

## Analysis of Common Syntactical Errors by Pakistani Students Due to L1 Influence

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### Abstract

Learners often find it challenging to write in a foreign language. Even after completing their education, Pakistani English language learners continue to face challenges in writing due to inadequate grammar skills and interruptions caused by their first language (L1). The current study provides the contextual background of syntactical errors in their writings due to the influence of mother tongue (MT) on L2 learners' writings. The primary goal of this study is to identify the common syntactical errors in undergraduate students' essay writing. This study aims to identify major errors and assess learners' feedback during the learning process. The study design that is used for data collection and analysis is mixed methods. Data was collected from a sample of thirty undergraduate students at Government Post-Graduate College Municipal, Faisalabad, who were enrolled in the BS Program in Information Technology. Selinker's (1972) theory of interlanguage and Corder's (1967) theory of error analysis are used to examine the data. A total of 227 errors have been extracted and divided into 11 grammatical categories during data analysis. The errors in spelling (14.95%), verb agreement (14.55 %), and punctuation (14.1%) were more frequent as compared to other errors in the students' writing. The study's findings illustrated errors that may have occurred due to distractions, an insufficient knowledge of the English language, and influence from one's native tongue.

**Keywords:** Pakistani L2 learners, Essay Writing, Syntactical errors

### 1. Introduction

In Pakistani society, numerous languages are spoken, including Punjabi, Saraiki, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, and Urdu. Approximately 45% of Pakistanis speak Punjabi, while Pashto and Sindhi are spoken by 15% each, and Balochi by 3.6%. Additionally, around 8% of the population speaks Urdu. These languages are considered varieties of the Indo-European language family. Kachru (2009) proposed the three-circle model of World English, categorizing Pakistani English as a non-native variety falling within the outer circle. Within Pakistan, there is a diverse range of regional languages spoken. As Pakistani learners, we live in a multicultural environment and use many languages during ESL programs (Khan & Iqbal, 2019). According to Parker (2019), multicultural education serves as a foundation for teaching English as a second language to post-secondary students. Smith (2018) asserts that every language has its spelling, syntactical order, and grammatical rules.

Communication is an integral part of language, encompassing both spoken and written methods to convey messages. Writing errors can be divided into several areas, including tense, aspect, mood, word choice, vocabulary, and spelling. These categories are classified into different levels because languages comprise distinct components, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, language elements like vocabulary, punctuation, and parts of speech play a role. Sentences can express different functions, such as being declarative, interrogative, imperative, and can be structured in active or passive voice. English encompasses a broad spectrum and deals with various types of grammatical errors in writing. Writing is a complex and continuous process of expression that involves intricate thought processes, linguistic synthesis, and strategic effort (Ngangbam, 2016). According to Alinsunod (2014), writing is a challenge for English learners that deals with multiple aspects; spelling, punctuation, and structural organization.

Writing, which plays a significant role in academic education, is typically the final skill acquired in the natural order of language learning (Rao, 2019; Javid & Umer, 2014). Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2010) state that language teachers emphasize writing skills being the language of instruction, particularly in tertiary education. Globally, the English language has become important in every field, and extensive knowledge of writing is highly valued and necessary (Mahboob, 2014). As stated by Mohammad and Hazarika (2016), composition in English has become increasingly indispensable in educational and professional contexts for non-native speakers, as it is the primary instrument used by academicians to assess pupils' achievement. Writing requires drafting and organization, content revision and editing, vocabulary development, and cohesion according to Gonca (2018).

Error Analysis theory is a framework that focuses on the errors made by language learners to better understand the language learning process. In the 1960s, Stephen Pit Corder and colleagues established it. The theory suggests that errors are indicative of the learner's internal grammar and are a natural part of the acquisition process. Errors are an inevitable factor contributing to students' reluctance to learn. Errors serve as a mirror of learners' shortcomings in the target language (TL), as learners are not proficient in L2 (Klassen, 1991). Errors are systematic and show the progress of students in language acquisition, facing various obstacles as second-language learners of English (Amara, 2015; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Khan & Khan, 2016). Errors are a part of learning, primarily occurring due to interlingual and intralingual errors, as well as inadequate knowledge of the target language (Richards, 1971; Phuket & Othman, 2015; Kaweera, 2013).

In linguistics, "syntactic" pertains to syntax, which governs the arrangement of sentences. Noam Chomsky is a prominent figure in the field of modern linguistics. Chomsky (1972) introduced the concept of transformational generative grammar within syntax theory, distinguishing between surface and deep structure. Chomsky (1957) identifies the fundamental grammatical structures within various syntactic formations. Deep and surface structures are essential components of phrase structure and the actual arrangement of sentence structure. Surface structure encompasses different voices, such as active and passive, while deep structure involves phrase structure rules (NP, VP, ADVP, ADJ, and PP).

The syntactic rules of any language are crucial for enabling students to communicate effectively in both written and oral forms. Precise command over syntax is indispensable in this regard, as it enables learners to develop a strong grasp of the language. Consequently, mastering these syntactical challenges is essential for successful language acquisition (Gedion, Tati & Peter, 2018). The purpose of this research is to investigate the errors perpetrated by undergraduate students due to the lack of knowledge of grammatical sentence structures, leading to numerous errors in their writing.

- What types of syntactic errors do Pakistani ESL learners commit due to the L1 influence on essay writing?
- Which of these syntactic errors is more common in Pakistani ESL learners' essay writing?
- Does mother-tongue interference contribute to the syntactic errors made by Pakistani ESL students while writing essays?

## **1.1 Significance of the study**

The current research is significant because it identifies the syntactic mistakes committed by ESL students due to L1 influence in essay writing and highlights problematic areas in syntax in the context of Pakistani learners varied linguistic backgrounds. Research has not been extensively explored in this field, especially Government Postgraduate College Municipal, Faisalabad, Pakistan. The consequence of this research lies in its examination of errors in essay writing, which were analyzed to learn the target language, English.

## **2. Literature Review**

Interference from their mother tongue is one of the primary reasons ESL learners make grammatical errors in their written work. The importance of the mother tongue (MT) in second language acquisition (SLA) cannot be ignored at all. The current studies examine syntactical errors committed by second language learners in the context of Pakistan. Error analysis serves as a method for identifying sentence structure errors. Many errors occur due to the influence of the mother language. When two languages are mixed, learners of the second language often make mistakes in both spoken and written forms. Their lack of familiarity with English grammatical rules, syntax, and vocabulary is the primary cause of errors.

### **2.1 Empirical Framework**

Many studies have been done on a wide range of errors, including subject-verb agreement, syntactic issues, punctuation, tense, and grammatical features (Garcia & Rodriguez, 2020; Johnson & Smith, 2018; Khan & Patel, 2019; Smith, 2020; Wang & Li, 2016; Sultana et al., 2022).

A notable study conducted by Fisiak in 1981 analyzed error analysis, a significant theory for learners of English as a second language, which involves the contrastive analysis of two languages. The findings demonstrate the pivotal role of contrastive analysis in comprehending the principles of linguistic structure, as well as its influence on language learning and translation. Furthermore, the study makes a substantial contribution to the field of contrastive linguistics and offers practical applications for language teaching and translation.

Ngangbam (2016) scrutinized the written compositions of English language students at Mutah University. Sixty Arabic native speakers provided data for the written texts. The results demonstrated that excessive use of sentence fragments, influence of the mother language, and a

lack of grammatical knowledge are the main causes of fifteen kinds of syntactic errors. This study provides practical applications for EFL teachers and addresses students' errors to improve teaching effectiveness.

Kambal (1981) investigated the doctoral dissertation among students at Khartoum University. This study provides a depth examination of composition mistakes faced by the learners of English due to the impact of Arabicization on the target language. By identifying these errors, the research suggests Arabic-speaking students can improve in English through a special program of English classes designed for the learners.

Hourani (2008) investigated the common grammatical errors made by male third-grade students on the Eastern Coast of the United Arab Emirates while writing in English. According to this research, a lot of mistakes in writing are caused by improper use of grammar. The study found that subject-verb agreement errors constituted 25%, verb tense errors 22%, preposition errors 19%, article errors 15%, and punctuation errors 13%. These mistakes occur in ESL students during essay writing.

A study of error analysis in their students' descriptive writing was done by Bustomi (2009). After reading the entire document, the investigation identified three types of errors. Verb tense errors at 34.1%, word choice errors at 28.3%, and word order errors at 22.10%. These errors are made by ESL learners in writing more frequently than other kind of errors.

Another previous study is conducted by Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) use of the mother tongue in the ESL classroom. This research examines the practice and attitude of the mother tongue during English language learning. According to Richard (2002). Errors occur due to inadequate instruction of the English language, as shown by the inappropriate use of vocabulary and grammar. Additionally, Hendrickson (1987) declared that an error is a sign which indicates the learners' progress due to their background in the English language (pp. 387-398).

The aforementioned studies provide contextual information about the analysis of syntactical errors and demonstrate that mother language influence is one of the main causes of errors at all levels of writing. The current study aimed to identify the most frequent syntactic errors committed by ESL students of Government Municipal Degree College, Faisalabad, and Pakistani in their written essays due to interference of L1 influence.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This mixed-methods approach investigated prevalent syntactic errors in the written essays of Pakistani undergraduates. Through error analysis, the study explored the syntactic errors made by second-language English learners. It aimed to identify problematic areas in the interlanguage syntax of Urdu and Punjabi-speaking learners and to understand what makes the language difficult to learn.

### 3.1 Data Collection and Source

Random sampling was used to gather data for this investigation. Thirty undergraduate students studying B.S. Information Technology (I.T) at the Government Municipal Degree College, Faisalabad, participated. The majority of the learners were aged between 18 and 22 years. Most of the students speak Urdu, while some speak Punjabi as their mother tongue. The data for this study were collected from these students, who were tasked with composing essays on various subjects pertinent to their academic studies or everyday experiences, such as "My Computer," "My Favorite Personality," and "Pollution."

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework

Selinker's (1972) theory of Interlanguage and Corder's (1974) theory of Error Analysis were utilized to analyze the data. Selinker (1972) highlighted the notion that a learner's language might be seen as a distinct language variety with its own grammatical rules and distinctive features. This hypothesis, originating in second language studies, asserts that the structure of the first language differs from the structure of the second language. The system that learners create for themselves is known as interlanguage and reflects the unique way they recognize and produce the second language.

Error Analysis, an area within Applied Linguistics, was developed in the 1960s by Corder and his colleagues. It reveals that errors made by learners are not solely influenced by their mother tongue, but also show some common techniques based on errors. Error Analysis is a method for addressing learners' errors in second language acquisition. This method focuses on errors, providing information about how beginners of a second language are learning in the classroom. Corder (1967) illustrates the importance of learners' error analysis in three ways:

**1. Informing Instructors:** Error analysis informs the instructor of the student's level of progress toward their objectives and needs.

**2. Providing Evidence:** This technique provides logical evidence of how new language is acquired and learned.

**3. Enhancing Understanding:** The technique of error analysis is crucial for improving the knowledge of second language learners during the learning process.

#### 4. Data Analysis

This section focuses on analyzing and interpreting data collected from BS students at the Government Municipal College in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Initially, a table was created to display the proportion of each type of syntactical error found in essay writing. Syntactical errors are categorized into several types: noun, verb agreement, adverb, adjective, articles, conjunction, word order, preposition, punctuation, object, and spelling. Further analysis of common errors is provided in the descriptions following the table.

Table 1. Common Errors Committed by ESL Learners

No.	Common Errors	Incorrect Sentence	Correct Sentence
1	Word order	-He plays esterday's games. -He will read the novel often.	- He played games yesterday. - He will often read the novel.
2	Spelling	- Computer is used for transfer and recive data. - My firt day at the college was very good.	- Computer is used for transfer and receive data." - My first day at the college was very good."
3	Punctuation	- In my point of view Computer is an electronic machine. - She loves to travel, however she is afraid of flying.	- In my point of view, a computer is an electronic machine. -She loves to travel; however, she is afraid of flying.
4	Object	- Ate she the apple. - Kicked John the ball.	-She ate the apple. - John kicked the ball.
5	Noun	- How is possible in modern? - It will buy laptops for future.	- How is it possible in the modern era? - I will buy a laptop for the future.

6	Verb Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is many computers in the lab.</li> <li>- The major components of computer display screen, mouse, and keyboard.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are many computers in the lab.</li> <li>- The major components of a computer are the display screen, mouse, and keyboard.</li> </ul>
7	Adverb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unfortunate our education system is not good.</li> <li>- is your computer slow working?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Unfortunately, our education system is not good.</li> <li>- Is your computer working slowly?</li> </ul>
8	Adjective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The boy is very taller than his sister."</li> <li>- She bought an expensive dress for her friend."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The boy is much taller than his sister.</li> <li>- She bought a more expensive dress than her friend.""</li> </ul>
9	Preposition		
10	Conjunction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I use both my laptop and smartphone for work.</li> <li>- He neither understood the question nor answered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-I use both my laptop and smartphone for work.</li> <li>- He neither understood the question nor answered</li> </ul>
11	Articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I will buy new laptop for his cousin.</li> <li>- Laptops are the best technology in modern era.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I will buy a new laptop for his cousin.</li> <li>- Laptops are the best technology in the modern era.</li> </ul>

A brief description of the typical errors encountered by ESL learners, as detailed in the accompanying table, is provided below:

**i. Word Order:** Incorrect word order disrupts the logical flow and clarity of a sentence. For instance, "He played games yesterday" follows the correct order of events.

**ii. Spelling:** Spelling errors can distort a sentence's meaning or render it incomprehensible. For example, "Data is transferred and received using a computer" should be corrected to "Data is transferred and received using a computer."

**iii. Punctuation:** Missing or incorrect punctuation can cause misunderstandings or confusion about the intended message. For example, "A computer is an electronic machine in my point of view" should be corrected to "A computer is an electronic machine, in my point of view."



**iv. Object Placement:** Proper placement of the object is crucial to conveying a phrase's meaning. For example, "Ate her the apple" should be corrected to "She ate the apple."

**v. Noun Errors:** Mistakes with nouns might include misspellings or improper forms that affect the sentence's structure. For example, "How is it possible in the modern era?" should be corrected to "How is it possible in the modern era?"

**vi. Verb Agreement:** This involves improperly conjugating verbs to fit the subject's number and person. For instance, "Many computers is present in the lab" should be corrected to "Many computers are present in the lab."

**vii. Adverb Use:** Adverbs must appropriately modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. For example, "Unfortunate, our education system is not good" should be corrected to "Unfortunately, our education system is not good."

**viii. Adjective Use:** Misusing adjectives can result in awkward or inaccurate comparisons. For example, "The boy is very taller than his sister" should be corrected to "The boy is much taller than his sister."

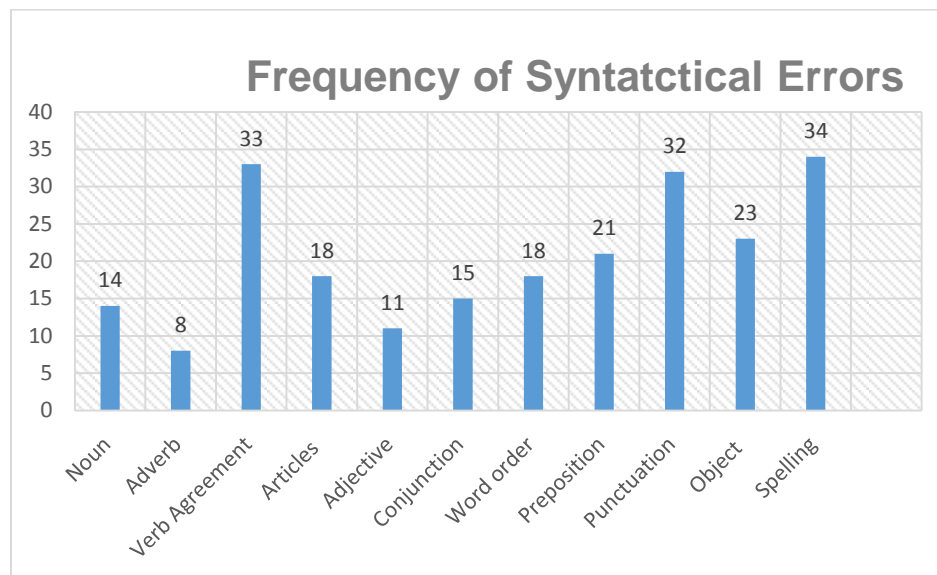
**ix. Preposition Use:** Prepositions function as connectors between nouns, pronouns, and phrases within a sentence. It is crucial to use them correctly to prevent misunderstandings.

**x. Conjunction Use:** Conjunctions link words, phrases, or clauses, and the incorrect choice of conjunction can alter the relationships within a sentence. For instance, "I use both my smartphone and laptop for work" should be corrected to "I use my smartphone and laptop for work."

**xi. Articles:** Proper use of articles is necessary to prevent ambiguity and establish the specificity of nouns. For instance, "The greatest technology of the modern era is laptops" should be corrected to "The best technology of the modern era is laptops."

These errors can significantly impair the effectiveness and clarity of communication. ESL learners need to understand and practice correct syntactical structures to improve their writing skills. Researchers analyzed the various grammatical errors made by Pakistani ESL learners and compared the error percentages to identify the most challenging grammar areas for these learners, considering their native languages while learning a second language. The table below summarizes the most frequent errors caused by L1 interference.

Figure 1. Comparison of Most Frequent Syntactical Errors Due to the L1



**Note:** Occurrence of Syntactical Errors in Essay Writing

The data revealed the most frequent errors committed by English second language learners from various regional linguistic backgrounds. These errors spanned multiple grammatical categories, with spelling errors being the most common. Previous studies have shown that spelling poses the greatest challenge for Pakistani ESL learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Sawalmeh, 2013, pp. 1-17). Verbal agreement was identified as the second most significant challenge (Sultana et al., 2022, pp. 111-123), while punctuation was recognized as the third major obstacle in learning English as a second language (Ghabool et al., 2012, pp. 130-143).

The present study found that learners committed errors in the following categories: nouns (6.17%), adverbs (3.53%), verb agreement (14.45%), articles (7.93%), adjectives (4.85%), conjunctions (6.61%), word order (7.93%), prepositions (9.25%), punctuation (14.1%), object placement (11.3%), and spelling (14.45%).

These findings indicate that ESL students frequently make numerous errors in their essay writing, reflecting a lack of proficiency in English syntax. The errors observed spanned various syntactic categories. The type and frequency of errors made by L1 speakers were quantified and analyzed. Additionally, an analysis was conducted to determine the errors most frequently influenced by the participants' L1.

A majority of participants struggled with subject-verb agreement, including agreement in person, number, coordinated subjects, and notional agreement (Corder, 1974; Ellis, 1986). They often failed to distinguish between singular and plural verbs. Moreover, errors involving verbs agreeing with subjects were also common, and participants sometimes failed to correctly format subject-verb agreement. These errors are associated with interlingual influences from the learners' first language (L1).

It is recommended that educators incorporate evaluations of grammatical rules between learners' first and second languages. By increasing awareness of these distinctions, learners can better recognize and avoid such errors in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The primary objective of this study was to identify common syntactic errors in the written work of Pakistani ESL college students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. By employing Error Analysis theory, we classified these syntactic errors, while Interlanguage theory helped us understand errors resulting from negative transfer from the L1, often due to direct translation from native languages into English. The research demonstrated that students struggled with sentence construction, often following the grammatical rules of their native languages when writing in English. Overall, the findings confirmed that L1 interference significantly contributes to the syntactic errors made by Pakistani ESL students. Additionally, the study explored whether these learners exhibited similar or distinct syntactic errors influenced by their L1s. The results are expected to provide valuable insights into English syntax teaching and learning in the Pakistani context. This understanding could aid educators and curriculum designers in developing specialized programs to enhance students' English syntax skills.

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⇒ Spelling error (10) 193

Internet

An internet play very important role in our life. We use internet in many field of life like communication, agreement, email and other. Internet provided many facilities to communication. We can communicate large distance places easily through internet. Internet has facility to send and receive message and calls. In business we can use internet and get progress? <sup>Business structure using</sup> our business? We create files, report and form and send to other companies by using internet. Internet helps us to create a great deal of business and market place to consumer. In education field we use internet to read and see lecture about topics and increase our knowledge. Many books and lecture available at internet? to learn.



Appendix 2

