An Error Analysis of Expository Essay Writing of English as Second Language (ESL) Undergraduate Learners in Pakistan

Moizza Ghyas¹
Hira Sakhawat²

Abstract: This study focused on the expository essay writing of undergraduate of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Pakistan. The study aimed to identify the most common errors made by these students and analyze the reasons behind those. The study used the quantitative method to conduct error analysis. To conduct error analysis, a sample of eight expository essays written by undergraduate second language learners of the selected colleges was analyzed, and the errors were identified and categorized. The data analysis identified the errors made by second language learners in expository essays, including grammatical, vocabulary, syntax, and organization errors. The sample students also struggled with using the correct verb tense, forming proper sentence structure, or accurately using prepositions. The results of the study provided insights into the areas that need improvement in the learning of English as a second language in Pakistan, as well as the strategies to address the identified errors. Further research may include more areas of grammar.

Keywords: error analysis, expository essay writing, grammatical errors, vocabulary errors, syntax errors, language learning strategies

¹M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Linguistics, Riphah International University, moizzamir25@gmail.com
²English Language Instructor, The Citizen Foundation School, hirasakhi63@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54692/jelle.2024.0601215

Introduction

Learning a different language is sometimes difficult since the target language has different elements compared to the native language. These differences sometimes cause students to make errors while using them. Among writing, reading, speaking, and listening in English, writing is the most complex aspect, but it is a crucial skill for students to learn. Students who have the ability and competency to write English will be able to express themselves effectively.

Background of the Study
Language is used by learners as a tool to shape their discourse, but, side by side, they talk about their feelings, who they are, and how they view relationships with the world (Norton, 2000). Second language learning and identity construction is a dominant area of research (Canagarajah, 1999). The English language was first established in the Indo-Pak subcontinent in the 16th century by British rulers (Mahboob, 2015). It has become a part of almost every single institution in Pakistan, which enhances the communication skills of students so they can easily communicate or argue with others. It is used by college and university communities not only as written communication or one of its programs but also as an intellectual activity, learning method, and instruction (Weigle, 2002).

Error analysis is a technique used to report the errors that appear in the learners’ language, discover if the errors are systematic, and, if possible, explain why they occur or what they are (Corder, 1976). An error is the use of a word, speech act, or grammatical item in such a way that it appears incomplete and is important to incomplete learning (Richard 2002). Errors are 'signals' that indicate a real learning process and that the learner has not yet acquired a well-structured linguistic competence in the target language (Hendrickson 1987). It is the tool through which one can find errors in the text or anything. It makes the academic thing such an easier way to detect or figure out the errors in the selected text. Techniques to identify, classify, and systematically identify receptive forms produced by a foreign learner using the principles and procedures of linguistics (Crystal, 2011).

The expository essay gives us the real based information through facts that are happening in the study. It helps us find an experimental way of finding out a solution to our problem. The specific language that is used in this is very simple or easy to understand because it helps us understand the sample very easily.

A collection of errors is referred to as a "bundle of errors" or simply a "bug collection." In linguistics, a collection of errors is referred to as an "error corpus."
This is a compilation of language samples, collected from learners of a second or foreign language, that contain mistakes or errors in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or other aspects of the language.

**Statement of the Problem**

Error analysis is a process used to identify the errors made by second language (ESL) learners in their use of the target language. The problem of error analysis in the context of ESL undergraduate learners may include:

- Recognising the usual linguistic errors that occur in ESL undergraduate learners
- Inadequate focus on error correction ESL learners may not receive enough feedback on their errors, which can hinder their progress.

Overall, effective error analysis requires a comprehensive understanding of the types of errors that ESL learners make, a systematic approach to identifying and categorising these errors, and a focus on providing meaningful and appropriate feedback to support language development.

**Aim of Study**

The study aims to analyse the errors from the required sample, which is collected from the college students in the form of expository essays, to find out what errors they make while writing and how to correct them and reconstruct the writing of the students by using the method of collection of errors. The interlanguage theory is used to analyse the study.

**Research Objectives**

- To investigate the most common errors students make in their ESL expository essays.

**Research Questions**

- What are the most common errors made by undergraduate students in their ESL essays?

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of error analysis in the context of ESL undergraduate learners can be highlighted by using an expository essay. Error analysis provides valuable insights into the linguistic challenges faced by non-native speakers of a language and can help to give them better
instruction to meet the needs of their students in a better way. Error analysis can provide information about the common types of errors made by ESL learners, which can help us understand the areas in which their students may need additional support. For example, an analysis of errors made in verb conjugation or pronunciation may indicate a need for more focused instruction in these areas.

In addition, error analysis can help us identify the sources of errors, such as interference from the learner's first language or a lack of understanding of grammatical rules. This information can be used to develop targeted instructional strategies to address the underlying causes of errors.

**Limitations of Study**

Despite its many benefits, error analysis of expository essay writing by ESL undergraduate learners also has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Some of these limitations are:

- With a limited focus on individual errors, error analysis often focuses on individual errors rather than considering the overall coherence and meaning of the text. This can lead to a narrow view of the writing abilities of the ESL learner and may not accurately reflect their overall writing skills.
- Error analysis may not consider the fact that errors are a normal part of language development for non-native speakers. Some errors may reflect the learners’ attempt to find a solution to a linguistic challenge rather than a lack of competence in the target language.
- Error analysis may not consider the situational context in which the language was used, such as the topic, audience, or purpose of the text. This can limit the understanding of the errors made and their impact on the overall meaning of the text.

**Operational Definitions**

**ESL:** ESL (English as a Second Language) refers to a specific, clear, and measurable description of what the term means in each context. It outlines how the concept of ESL will be operationalized, or put into practice, in a particular research study or educational program.
Error analysis: Error analysis is a specific, clear, and measurable description of the term in the given context. It outlines how the concept of error analysis will be operationalized, or put into practice, in a particular research study or educational program.

Inter-language Theory: The Inter-language Theory contends that a learner's errors are not just mistakes, but a potential part of the interlanguage system that they are constructing.

Expository essay: An expository essay is a written piece that explains, clarifies, or defines a topic or issue by presenting information clearly and logically, without personal opinions or emotions.

Literature Review
The literature on error analysis in second language writing provides valuable insights into the nature of errors made by ESL learners and the factors influencing these errors. Understanding the underlying causes of errors is crucial for effective language instruction and curriculum development. This literature review synthesises key findings from recent studies on error analysis in ESL writing, focusing on grammatical, vocabulary, syntax, and organisational errors.

According to Corder (1976), an error takes place when a deviation arises because of a lack of knowledge. It represents a lack of competence. An error is a systematic deviation when a learner has not learned something and consistently gets it wrong (James, 2003). The errors can be defined in terms of the difference between the learner’s utterances and the reconstructed version.” In this way, errors fall into four categories: omission of some required element; addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element; selection of an incorrect element; and disordering of the elements (Corder, 1976). Errors are due to what Richards (1971) mentioned: ignorance of rule restrictions and incomplete application of rules. The sources of errors in studying a language might be derived from the interference of the learners’ mother tongue and the general characteristics of rule learning (Richards, 2015).

Grammatical Errors
Grammatical errors are among the most common types of errors observed in ESL writing. According to Ellis (1994), grammatical errors occur due to lack of knowledge or competence in the target language. These errors include incorrect verb tense usage, subject-verb agreement issues, and article misuse (James, 1998). For example, ESL learners may struggle with distinguishing between countable and uncountable nouns, leading to errors in article usage (Leki, 1990). Research has also highlighted the role of first language interference in grammatical errors. Chaudron (1986) suggests that ESL learners may transfer grammatical structures from their native language into English, resulting in errors such as word order inversion or incorrect use of prepositions. Additionally, sociolinguistic factors, such as language exposure and proficiency level, can influence the frequency and types of grammatical errors made by ESL learners (Odlin, 1989).

Recent studies have employed corpus-based approaches to analyze grammatical errors in ESL writing. By examining large collections of learner texts, researchers can identify patterns of error occurrence and distribution (Biber et al., 1999). For instance, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) conducted a corpus-based analysis of ESL essays and found that grammatical errors were more prevalent in certain linguistic features such as relative clauses and modal verbs.

**Vocabulary Errors**

Vocabulary errors are another significant aspect of ESL writing, affecting the clarity and coherence of the text. These errors involve lexical selection, word form, or collocational patterns (Laufer & Nation, 1999). ESL learners often face challenges in accurately recalling and using vocabulary words in context, leading to lexical errors (Nation, 2001). Research suggests that vocabulary errors can stem from a variety of factors, including limited vocabulary knowledge, lack of exposure to authentic language input, and ineffective vocabulary learning strategies (Schmitt, 2000). Moreover, L1 interference can influence vocabulary choice and usage in ESL writing (Corder, 1981). For example, ESL learners may rely on direct
translation from their native language, resulting in inappropriate word choices or phrasing (Cook, 2001).

Recent studies have explored the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction techniques in reducing lexical errors in ESL writing. Nation and Macalister (2010) advocate for explicit vocabulary instruction methods, such as vocabulary notebooks and word cards, to enhance learners' lexical knowledge and usage. Additionally, corpus-based analysis can provide insights into the frequency and distribution of vocabulary errors in ESL writing (Liu & Jiang, 2015).

Syntax Errors
Syntax errors refer to violations of grammatical rules governing sentence structure and word order. These errors can occur at various levels of syntactic complexity, from basic sentence formation to complex clause structures (Kroll & Stewart, 1994). ESL learners often struggle with syntactic features such as subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences (Ferris, 2002).

The acquisition of syntactic structures in a second language is influenced by factors such as language input, proficiency level, and cognitive processing capacity (Fotos & Ellis, 1991). For example, ESL learners may overgeneralize grammatical rules or apply syntactic patterns inconsistently, leading to errors in sentence construction (White, 2003). Moreover, syntactic errors can result from incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of target language grammar (Ellis, 2008).

Recent research has investigated the role of corrective feedback in addressing syntax errors in ESL writing. Ferris (2010) suggests that explicit error correction techniques, such as focused written feedback and peer editing, can help learners identify and correct syntactic errors. Furthermore, corpus-based analysis can facilitate the identification of common syntactic errors and their distribution across different learner populations (Boulton, 2009).

Organizational Errors
Organizational errors pertain to the overall structure and coherence of the
written text. These errors can manifest as lack of paragraph unity, unclear thesis statements, or inconsistent argumentation (Hyland, 2003). ESL learners struggle with organizing their ideas logically and cohesively, resulting in disjointed or poorly structured essays (Swales, 2004).

The development of organizational skills in ESL writing is influenced by factors such as genre awareness, rhetorical conventions, and writing proficiency (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). For instance, ESL learners may struggle with adapting to the organizational patterns typical of academic discourse, such as the introduction-body-conclusion structure (Bitchener&Basturkmen, 2006).

Recent studies have explored pedagogical approaches to enhancing organizational skills in ESL writing. Swales and Feak (2012) advocate for explicit instruction in genre-based writing strategies, such as outlining and paragraphing techniques. Additionally, corpus-based analysis can provide insights into the organizational features of proficient academic writing and help

learners develop effective organizational strategies (Charles, 2007).

In conclusion, error analysis in ESL writing encompasses a range of linguistic features, including grammatical, vocabulary, syntax, and organizational errors. Understanding the underlying causes of these errors is essential for designing effective language instruction and supporting ESL learners' writing development. Recent research has employed diverse methodological approaches, such as corpus-based analysis and pedagogical intervention studies, to investigate error patterns and inform instructional practices in ESL writing classrooms. By addressing the specific needs of ESL learners and providing targeted feedback and instruction, educators can help facilitate their development as proficient writers in English.

**Theoretical Framework**

**History and Development of Interlanguage Theory**

The term interlanguage was first introduced into the literature by Selinker and Lamendella (1978) in 1972. Selinker
introduced the concept of interlanguage, which was based on Corder’s previous work on the nature of language learners’ errors.

What is a Theory About?
Interlanguage theory is a linguistic theory that looks at the differences between a learner's native language and the language they are learning. It suggests that a learner's native language influences their ability to learn a second language and that they make use of their native language grammar to construct the new language.

Salient Features of Interlanguage Theory:
The salient features of Interlanguage Theory include:

- Use of an interlanguage different from the native language, as well as the target language
- Development of the interlanguage in a systematic and rule-governed way
- A continuum of language forms from the native language, through the inter-language to the target language
- Gradual transfer of the learner’s native language rules and structures to the target language
• The emergence of new and unique features of the interlanguage as the learner progresses.

Practical Application of Interlanguage Theory in the Expository Essay of Undergraduate ESL Learners

Analyzing writing tasks: Interlanguage Theory can be used to analyze the demands of different writing tasks and the impact they have on ESL learners' ability to produce language in their second language. This information can be used to select writing tasks that are appropriate for ESL learners at different stages of proficiency.

Conceptual Framework

Error analysis is an important component of interlanguage theory and involves identifying and analyzing the errors that ESL learners make in their writing. Conceptual framework helps to understand the language difficulties that students are facing and to design strategies that target these difficulties. Expository essays are an independent variable, a common assignment for undergraduate students and there are
several common errors that they tend to make.

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm of this study is post-positivism. It sees research problems as an outcome of certain causes and then is interested in investigating the causes. There are empirical observations and experiments in it. Post-positivism is a philosophical approach that recognizes that knowledge is socially constructed and subjective. In an error analysis of expository essays written by ESL undergraduate learners, post-positivism provides a framework for understanding the errors made by these learners as a result of their cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds.

Research Method

The study uses the quantitative method and collection of errors procedures of error analysis itself. This study identifies the students’ errors by writing an English essay. On the other hand, the researcher will calculate the errors and make the corrections or reconstructions. The study also tries to find out the possible causes behind these errors. The study used an English essay as a research tool. The
students were asked to write essays on two different topics.

**Research Design**

This research is conducted by using a document analysis. Quantitative research is a type of research that uses numerical data to analyze and test hypotheses. It emphasizes objectivity, reliability, and validity.

**Data Collection**

The major source of data used to find answers to the research questions is the written essays of 8 participants from the chosen college. The topics given in the essays were general but expository, regarding collecting the data the study provided a test which is in the form of an essay.

**Data Collection Procedure**

All 8 participants were required to write on one of the 2 different topics: 1) Why Do I love Pakistan? 2) My First Day at College. They were asked to write approximately 200 to 300 words within 35 minutes.

The analysis of written essays was derived from Corder’s (1967) method of error analysis. This method had three steps: (1) Collection of sample errors, (2) Identification of errors, and (3) Description of the error. The study presented a case of students of the 12th class and discussed the findings of its objectives. First, the errors made by the students were classified; second, the common errors were identified; and finally, these errors made by the learners were corrected.

The errors made by the students were classified; second, the common errors were identified with illustrative examples; and finally, these errors made by the learners were corrected by examples.

**Identification of Errors**

In this step, the study gained the data and tried to find out the grammatical errors by analyzing the errors. The study tried to analyze the data as objectively as possible.

**Classification of Errors**
Once the errors had been identified, the researcher classified them into the following categories of grammatical rules, for example:

- Errors in using verb forms
- Errors in the use of the article
- Errors in the use of prepositions
- Errors in the use of punctuation

**Findings**

The analysis was conducted on essays written by 12th-grade students, focusing on grammatical errors using Corder's (1967) method of error analysis. The errors were categorized into five types: tense, spellings, articles, prepositions, and punctuation.

**Table 1: Distribution of Grammatical Errors by Error Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error Category</th>
<th>Count of Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tense</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spellings</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 showed that total 69 grammatical errors were identified across the sample. These errors were further classified into specific categories.

Further, Utilizing Corder's (1967) method of error analysis, errors were categorized into tense, spellings, articles, prepositions and punctuation.

**Table 2: Distribution of Grammatical Errors Among Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Spellings</th>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Punctuation</th>
<th>Tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 presented a summary of the distribution of errors among the students. In total, 69 grammatical errors were identified across the essays. The distribution of errors varied among the students with some demonstrating proficiency in certain areas while struggling in others.

**Types of Errors**

The most common errors were in spellings with a total of 20 errors identified. These errors encompassed misspellings of words such as "Pakistani" instead of "Pakistan."

Tense errors accounted for 17 instances, indicating challenges in using the correct verb tense within sentences. For instance, errors such as "I can felt love for my country" demonstrated difficulties with verb tense agreement.

Punctuation errors amounted to 12 instances, indicating issues with the placement and usage of punctuation marks. For example, the sentence "We had a meeting on the beautiful fresh and grassy ground" lacked proper comma usage.

Articles and prepositions accounted for 11 and 9 errors, respectively. Errors in articles involved instances where the wrong article was used or omitted altogether, while prepositional errors indicated difficulties in selecting the appropriate preposition to convey meaning accurately.

Examples of errors identified within the essays include:

**Tense:** "I can felt love for my country."

(Correction: "I can feel love for my country.")
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Spellings: "Pakistani is a Islamic country." (Correction: "Pakistan is an Islamic country.")

Article: "I have great love of my country." (Correction: "I have great love for my country.")

Preposition: "I have been eaten it's wheat." (Correction: "I have been eating its wheat.")

Punctuation: "We had a meeting on the beautiful fresh and grassy ground." (Correction: "We had a meeting on the beautiful, fresh, and grassy ground.")

These findings provide insights into the common grammatical errors made by 12th-grade students in their essays, highlighting areas where further instruction and practice may be beneficial.

Discussion
Based on the collected data, the findings show that errors in tense usage are the most frequent, followed by spelling mistakes, punctuation errors, issues with articles, and finally, errors involving prepositions. Here is a description of each error category and what the count of errors implies:

Tense (Total Errors: 17): This indicates that students frequently misuse verb tenses in their writing. They may have difficulty in understanding when to use different tenses or how to conjugate verbs properly for past, present, or future actions.

Spellings (Total Errors: 20): The number of spelling errors suggests that students struggle with the correct spelling of words in English, which could be due to the complex nature of English orthography or a lack of familiarity with the standard written form of words.

Article (Total Errors: 11): Errors in this category involve the misuse or omission of definite (the) and indefinite articles (a, an). ESL learners often find article usage challenging because such distinctions may not exist in their native languages.

Preposition (Total Errors: 9): Prepositional errors involve incorrect use of words like "in," "on," "at," and others that indicate relationships between other words in a sentence. These errors could stem from the subtlety of preposition usage in English, which can be difficult for learners to master.
Punctuation (Total Errors: 12): Punctuation errors include incorrect use or omission of commas, periods, question marks, and other punctuation marks that can alter the meaning of sentences and affect the clarity of the writing.

The table showing the breakdown of errors per student indicates individual areas where each student might need focused instruction or practice. For instance, the first student made three errors in both spelling and tense, suggesting a need for further learning in these areas. The analysis can help educators tailor their teaching strategies to address specific weaknesses and thus improve the overall writing proficiency of ESL learners.

Overall, the data suggests that a multifaceted approach to teaching English writing skills is needed. The error analysis not only helps in identifying common errors but also provides a direction for curriculum development. Teachers can utilize this information to design specific lesson plans targeting each identified area. Additionally, more individualized feedback on student essays and other written assignments can be crucial in helping students to learn from their mistakes and improve their writing abilities.

Conclusions
In conclusion, error analysis provides valuable insights into the language challenges faced by non-native speakers and can help to meet their needs better. Error analysis of expository essay writing of undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan provides a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their writing skills. The study found that the most common errors made by the participants were related to tense, punctuation, articles, and prepositions. Error Analysis of expository essay writing is important for undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan as it helps to identify and understand the common mistakes they make in writing and improve their writing skills. This study concluded that students committed five types of errors tense punctuation, spelling and, preposition errors occur with interference of mother tongue.
Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of the challenges faced by undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan.

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