Analyzing Grammatical Errors in Students' Essays: the case of BBS 1st Year Management Students at Bal Kumari College

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to assess the grammatical errors committed by bachelor first-year management students studying English as a foreign language at Bal Kumari College, Naryangarh in the year 2023. To identify the errors, every student was assigned to write an essay on "The Pros and Cons of Social Media for Students" in about 500 words within 50 minutes. 80 essays were collected through the simple random sampling method, and those essays were checked in depth. All the errors in their essays were collected, identified, classified, explained and analyzed. The results revealed that the most common grammatical errors made by the students involved subject–verb agreement, verb tenses, spellings and punctuation and the causes of the errors were due to intralingual transfer and interlingual transfer.

Key Words: English essay, grammatical errors, error analysis, interlingual, intralingual, writing skill

1.   Introduction:

English holds significant importance in Nepal, although it's not the country's native language. Nepali is the official language and the most widely spoken, but English plays a crucial role in various aspects of Nepalese society, particularly in urban schools and higher education. Proficiency in English is seen as advantageous for accessing global opportunities, higher education abroad, and securing better job prospects, particularly in fields such as tourism, hospitality, business, and education. Maharjan (2009) notes that although Nepali is the national language, English exposure for Nepalese students is limited, contributing to difficulties in writing and speaking English.

According to Ananda, Gani, and Sahardin (2014), teaching English learners in an EFL context is a challenging task, with writing considered the most difficult among vital skills (p.81). Effective writing involves a combination of various cognitive processes– maintaining grammatical accuracy, logical organization, creative thinking, semantic clarity, and syntactic specificity. Learners must be able to express their thoughts clearly and effectively. While writing may be challenging, it is also a skill that can be developed and improved through practice, feedback, and continuous learning.

Essays provide valuable data for teachers to assess learners' errors, covering various topics and lengths. As a reliable and explicit writing genre, essays allow students to express information, experiences, feelings, and opinions in their language. The expressed ideas and information remain ambiguous and unintelligible if they lack sound knowledge of language use in practice.

Bal Kumari College fosters a diverse student body from different backgrounds, mother tongues, and geographical distributions. This diversity may manifest in challenges relating to their writing skills. This research article, through the tool of essay writing, aims to find out the most prevalent area of errors in their writing so that educators can address these specific mistakes and provide the students with feedbacks that will help improve their writing skills.

1.1 Research Objective

To identify and analyze the prevalent grammatical errors in essays written by BBS first-year students of Bal Kumari College, Narayangarh, and to find out the possible causes of those errors.

1.2 Research question

What are the primary grammatical errors identified in the essays written by BBS first-year students and to what extent do these errors impact the overall quality of their written communication?

1.3 Literature Review

A mistake is an unconventional linguistic expression sporadically observed during a language learner's writing or speech, while an error is a consistent deviation regularly noticed at the competence level, stemming from a lack of knowledge about language usage in writing or speech. Richards and Schmidt (2002) define an error as the faulty use of language because of incomplete learning of language use (p. 184). Gass and Selinker (2001) assume the errors to act as red warning signals mirroring the learners' lack of knowledge of the target language.

Mistakes can be corrected by the learners themselves, while errors can't be. The same opinion is mentioned by Ellis (1996) who claims that errors cannot be self-corrected by the learners (p. 17).

Furthermore, Corder (1974) remarks that errors are produced because of incomplete learning and linguistic incompetency of the learners (p. 259). Therefore, errors should be taken seriously and the teachers need to take remedial steps to improve language competence that is revealed at the performance level of the learners.

1.4 Sources of Errors

Brown (2002) points out two main sources of errors: interlingual transfer andintralingual transfer (p. 224). Interlingual transfer is a source of error which influences the foreign language learning negatively due to the mother tongue of the learner, whereas intralingual transfer is a source of error which tends to make the learner apply the incorrect generalization of the rules within the target language because of lack of correct learning of language use.

1.5 Error Analysis

Error analysis is a crucial aspect of applied linguistics and second/foreign language learning, offering a systematic approach to examining learners' mistakes. These errors are integral components of the language learning process. In linguistics, error analysis involves systematically collecting, identifying, describing, explaining, and evaluating unacceptable linguistic forms in learners' writings or speeches.

Darus and Subramaniam (2009) discovered that Malaysian students commonly faced grammatical challenges, particularly in singular/plural forms, verb tenses, word choice, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and word order. Sarfraz's (2011) research indicated that Pakistani students mainly made grammatical errors through intralingual processes. Yahya, Ishak, Zainal, Faghat, and Yahaya (2012) found that Malaysian students struggled with singular-plural forms due to mother tongue interference. Similarly, Sawalmeh's (2013) study highlighted that Saudi Arabian students frequently erred in verb tenses due to first language transfer.

Additionally, Amiri and Puteh's (2017) research on Iranian students revealed that sentence structure posed challenges, primarily attributed to mother tongue interference.

2. Methodology

The researcher adopted the following methodological elements to carry out the research.

2.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was employed to carry out the research study.

2.2 Population

The population of the study consisted of 80 Bachelor first year management students studying at Bal Kumari College, Chitwan Nepal in 2023.

2.3 Sampling Design and Sample Size

The researcher followed the simple random sampling technique as a sampling design by selecting 80 students' essays.

2.4 Nature and Sources of Data

The researcher used the nominal data whose primary source was the essays of the students. The secondary sources of data were books and journal articles.

2.5 Stages of Error Analysis

The analysis of errors in the essays was based on Corder's (1974) method which embraced the five proceedings: collection, identification, description, explanation and evaluation of errors.

2.6 Collection of Data

The data for the analysis of errors were elicited from the corpus of essays written by the students.

2.7 Identification and Description of Errors

Table 1: Errors in the Use of Diverse Grammatical Aspects

S.N.	Type of Error	No. of Papers exhibiting the error	Percentage
1.	Subject-Verb Agreement	66	82.5
2.	Verb-Tenses	46	57.5
3.	Spellings	40	50
4.	Punctuation Marks	30	37.5
5.	Capitalization	24	30

Errors:

This table displays that the highest percent of errors was in the use of Subject-Verb Agreement (82.5%), whereas the lowest percent of errors was in the use of Capitalization (30%). It was observed that the highest frequency of errors in the use of Subject-Verb Agreement was owing to the intralingual interference.

Table 2: Sample students' transcribed Subject-Verb Agreement errors

S.N.	The texts with Subject-Verb Agreement Errors	Correction
1.	The main disadvantage of social media *are*	The main disadvantage of social media is
2.	Many people *faces* different types of difficulties.	Many people face different types of difficulties.
3.	Students *uses* social media for different purposes.	Students use social media for different purposes.
4.	She *watch* tiktok, *learn* different style	She watches tiktok, learns different styles
5.	Nowadays people of any age *uses* social media.	Nowadays people of any age use social media.

Table 3: Sample students' transcribed Verb Tenses errors

S.N.	The texts with Verb Tenses Errors	Correction
1.	They *are* work easily and efficiently	They work easily and efficiently
2.	Students can *educated* themselves	Students can educate themselves
3.	*Students involved* in social media very easily.	Students are involved in social media very easily.
4.	We should *used* social media in our limitation.	We should use social media in our limitation.
5.	People are getting *addict* to social media, which affects their studies and health.	People are getting addicted to social media, which affects their studies and health.

Table 4: Sample students' transcribed Spelling errors

S.N.	The texts with Spelling Errors	Correction
1.	*easyly*	easily
2.	*intelijent*	intelligent
3.	*maneg*	manage
4.	*tallent*	talent
5.	*biussness*	business

Table 5: Sample students' transcribed Punctuation errors

S.N.	The texts with Punctuation Errors	Correction
1.	In this 21st century students use google you-tube and other media for learning	In this 21st century, students use google, you-tube, and other media for learning.
2.	Social media is important for *students* life	Social media is important for students' life
3.	Most importantly it can be used to learn new skills.	Most importantly, it can be used to learn new skills.
4.	Students can develop their skills...with the help of social media.	Students can develop their skills with the help of social media.
5.	If we feel bored then we can watch movie funny videos	If we feel bored, then we can watch movies and funny videos.

Table 6: Sample students' transcribed Capitalization errors

S.N.	The texts with Capitalization Errors	Correction
1.	There are some *Disadvantages* of social media.	There are some disadvantages of social media.
2.	*it* causes distraction in studies by uncontrolled use.	It causes distraction in studies by uncontrolled use.
3.	It affects our *Mental Health.*	It affects our mental health.
4.	New *ai* systems are released which help us to work faster.	New AI systems are released which help us to work faster.
5.	It helps to give us various kinds of *Knowledge* and ideas.	It helps to give us various kinds of knowledge and ideas.

3. Explanation of Errors

The researcher focused exclusively on two error causes: intralingual transfer and interlingual transfer. Within intralingual transfer, instances of overgeneralization, hypercorrection, erroneous input, faulty analogy, and overlooking co-occurrence restriction were identified. Likewise, interlingual transfer encompasses instances of mother tongue interference arising from distinctions between the Nepali language and English. It also involves the non-utilization of a linguistic form present in another language.

3.1 Evaluation of Errors

Upon analyzing the essays written by the chosen students, the researcher identified a variety of errors made by the students. Notably, certain essays featured a significant number of ambiguous sentences, and this observation distinctly shows us the students' proficiency in the English language and sheds light on specific challenges they face, which includes subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and the incorrect usage of words. This examination further emphasizes the importance of educators dedicating more attention to these aspects when instructing the Basic Writing Skills course, with a particular focus on essay writing. It shows the need for a targeted approach in addressing students' language difficulties, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their language proficiency levels and facilitating more effective teaching strategies.

4. Conclusion

Thus, the results of the study show that errors that participants committed were basically grammatical. The participants also had a relatively weak vocabulary and their sentences were sometimes incomprehensible. Hence, we can conclude that these participants have problems in acquiring normal grammatical rules in English. Such an insight into language learning problems is useful to teachers because it provides information on common trouble-spots in language learning which can be used in the preparation of effective teaching materials. Also, by being able to predict errors to a certain extent, teachers can be well-equipped to help students minimize or overcome their learning problems. Additionally, it identifies intralingual transfer as the primary cause of these errors.

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