



Error Analysis of the English Essays of Undergraduate Engineering Students in Pakistan: A Case Study

Quratulain Talpur*, Zufiqar Ali Shah**

ABSTRACT: Error analysis is a very important notion in the tradition of language learning and teaching. The current study examines English language errors committed by engineering students of English at Mehran UET SZAB Campus Khairpur Mirs, Sindh. It aims to investigate the types of errors in writing that are most frequently committed by the students of engineering. The data collected from 120 undergraduate engineering students were analyzed through three step process on the basis of Corder's (1967) method regarding Error Analysis. Findings of the analysis led to the conclusion that engineering students in the said institute make numerous errors such as in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, singular/plural form, articles, prepositions, pronouns, and spellings.

Keywords: Errors, Mistakes, Error Analysis, Subject-verb agreement, Tense

Introduction

Learning a second language is an important and interesting endeavor for students in order to share their knowledge and perform better in their academic activities. Besides, the process of learning a language is also a complex task for both L1 learners and for those who are learning it as a non-native language. English language is considered as the bridge to connect with the modern world. Therefore, the process to gain expertise in it requires enormous efforts for learners of a second language. English language is regarded as a second language and lingua franca in Pakistan and enjoys the status as a medium of communication in the education, government, trade, commerce, and judiciary; and in science & technology despite all its controversies and conflicts with the local languages since 1947. As commented by Coleman (2012, p. 64) regarding the status of English in Pakistan as “the language of power and the language of an elite class that has dominated the country since independence.”

Writing falls in the category of “productive skills” and is considered as an important skill in English (as a second language) classroom. Humaira (2011) argues for the importance of writing:

* Lecturer in English at Mehran UET SZAB Campus Khairpur Mirs. .

** Corresponding Author and Professor at the Institute of English Language and Literature, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur. .

Traditionally, in Pakistan, creative writing was known as literature including the variety of its genres. As a result, Pakistani students and teachers are still confused about the term 'creative writing' and so tensions arise in the classroom. Considering the changing trends in teaching and the advantages of creative writing, it is certainly the responsibility of English teachers to give importance to creative writing, to understand the complexity of writing development. (p. 122)

Likewise, in Pakistan, engineering students have less exposure to the writing process which makes them weak in writing critically. This approach compels students to memorize contents on any topic. The term "conscious doing" as referred in Lunsford (1979) is that writer needs to have knowledge about "what he is writing" rather than the contents of the written document. Hence, the present study regarding "Error Analysis" will provide details regarding the errors committed by the students of engineering while writing.

The Role of English for Engineering Students

Normally, major related competence is preferred for the employment purpose but expertise in English is undeniable for the job seekers. Likewise, English language is the most significant component for engineering students in their educational career since they are possibly going to use it in the industries or corporate culture. "Globalization directly influences industry's needs; a global engineer must be able to easily cross national and cultural boundaries." (Riemer, 2002, p.94) Above mentioned statement justifies the dire need of English for engineering students because it is prerequisite for them to attain remarkable future in the global market. English language for engineering students falls under the category of ESP (English for Specific Purposes).

There are multiple reasons for teaching English to engineering students. Firstly, Ongsakul (1984) claimed that English is vital for engineering students because their textbooks are written in English so proficiency in English language creates ease for them to certainly comprehend the material written in the textbooks. Secondly, Talpur (2016) demonstrated in her study that engineering students in Pakistan are motivated to learn English "to get a prestigious job, to get a prestigious position in society. Their learning of the English language will facilitate them to learn and understand textbooks in higher education more rapidly and easily. It will help them to get high marks/grades in examinations and to get better understanding of science and technology. It increases student's self-esteem and makes them feel proud and important. It makes them feel competent and at the end it will enhance the overall status of the learners" (p.207).

Brown (2000) acknowledged that language learners need to learn four language skills namely: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing as to attain competence in English language. However, same is true in the case of engineering students. More specifically, engineering students must have efficiency in the writing skills because they have to provide documentation of their projects in the industries. 'English is an essential tool in the engineering education and, therefore, integrating English into engineering, science and math courses is an effective way to improve the performance of engineering undergraduates in oral and written communication' (Pendergrass, 2001, p. 1).

Generally, the engineering students lack proficiency in all language skills. More specifically, they have weak writing skills. The same situation is quoted as,

Many competent, articulate business people experience a moment of panic when they are asked to write a report, memo, or letter. Faced with putting their thoughts in writing, they become confused about what to say, how to say it, and how to manage the mechanics of grammar, spelling, and format (Baugh *et al*, 1999, p. 2).

This study aims to investigate the types of errors in writing that are most frequently committed by the students of engineering. It also aims to answer the research question that what errors in their writing are most frequently made by the undergraduate students of engineering?

Literature Review

In order to thoroughly comprehend the concept of Error Analysis (EA), it is important to distinguish the notions of "error" and "mistake" in second language acquisition (SLA). As per identifications of Krashen (1982) error is "the flawed side of learners' speech or writing. Errors fall in that part of conversation or composition that deviates from some selected norms of mature language performance" (p. 162). Error is also reflected as "systematic deviation". Besides, Angelis (1975) exemplified that error in terms of written English is "any form or construction which deviates in any way from that considered to be acceptable for standard, written academic English" (p.295). According to the findings of Corder (1973) errors are classified into three categories. These are:

- 1) Pre-systematic
- 2) Systematic
- 3) Post- systematic

English language learners commit "pre-systematic" errors when they are not sure about the mechanism of any item and attempting to comprehend it. "Systematic" errors are regular. In this stage, learners are not able to make correct hypothesis and comprehend their errors. Whereas, "Post-systematic"

stage involves that learners produce correct forms but they are not able to use those rules on regular basis due to the lack of proper attention or short of memory.

On the other hand, mistake involves “performance error”. “It may be a slip of tongue, random guess, random ungrammatical structures, and actually it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly” (Gulzar, 2009, p.62). It is also considered as “inconsistent deviation”. Moreover, these “do not reflect a defect in knowledge, but are rather random errors in performance” (Edstrom, 1972, p. 45).

In the early 1970’s, the field of “Error Analysis” in “Second Language Acquisition” was initiated by Corder and his colleagues. Corder is acknowledged as the “father” of the Error Analysis (EA). He claimed in his book “Error Analysis and Interlanguage” two justifications for need of analyzing errors of the learners. First, the pedagogical errors, and second the theoretical ones. Furthermore, he demonstrated that pedagogical errors are “a good understanding of the nature of error is necessary before a systematic means of eradicating them could be found”. The theoretical errors are related with “claims that a study of learners' errors is part of the systematic study of the learners' language which is itself necessary to an understanding of the process of second language Acquisition” (Corder, 1981:1). Corder (1967) provides a completely new picture of errors made by the learners. In his view, errors are considered as “flaws” that must be exterminated.

Darus (2009) concluded in her study;

A key finding of EA has been that many learner errors were produced by learners misunderstanding the rules of the new language. EA is a type of linguistic study that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in TL and within that TL itself. (p.490)

This influential sub field of linguistics has become immensely significant due to the learners’ frequently committed errors; and became the focus of researchers, linguists and teachers at international level.

In the context of Pakistan, many researchers have worked on Error Analysis (EA). Gulzar (2009) investigated the system of error analysis in the writing of intermediate level. Furthermore, he demonstrated that students lack in the areas of preposition, articles, spelling and tenses. His experimental study shows the reasons of poor writing skills are use of traditional methods while rectifying errors and mistakes.

Another study on error analysis is conducted by Sarfaraz (2011) in the Pakistani context, she identified that students of FAST commit grammatical

errors due to the interlanguage process. She also indicates that another reason of committing errors in the students' written documents is the lack of motivation to learn the target language (TL).

Research Methodology

This section provides thorough description regarding the population and sample used in the present study. Furthermore, it informs about the data collection instruments and data collection procedure. At the end of the section, process of data analysis is discussed.

Sampling techniques are used in order to draw a feasible number of respondents from the target population (Saubdras, et al, 2016). Due to the lack of resources and time available, most of the research utilizes sampling. The reason behind this is that we cannot study cover everything "you cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything" (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 27). The sample is well-defined by the researchers as a subset of a population selected from the full set or the entirety of population in accordance with the research design (Howitt and Cramer 2000; Runyon and Haber 1991). It is maintained that a good sample should be representative of the overall target population. This is also evident by the statement of Dornyei (2003, p.71) who opines that sample must be representative of the target population in terms of the most significant characteristics containing "gender, ethnicity, educational background, academic capability, social class, socioeconomic status, etc." In the present study, 120 is the sample size including 90 male and 30 female undergraduate engineering students of Mehran UET SZAB Campus Khairpur Mirs'.

Those students were enrolled in the first year of six departments namely: Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Petroleum & Natural Gas Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Software Engineering and Electronic Engineering. In order to attain the sample of 120 students, 20 students were randomly selected from each department to cover the whole population. Random sampling is considered as one of the most "reliable" tool to gather data. This type of probability sampling involves less risk of biasness as compare to the non-probability sampling techniques. All students involve in this study are native speakers of Sindhi language and speak Sindhi at their homes. They are learning English as a Second Language. In terms of their educational background, they are learning English since 12 years from primary classes till now. They don't have exposure of English language except it is part of their educational career.

The primary source of data collection in the study was argumentative type of essays in order to get the answer of the research questions. All the 120 undergraduate engineering of Mehran UET SZAB Campus Khairpur

Mirs' were asked write an essay in order to get the answer of the research questions.

The 120 undergraduate engineering students of Mehran UET SZAB Campus Khairpur Mirs' were asked to write an essay about 200-300 words on any one of the following three topics:

1. The reasons of illiteracy in our education system,
2. Are we too dependent on computers? ,and
3. The season you like most.

The total time duration given to the students for working on this task was one hour in their scheduled English language class. The students were already familiar about the format of the essay but they were not aware that their essays will be used for the research study.

Data Analysis

The data collected from 120 undergraduate engineering students were analyzed through three step process on the basis of Corder's (1967) method regarding Error Analysis. It involves following phases:-

- 1) Collection of Sample Errors
- 2) Identification of Errors
- 3) Description of Errors

Following Corder's (1967) method, first of all classification of errors is made; secondly the most frequent errors are indicated and explained with the examples taken form students essays and at last; those errors done by students are corrected and given with examples. Table No. 1 provides the type of error, its frequency, percentage and mean of each category of errors committed by the undergraduate students of engineering.

Table No 1.

Error Analysis of Pakistani ESL Learners'

Type of Error Mean (x)	Frequency of Errors	Percentage (%)
Verb Tense 6.79	815	18.93
Subject/Verb Agreement 5.65	678	15.74
Spelling 4.85	583	13.54
Capitalization 3.97	477	11.08
Sing/Plural form 3.35	402	9.33
Article 3.08	370	8.59
Preposition 2.54	305	7.08
Word Order 2.5	300	6.96
Pronoun 1.62	195	4.52
Double Negative 1.5	180	4.18
Total	4305	100%

From table no. 1, it is clear the students of engineering commit three most frequent errors in “Verb Tense” with 18.93%, “Subject/Verb Agreement” with 15.74%, and “Spelling” with 13.54%. Whereas, the least frequent error committed by engineering students was “Double Negative” with 4.18%.

In the next section, the researcher has provided detailed overview of the top ten errors most frequently committed by the undergraduate engineering students of Mehran UET SZAB Campus Khairpur Mirs’.

1) Verb Tense

The incorrect use of tense or verb in sentence creates error of verb tense. In the present study, verb tense errors are at the highest category committed by the undergraduate students of engineering. The findings of the present study disclose that engineering students lack understanding of using exact tense of the verb. The examples from the student's written essays are given under:

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error	Correction
Verb Tense	1. In villages, boys and girls are not go to the college.	1. In villages, boys and girls are not going to the college.	
	2. Computer play vital role in daily life's activities.	2. Computer plays vital role in daily life's activities.	
	3. In winter season, rain falls and I really enjoyed it.and I really enjoy it.	3. In winter season, rain falls	

2) Subject/Verb Agreement

The wrong combination of subject and verb creates error. They must agree with one another. If subject is singular, verb must be singular. Whereas, if subject used in sentence is plural then verb followed in the sentence must also be plural. The examples from the students' written samples are given as under:

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
Sub/Verb Agreement	1. The main reasons of illiteracy 1. The main reasons of illiteracy is lack of proper management, are lack of proper management, poverty and feudal system. poverty and feudal system.	
	2. At the end, we all are	

2. At the end, we all are dependent

dependents on computer on computer
because computer is

because computer is the right hand of
everyone.

the right hand of everyone.

3. Everyone like season and my favorite season is autumn. 3. Everyone likes season and my favorite season is autumn.

3) Capitalization

The concept of capitalization means starting a letter of a word with capital letter (Upper case) and other letters of a word in small letters (Lower case). The examples from the students written essays are given under:-

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
Capitalization	1. If <u>pakistan</u> has to be a developed country then obviously, she should take necessary steps to upgrade the level of education.	1. If <u>Pakistan</u> has to be a developed country then obviously, she should take necessary steps to upgrade the level of education.
	2. Being a student, <u>i</u> can say that yes <u>i</u> depend upon the computer.	2. Being a student, <u>I</u> can say that yes <u>I</u> depend upon the Computer.
	3. <u>the</u> season <u>i</u> like the most is spring.	3. <u>The</u> season <u>I</u> like the most is is spring.

4) Singular/Plural Form

The error related with singular/plural form means incorrect use of it as per the sentence construction. The examples from the students written essays are given under:-

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
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Singular/Plural

1. In our education system, 1. In our education system,
system,

Form we face many problem. we face many problems

2. Now a day, computer is very 2. Now a day, computer is very
much necessary for student for much necessary for students their progress.
for their progress.

3 In summer season, day are long 3. In summer season, days are and night
are short. long and nights are short.

5) Article

An article is a word that is used with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun (Sawalmeh, 2013). Broadly, there are two kinds of articles such as “Definite article” and “Indefinite article”. “The” comes in the category of “Definite article” which is used for the specific or particular nouns. Whereas, “A/an” lies in the category of “Indefinite article”, it is used for the non-specific modifications in the noun. The examples from the students written essays are given under:-

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
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Article

1. If government is <u>a</u> honest, illiteracy can be removed.	1. If government is <u>an</u> honest, illiteracy can be removed.
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2. Computer is <u>electronic</u> device which is made by human being.	2. Computer is <u>an</u> electronic device which is made by human being.
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3. The season which I like <u>most</u> .	3. The season which I like <u>the</u> most.
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6) Preposition

Preposition is a word which is used as a link to connect noun or pronoun and other words in a given sentence. The examples from the students written essays are given under:-

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
Preposition	1. Another reason of illiteracy is that teachers in our schools are not good <u>for</u> teaching.	1. Another reason of illiteracy is that teachers in our schools are not good <u>at</u> teaching.
	2. Computer is very important <u>to</u> us.	2. Computer is very important <u>for</u> us.
	3. <u>At</u> winter season, I feel fresh whole the day.	3. <u>In</u> winter season, I feel fresh whole the day.

7) Spelling

“Spelling means the act or process of writing words by using the letters conventionally accepted for their formation” (Sawalmeh, 2013). The examples from the students written essays are given under:-

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
Spelling		
	1. <u>Their</u> can be many reasons for the <u>litracy</u> in our system.	1. <u>There</u> can be many reasons for illiteracy in our system.
	2. Yes, we are <u>dependant</u> on computer.	2. Yes, we are <u>dependent</u> on computer.
	3. In the <u>hole</u> world, people like <u>diferent</u> seasons.	3. In the <u>whole</u> world, people like <u>different</u> seasons.

8) Pronoun

“A Pronoun is a word used instead of a noun” (Wren, & Martin, p.39)

The examples from the students written essays are given under:-

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
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Pronoun

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. If Pakistan has to be a developed country then <u>Pakistan</u> should take necessary steps to upgrade the level of education. | 1. If Pakistan has to be a developed country then <u>she</u> should take necessary steps to upgrade the level of education. |
| <hr/> | |
| 2. Computer helps us in many tasks. <u>Computer</u> is also used for office work. | 2. Computer helps us in many task. <u>It</u> is also used for office work. |
| <hr/> | |
| 3. The season <u>that</u> I lovemost is winter. | 3. The season <u>which</u> I love the most is winter. |

9) Word Order

Word order means “The arrangement of words in a sentence” (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p. 590). The examples from the students written essays are given under:-

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
Word Order		
1. There are reasons of illiteracy <u>so many.</u>	1. There are <u>so many</u> reasons of Illiteracy.	
2. We generally use the computer for office work such as presentations <u>to deliver.</u>	2. Generally, we use the computer for office work such as <u>to deliver</u> presentations.	
3. Spring season occurs <u>mostly</u> in northern areas.	3. Spring season <u>mostly</u> occurs in northern areas.	

10) Double Negative

This type of error occurs when two negations are employed within the same sentence. The examples from the students written essays are given as under:

Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
Double Negative		
1. There people <u>do not</u> allow their	1. There people <u>do not</u> allow their	

children **not to** go school.

children **to go** school.

2. We **do not** have **nothing** useful
to work on computers.

2. We **do not** have **anything** useful
to work on computers.

3. Winter season **does not** irritate
not to visit places.

3. Winter season **does not** irritate
to visit places.

Findings

The findings of the present study reveal many error types committed by engineering students at Mehran campus. It was found that students of English at Mehran campus commit ten types of errors in their writing tasks. Out of those, top three error types were grammar related. The students were also weak in the spellings which create huge hindrance in their way to write in an effective and persuasive manner. These students also face difficulty in proper arrangement of word order in their writings.

The most frequently errors range from spelling to grammar. Grammar remained the main weakness among students. Starting from verb tense recognition and proper use of the tense in English which covers 18.93% of errors, subject-verb agreement was another main area of student errors with 15.74%. Other error types were spellings, capitalization, wrong use of articles, nouns, singular/plural forms, prepositions, pronouns, and word order in the sentence.

Apart from the most frequently committed ten errors by the engineering students of Mehran UET SZAB Campus Khairpur Mirs', some other minor errors were also came into notice to be committed by them. Those were related to the words differentiation errors, punctuation errors, contraction errors, spelling errors etc.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that, students of engineering had previously learned grammar rules yet they were unable to use them properly. It is concluded from the analysis and interpretation of the results, that the engineering students of Mehran UET SZAB Campus commit ten types of errors in their writing tasks. Out of those, top three error types were grammar related. The students were also weak in spellings which create huge hindrance in their way to write in an effective and persuasive manner. These students also face difficulty in proper arrangement of word order in their writings. The reason

of it may be their habit of translating from L1 into L2 and also the absence of writing practice. Some of the errors in the students writing were due to their carelessness in the use of advanced technologies such as internet facilities and mobile phone SMS. Therefore, it can be concluded that students of engineering in Pakistani context face problems in writing due to their lack of proper grammatical awareness.

The findings of this study will be significant for the learners to improve their writing skills by minimizing errors with the help of Error Analysis.

The present study will also be useful for language teachers to analyze common errors made by the students of engineering in order to rectify them in the class and prepare material for them accordingly. This strategy also provides assistance for the language teachers to improve language problems of their engineering students and use modern approaches in the classrooms while teaching writing skills.

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Appendix 1

Coudnt	Contraction Error	Correction: Couldn't .
b/c	Contraction Error	Correction: Because
Dependant Illitracy Internate	Spelling Errors	Correction: Dependent Illiteracy Internet Explanation: It is because "E" sound is silent here.
&	Contraction Error	Correction: And
d/f	Contraction Error	Correction: Different
We people	Interlangauge Errors	Correction: From the starting
Chairman/Chairmen	Differentiation Error	Its correct usage depend upon the sentence construction.
Gradually Gradually	Interlangauge Errors	Correction: Slowly and Gradually
Foren Countre Gate Firstley Lyf Universtey	Spelling Errors	Correction: Foreign Country Get Firstly Life University
e.t.c	Punctuation Error	Correction: Etc. Explanation: There is wrong use of full stop in between.
Cann't	Contraction Error	Correction: Can't Explanation: it is wrong use of contraction.
There/their	Homophones	Its correct usage depend upon the sentence construction.
Does'nt	Punctuation Error	Correction: Doesn't
Goverment	Spelling Error	Correction: Government
Eg Ie	Contraction Error Contraction Error	Correction: E.g. I.e.

Rewieu	Spelling Error	Correction: Review
People/peoples	Differentiation Error	Its correct usage depend upon the sentence construction.
Friend's/ friends	Differentiation Error	Its correct usage depends upon the sentence construction.
Assigment	Spelling Error	Correction: Assignment
Bigest	Spelling Error	Correction: Biggest
Today's / today's	Differentiation Error	Its correct usage depend upon the sentence construction.
Main/men/man	Homophones	Its correct usage depend upon the sentence construction.
Very/vary Then/than It's/its	Homophones	Its correct usage depend upon the sentence construction.
Ppts	Contraction Error	Correction: PowerPoint slides
Feb	Contraction Error	Correction: February
Thats why	Contraction Error	Correction: That's why
Latter/letter	Homophones	Its correct usage depend upon the sentence construction.
Poors	Plural Error	Correction: Poor
Childrens	Plural/Apostrophe Error	Correction: Children Children's
Govt.	Contraction Error	Correction: Government