984) .

Errors can be either inter-lingual or intra-lingual and the latter may be a cause of faulty learning of the target language like over-generalization and over-simplification but the former result from L1 interference. However, all the errors are not because of L1 interference. Dulay and Burt (1982) found that around 80 % of errors could be explained without reference to L1 interference (Ellis, 1994:19). Rather than comparing L1 with the target language, the latter could be compared to the actual performance of learners to see what systematic error patterns emerge.

Second language acquisition cannot be effective if it is not very well supported by the teaching methodology. This is one of the best ways to facilitate the learner as the most appropriate methodology can make the task easier for the learner. Recognizing that not all the errors are due to L1 is a significant divergence and aims to produce more accurate results (information about learning process). In moving towards the mastery of L2, error analysis suggests that learners develop a series of "transitional dialects" (Corder, 1971) which are linked to the concept of inter language. A learner can only understand such abstract concept only when they are given by some trained teachers.

The problem which the learner is facing is that errors and mistakes are classified and identified only when a competent and trained teacher helps the learner understand the problems. Analysis of errors is comprised of techniques and skills which require some specialist teachers to deal with. The teacher will generate the required fluency, accuracy and will separate the mistakes of form from the mistakes of meaning. He or she will further apply some techniques to identify the errors through peer or group work.

2.3. Types of Errors

When a learner, of L1 or L2 has not learnt some thing and consistently gets it wrong, it is called an error. Corder (1973) says 'it is a breach of the language's code, as 'the learners have not yet internalized the formation rules of the code' and when an L1 learner has acquired something through native environment or an L2 learner has learnt something through classroom situation and both kind of learners sometimes use one form and sometimes the other, quite inconsistently, this inconsistency is called a mistake which are further, 'the result of some failure of performance' (1967: 18). These occur when the language user makes a slip such as a false start or a confusion of structure. On the other hand, a mistake is made when one miss-takes something. The learner knows the rule; sometimes he or she produces one form/and sometimes the other, i.e., sometimes the learner uses "he must go", sometimes "he must to go". This inconsistent deviation, we call mistake.

The last type of wrong usage is a lapse which may be due to lack of concentration; carelessness slip of the tongue, slip of the pen, shortness of memory, or fatigue, etc.

There is another type of mistakes which are called syntactic mistakes. Fay (1980), Garret (1975), and Motley (1985) have given eight kinds of syntactic mistakes like shift mistakes, substitution mistakes, blend words, stranding, dropping addition, wrong order and blend sentences are some of the other syntactic mistakes. Richards (1971) has also categorized certain errors.

Two Schools of Thought

There are basically two different schools of thought regarding mistakes made by people learning languages other than their own, i.e., second or foreign language.

The traditional school of thought considers errors as a flaw in learning and shows a highly hostile attitude towards errors. The teachers who follow this school of thought regard mistakes as undesirable a sign of failure, either on the part of the student to pay attention or to deal with language properly, or on the part of the teacher being unable to teach language items successfully. Norrish (1987) observes that “in many traditional language classes, students have been made to feel that errors bring discredit both on the teacher and the learner and have been reprimanded for making too many errors”.

On the other hand, the mentalists, who believe errors to be signs which tell us that the process of learning is going on. In other words, errors made by a learner shows that he is making his way to the mastery of language.

2.4. Procedures of Error Analysis

Linguists have identified different ways and means of correcting the errors made by the students for pedagogical purposes. Rod Ellis (1997) and Pit Corder (1973) are some important linguists. Pit Corder has given the following procedures for correction of errors:

1. Collection of a sample of learner language
2. Identification of error
3. Description of error
4. Explanation of error
5. Evaluation of error

3. Methodology

The purpose of the research is to find the reasons why the students are unable to reach to the desired goal in acquiring L2. For this, this paper seeks to investigate the learners' language output by analyzing the type and source of the errors made by the science students. Our subject was the university level students. Their field of study was pure sciences and they also studied English as one of their core subject.

3.1. Subjects

The subjects chosen for the present research are taken from the University of Sargodha. The English papers were taken from the internal examination with prior permission. All the students are from the same university with different classes.

3.2. Instruments

The researchers collected the data from the scripts of the students and used their worksheets as well as the sentences from the papers for analysis and experimentation. The researchers further used the sentences in the model mentioned above and drew findings.

4. Data Analysis

This section deals with the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the scripts of the B.Sc. students through the tools mentioned in the previous chapter. The nature and quantity of data need no complicated statistical formula for its analysis in order to maintain clarity and objectivity. Analyses have been shown in the form of tables which were analyzed in Microsoft Excel 2003 in order to generate frequency and percentage of the occurrence of errors. Different variables of the data were coded and divided into different categories. These variables were further analyzed. The number of occurrences was noted and pie charts were developed using Excel. These pie charts were quite easy to understand and interpret in the end. The column chart helped a lot in assessing the overall evaluation of the students and the errors and mistakes they committed. Analysis of each graph is given below the table in order to facilitate the readers. At the end, the researcher has drawn conclusion, by keeping in view the results of data analysis.

Table 1 Detail of the Errors committed by the Students

S. No:	Sentence	Recognition	Interpretation	Reconstruction	Explanation	Classification
	Language in India www.languageinindia.com					273
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1.	The parents want to you to work at fields and earn something.	Yes The sentence is erroneous	The student wanted to say, "The parents want you to work at fields and earn something."	The parents want you to work at fields and earn something.	Double preposition used. Lack of knowledge of Preposition	The error of Preposition
2.	He says that a four footed animal is running on around.	Do	The student wanted to say, "A four footed animal is running around."	A four footed animal is running around.	Wrong learning / Lack of knowledge of preposition	Preposition error
3.	In North America and England, the food is ----- abundance.	Do	The student wanted to say, "The food is in abundance in North America."	The food is in abundance in North America.	Lapse in writing/lack of knowledge of preposition	Dropping / Omission
4.	Mr. Mitty as the commander, ordered switched on the lights.	Do	The student wanted to say the same sentence in direct narration like Mr. Mitty, as the commander, ordered, "switch on the lights."	Mr. Mitty as the commander ordered "switch on the lights."	Lack of knowledge of imperative sentences, punctuation.	Tense/punctuation, inverted commas
5.	From out wardly, usects looks very delicate.	Do	The student wanted to say that apparently insects look very delicate	From outwardly, insects look very delicate.	Tenses, spellings and morphology errors	Grammar errors (tenses, syntax and spellings)
6.	The writer points out that the nation which love its language can safe guard its freedom.	Do	The students wanted to say, "the writer wants to say that the nation which loves its language, can safe guard its freedom.	The writer wants to say that the nation which loves its language, can safe guard its freedom.	Tenses, spellings and morphology errors	Grammar errors (tenses, syntax and spellings)
7.	In a few years, he become a great writer of Islam.	Do	The student wanted say that he (M Asad) became a great writer of Islam in a few years.	In a few years, he became a great writer of Islam.	Tense/ SVA	Grammar error (syntax and morphology)

8.	The language of the country reflects the condition and sir Hamel know this secret.	Do	The student wanted to say that the language of the country reflects the condition and sir Hamel knows this secret.	The language of the country reflects the condition and sir Hamel knows this secret.	Lack of control over tenses, word construction and spellings are also poor.	Grammar error (syntax and morphology) Past tense
9.	His deep study of Islam shows that he haves Islam.	Do	The student wanted to say that his deep study of Islam shows that he knows Islam.	His deep study of Islam shows that he knows Islam.	Lack of control over the use of verb/tense	SVA/compound Sentence
10.	They ____ passing through Jeddah.	Do	The student wanted to say that they were passing through Jeddah.	They were passing through Jeddah.	Lack of knowledge of Tense	Lapse/psychological
11.	They pay the attention of the French Language.	Do	The student wanted to say that they pay attention on the French language.	They pay attention on the French language.	Lack of knowledge of SVA and compound sentence.	Tense/SVA
12.	The Hamel writes Alsace on the different corners of the class.	Do	The student wanted to say that Hamel writes Alsace on the different corners of the class.	Hamel writes Alsace on the different corners of the class.	Unconscious mistake/lapse The mistake may be of confusion.	Content word / lapse
13.	These are the last words of the Hamel's Speech.	Do	The students wanted to say that these are the last words of the Hamel's speech.	These are the last words of the Hamel's speech.	Omission/psychological	Omission
14.	The Russel Points out that science is involved in every field of life.	Do	The students wanted to say that Russel Points out that science is involved in every field of life.	Russel Points out that science is involved in every field of life.	Lack of knowledge about article and preposition	Substitution /deletion
15.	This is a last word of the	Do	The student wanted to say	This is the last word of the	Lack of knowledge of	Function word Addition

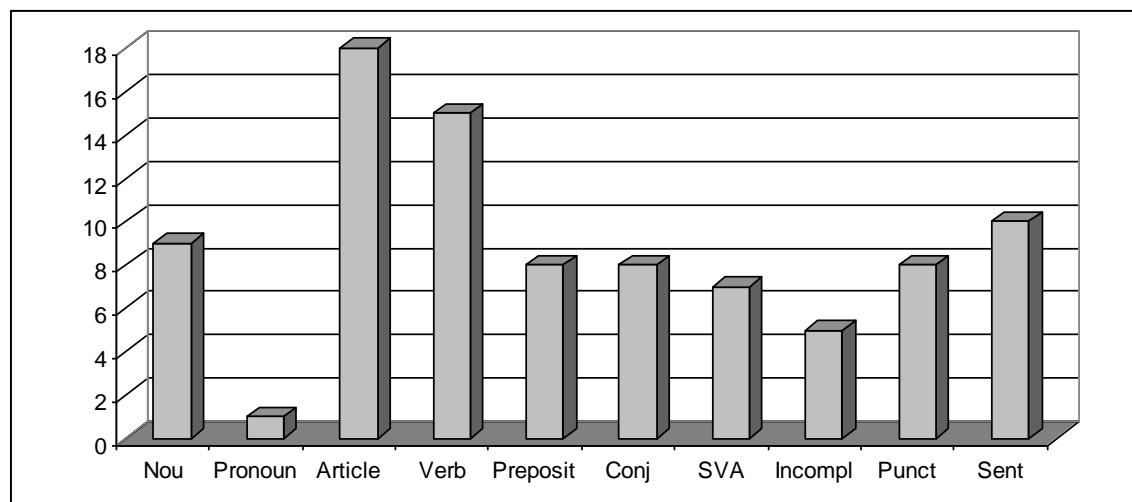
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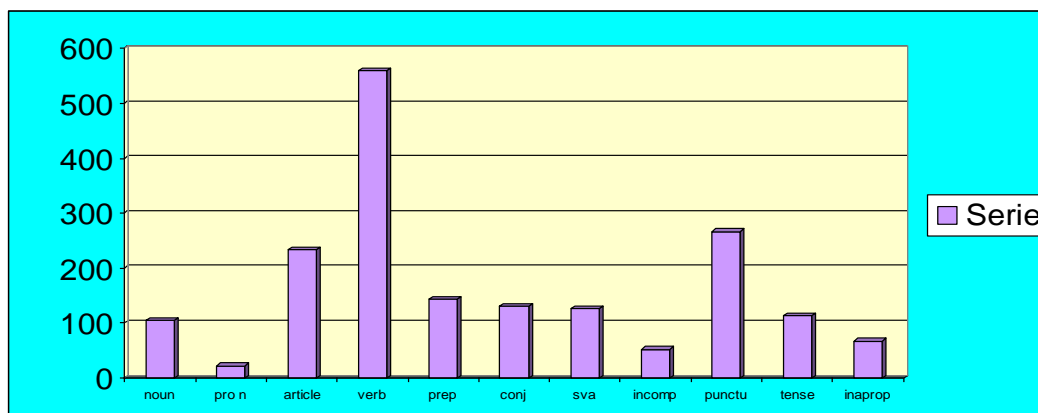
	lecture.		“This is the last word of the lecture.”	lecture.	article	
16.	His last lecture was attended by a villagers, pupile.	Do	The student wanted to say, “His last lecture was attended by the villagers and pupils.”	His last lecture was attended by the villagers and pupils.	Lack of knowledge of punctuation	Misuse of punctuation

The above table is self explanatory in which different types of mistakes are given which are taken from the data collected from the papers of the subjects. It shows that all the sentences were faulty for one reason or the other. Most of the errors were due to the lack of the knowledge of grammar. Graph 1, shows the nature of the errors in detail:



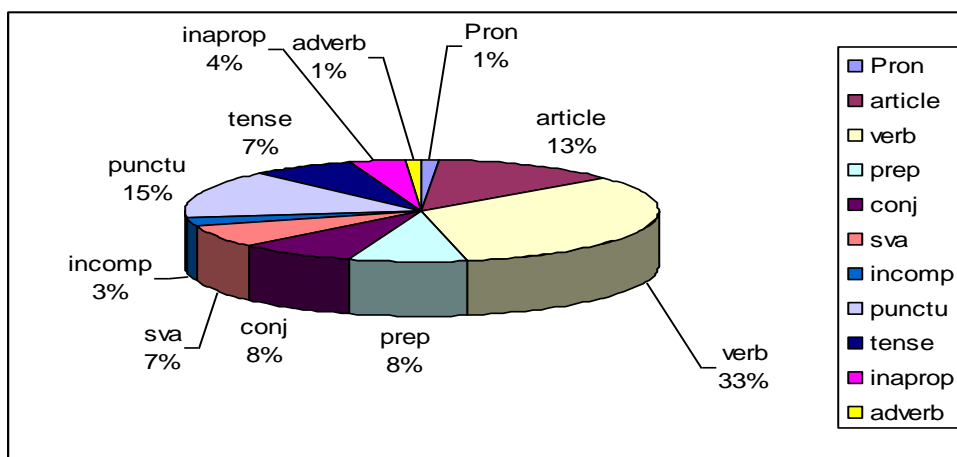
Graph 1 The Nature of the Errors Committed by Students

The above graph shows the mistakes committed by one representative student who has shown that he has committed 17 % of article mistakes and 15 % of mistakes were related to the use of verb. 7% of errors are of SVA which may also be considered as verb mistakes. Graph 2 will show the accumulative results of the analysis for all the students.



Graph 2 Accumulative Results of the Analyses

The above graph shows the total number of mistakes committed by all the students. This graph again gives us the picture that verb and the article were the most affected grammatical classes where the students have made maximum number of errors 570 and 280. For further explanation, we have drawn the results on the following pie-chart in the shape of percentage of the errors.

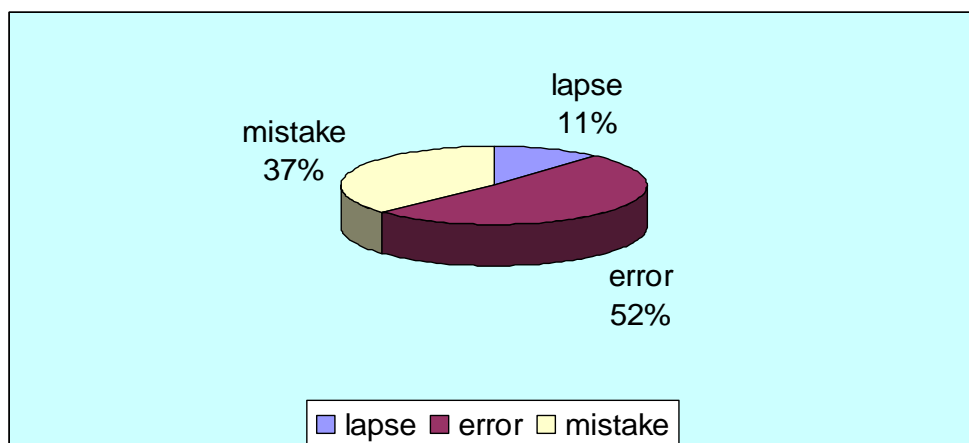


Graph 3 The Overall Performance of the Students

The above graph shows the overall performance of the students by which we come to know that most problematic areas for the students are the verb followed by the article which are 32 % and 14 % respectively. However, the mistakes of adverb and pronoun are quite a few i.e. 1 % each.

For further analysis of the overall performance, we have drawn on our conclusion in the form of another pie-chart. This shows that the nature of the errors, mistakes and lapses of the students.

This idea is based on the evaluation and improvement of the teaching of second language to the students. The following pie-chart shows percentage of them:



Graph 4 The Evaluation of the Performance of the Students

The pie-chart shows the overall performance of all the students. It clearly reveals that most of the students need to work on the verb and it covers 33% of the total graph in the table. This shows that one third of the total mistakes are of verb and if the errors of tense and SVA are included, it makes 47% of the total area. Moreover, the areas of punctuation and article are also important to note which take 28% of the total mistakes. Since there is no parallel to the article in Urdu language, therefore, the students have to face a lot of problems regarding article.

5. Discussion

This section focuses on findings, suggestions and recommendations after the analysis of data taken from the scripts. Based on our analysis of data, charts and tables in the last section, the researchers have drawn the findings and their suggestions related to remedies of the errors in this section.

5.1. Findings

The following are the findings of the study:

- Data analysis shows that most of the errors are found in the area of the verb i.e. 33%. The other two variables like tense and SVA are also related to the verb. So, if errors of all the above mentioned three variables are counted, it makes 47% of the total errors committed by the students. This shows that the students are facing a lot of problems in this area. So,

the teachers need to work particularly on the verb. A sentence can be made with noun, adjective or preposition but it cannot be made without a verb.

- The above graph indicates that errors cover 52% of the total area which shows the lack of knowledge. How can a test be conducted from the students if they have not learnt the concept? It depends on the teaching strategy and teaching practice how the teacher executes and regulates them. This further shows that the continuity in teaching practice is lacking on the part of the teacher.
- The second important part of the graph is of mistakes which covers 37%. The part again shows that the mistakes of students are teaching induced as the mistakes may be a result of misunderstanding of rules of usage. It further shows that the teaching methodology may be faulty and the instructions are not effectively imparted to the students.
- Another factor for the mistakes may be of course content which may itself be faulty. The faulty content may lead to faulty grading or sequencing for which teacher cannot be held responsible.
- The data indicate that there are some faults in the construction of tests as the teacher himself administers the test and errors are occurred again. The objective of the test needs to be concentrated further. If the syntax is to be concentrated through evaluation, it should focus only the concerned part and if only content is to be stressed upon, there is no need to check it in detail. So, the objective of the evaluation of the scripts should be quite clear.
- Students studying Inter lingual method are badly confused in dealing with article because there is no article in Urdu. That is why, 13 % errors are found in article. So, the teachers teaching through GTM have to be careful while teaching article or the systems of English not existing in Urdu. Researches have been conducted on these differences under contrastive analysis during the evaluation of Audio-Lingual Method (Richards and Rogers, 1995).
- Data analysis regarding errors indicates that teaching methodology used by the teachers is not up to the required standard due to which the students are making a high rate of mistakes.

5.2. Suggestions

The following suggestions have been made on the basis of the findings of the last subsection.

- A test is the real outcome and feedback for the teacher and it shows whether the quality of teaching is really imparted or not. A teacher should provide tension free environment to conduct the test so that the students may feel comfortable during the test. This would not only facilitate the students but also help the students improve their efficiency. Moreover, the teacher should adopt the techniques in which discriminatory treatment may be avoided. There is always a fear for the examination and if the exam phobia is reduced from students' minds, there are a lot of chances of improvement of their improvement.
- The second important part regarding the test is that it should be valid for which the teacher should be very careful while preparing the items. Moreover, it should be conducted from the parts of the syllabus about which the students have already been given practical guidance.
- The teaching methodology should be adopted according to the contents being taught it should be according to the objectives of the lesson. The selection of the subject plays a key role in imparting pedagogical instructions. So, the syllabus should be recommended after thorough research. It should not be based upon experience of the experts only. The teachers and students should also be involved and their need analysis should be proper so that the grading and analysis may be up to the mark.
- The preparation and conduction of the test should follow the proper procedure. The examiner should clearly write down the objectives of the test and prepare the test according to those objectives.
- Bi-lingual method should be discouraged and mono-lingual method should be encouraged so that the mother tongue intervention may be reduced.
- The teacher should make analysis of the students' shortcomings and concentrate on the particular syntactic errors which occur repeatedly. He can further assign them some activities, games and drills to rectify the errors.
- The teacher should enliven the otherwise boring class of language. He can use different drills and exercises full of interest so that the students may not get bored.
- Public sector colleges and universities are always over crowded. The increased number of students does not allow the teacher to concentrate the writings of students. If the strength of the class is reduced to a reasonable level i.e. 30 to 35, the student's performance may be increased.

6. Conclusion

The data analysis has indicated inherent flaws in the overall teaching of English language in public sector colleges and universities. Teaching of English includes, course contents, teaching methodology and evaluation. The data analyzed clearly reveals that either the evaluation is invalid or methodology and contents are inappropriate. Such a high rate of errors and mistakes as indicated by data analysis indicates that little teaching of English is in operation. Under these circumstances, it is inevitable to change the existing contents and incorporate new methodologies which are more learner-centered and functional in their nature.

The course contents are required to be more activity based than to be merely theoretical and prosaic. Further researches may be conducted to find apt contents and effective methodologies for language teaching. The course contents may be supplemented with teaching manuals for the teachers. Teachers may be trained to carry out continuous analysis of the learners' performance in the target language and to devise suitable strategies to eradicate the deficiency in their linguistic performance. The researchers can conclude the discussion by emphasizing the improvement of teaching strategies and teaching methodologies which may lead to better results.

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ANNEXURE-1

PREPOSITION

1. The parents want to you to work at fields and earn something.
2. He says that a four footed animal is running on around.
3. I visited through many areas of Sargodha.
4. The desire of T.V becomes addiction and we cannot fulfill this desire.
5. Our social place becomes down and also affects on the future of our children.

OMISSION

1. In North Americal and England, the food is ----- abundance.
2. Mr. Mitty as the commander, ordered switched on the lights.
3. Mr. Mitty went into imagination where he was the captain of the war.

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4. From out wardly, usects looks very delicate.

VERB

1. The writer points out that the nation which love (S) its language can safe guard its freedom.
2. In a few years, he become a great writer of Islam.
3. The language of the country reflects the condition and sir Hamel know (s) this secret.
4. The story awaken (s) feelings of love in one's father land.
5. His deep study of Islam shows that he have (s) Islam.
6. They () passing through Jeddah.
7. They do not gives attention to their language.
8. The German master point () out the culture of France Struggle.

ARTICLE

1. They pay the attention of the French Language.
2. The Russian strongly advocate the science of education.
3. The Hamel writes Alsace on the different corners of the class.
4. These are the last words of the Hamel's Speech.
5. The Russel Points out that science is involved in every field of life.

INAPPROPRIATE SENTENCES

1. This is a last word of the lecture.
2. His last lecture was attended by a villagers, pupile.
3. All-aliments of liver are covered by adultration.
4. Now we can reach from one part of the world to the other within _____ minute.
5. They cannot us with a world within minute.

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