

## ERROR ANALYSIS OF POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING

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### ABSTRACT

Having students to produce an organized, neat and error-free piece of writing has always been the lifelong dream of all ESL instructors. The purpose of this study is to identify the types and most common language errors in writing made by polytechnic students under degree program. Error analysis was done on 28 samples of students' essay. The most salient grammatical errors found in the students' essays were mismatch in Subject Verb Agreement. The data revealed that polytechnic students make different types of grammatical errors, and most of these errors were due to intralingual transfer. Furthermore, the findings and the results also showed that the English writing skill of degree students in polytechnic needs more reinforcement and development. It is hoped that the results of this study could be of much benefit for developing the English writing skill among polytechnic students.

**Keywords:** Error analysis, Grammatical errors, Writing.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Errors in writing are unavoidable and it can be anticipated when examining the students' output. These errors may occur due to various factors such as interference errors, intralingual errors and developmental errors (Richards, 1974). However, for the language instructors, errors are beneficial in measuring the students' language performance. Error analysis has always been an integral part of research in ESL studies. Errors committed by ESL students are perceived as "systematic and reasoned" and by drawing upon these errors, language instructors can scrutinize the students' performance and development and "take the remedial action afterwards" (Shahrokhi & Lotfi, 2012).

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate types of errors committed by second language students in two different types of academic writing; article review and reflective essay. Writing is chosen as the main focus of this study as it is considered as one of the most important language skill that the polytechnic students need to acquire especially when they are studying for a degree.

Academic writing is important for them too as they will need to present their creative thinking and analytical skills by making readers understand what they mean to say in writing. Writing academically helps students to implement their theoretical knowledge into the practical world. Thus, the finding of this study is hoped to help language instructors to recognize students' difficulties in learning English as well as to assist in the application of suitable approach to teach beginning ESL students in acquiring better writing skills in English.

Errors in writing are often considered as an irritating factor to language instructors (Brown, 1994). Thus, this study attempted to identify the types of error and the most common language errors in order to get a closer look into these issue so that useful pedagogical instructions to teach writing for polytechnic degree students could be recommended. The errors can be categorized into interlingual which resulted from the students' application of the native language elements in their spoken or written performances of the target language. The Interlanguage was introduced by Selinker (1972) who views interlanguage as a series of overlapping systems characterized by having aspects from both first language (L1) and second language (L2) in the learner's verbal performance in L2. On the other hand, intralingual is defined as hypotheses about the English language which are built by language learner although he/ she has inadequate knowledge of it and only obtain it from text book or the classroom. Developmental errors however will occur when L2 students have deficient familiarity of the target language.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research method. In order to investigate the type and frequency of errors made by polytechnic students, this study adopts a quantitative approach by analysing errors made in students' writing based on Key List.

Due to the small number of respondents, the statistical data of the errors is not to be generalized. This quantitative approach was only chosen to identify errors, the type and its frequency and it was carefully planned to ensure that there is a complete randomization among only the students in the class and the students will be benefited from the result of the study

### 2.1 Procedures of Data Collection

Ellis (1994) suggests the following steps to conduct an error analysis research:

No.	Steps	Explanation
1.	Collection of samples of learner language	Deciding what samples of learner language to use for the analysis and how to collect these samples
2.	Identification of errors	Identifying the errors by underlying the errors the learner made
3.	Classification of errors	Grouping the errors that have been found and stating the classes of the errors
4.	Explanation of errors	Explaining the errors by establishing the source of the errors and calculating how often the errors appear
5.	Evaluation of errors	Evaluating the errors involves stabilizing the errors and drawing conclusion

### 2.2 Classification of errors

Each error was recorded according to its type in an individual error record form according to the Key List and the identified errors were classified into two categories: interlingual and intralingual. Under interlingual, the errors were further identified and classified in several specific components which are:

- a. errors in spelling
- b. errors by using native language
- c. errors by using L1 structure
- d. errors by omitting "Be" (was/were) in nominal sentence

For the intralingual category, the errors were further identified and classified into several specific components which are:

- a. errors in spelling
- b. errors by omitting suffix (-ed) in regular past verb
- c. errors by using present "be" in past event
- d. errors by using present verb in past event
- e. errors in choosing wrong pronoun
- f. errors in using wrong auxiliary verb
- g. errors in omitting('s) as possessive marker
- h. errors in adding "S" in singular noun
- i. errors in omitting "s" or "es" in regular plural noun
- j. errors in omitting "ing" in gerund noun
- k. errors in using wrong preposition/ conjunction
- l. wrong usage of "to"
- m. wrong usage of articles
- n. wrong usage of modals

In calculating the frequency of these each error, the following formula was adapted from the studies of Haryanto (2007) and was employed:

$$P = \frac{nl}{\sum N} \times 100\%$$

in which,

P : percentage of each error

Nl : total of the given error

$\sum N$  : total of the whole errors

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Results

This section discusses the grammatical errors categorization due to Interlingual and Intralingual Transfer

	INTERLINGUAL ERRORS	Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage of Occurrence	Most Common
1.a	spelling error	1	0.2	16
1.b	using native language	1	0.2	16
1.c	using L1 structure	26	5.9	7
1.d	omitting "verb to be" in nominal sentences	29	6.6	5
	INTRALINGUAL ERRORS			
2.a	spelling error	47	10.7	2
2.b	omitting suffix (ed) in regular past verb or passive verb	41	9.2	3
2.c	using present "be" in past event	5	1.1	15
2.d	using present verb in past event	8	1.8	13
2.e	choosing wrong pronoun	13	3	11
2.f	mismatch in (SVA)	108	24	1
2.g	omitting ('s) as possessive marker	7	1.6	14
2.h	adding "s" in singular noun	13	2.9	12
2.i	omitting "s" or "es" in plural noun	19	4.3	8
2.j	omitting "ing" in gerund noun	17	3.9	9
2.k	using wrong preposition/ conjunction	27	6.1	6
2.l	wrong usage of "to"	27	6.1	6
2.m	wrong usage of articles	15	3.4	10

Based on the findings, the occurrences of errors done by the polytechnic students in their writings are mostly caused by intralingual factors whereby the students failed to comprehend the general characteristics of rule learning. This caused faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions and they are reflected in their writing. The highest error rates in this study came from the intralingual group and errors in SVA had the highest percentage which was 24%. A total of 108 errors related to SVA in were found in their writings out of a total of 441 errors. The errors were caused mainly by intralingual sources: overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, omission, and building of false concepts. The intralingual errors are explained as unrelated to the native language interference as they are led by the target language itself. This is due to the errors that normally occur when the students have acquired knowledge of the language but it is insufficient (Kaweera, 2013). As, the students can be considered language incompetent, these errors could be caused by ineffective traits of learning such as unawareness of the rules and restrictions or faulty application of rules.

From this study, the findings show that the native language interference was found only in a small proportion. As mentioned earlier, L1 interference happens whenever L2 students' syntactic understanding is transferred into their use of the target language. According to Dulay (1982), there is an automatic transfer that habitually occurs when students make use of their L1 structures in the target language. This statement is supported by Hashim (1999) who identifies that the automatic transfer is referred to as L1 interference/ language transfer/ cross-linguistic which explains the interference of the students' mother tongue when they use the second language in spoken or in written forms. Based on the findings, although the students are generally language incompetent, surprisingly, their writings are less influenced by their L1 except for certain phrases that have similarities with L2 in terms of its spelling. The other L1 influence that can be clearly found is the omission of "verb to be" in nominal sentences as their L1 does not require that to be in the sentences. Overall, the analysis of written essays shows that L1 does not play too much of a harmful role in polytechnic students' writing.

The data of interlingual errors and intralingual errors are analyzed from two types of writing from each student, an article review and a classification essay. The interlingual errors made by the participants are divided into four (4) subcategories: they are (1) wrong spelling, (2) use of Malay word, (3) use of L1 structure and (4) omission of "verb to be" in nominal sentences.

The types of intralingual errors made by the participants are: (1) wrong spelling, (2) omission of suffix (ed) in regular past verb or passive verb, (3) use of present "be" in past event, (4) use of present verb in past event, (5) wrong selection of personal pronoun, (6) mismatch in SVA, (7) omission of ('s) as possessive marker which consists of 7 cases (1.6%), (8) adding "s" in singular noun, (9) omitting "s" or "es" in plural noun, (10)

omission of "ing" in gerund noun, (11) use of preposition/ conjunction, (12) wrong usage of "to", (13) wrong usage of articles and lastly, (14) wrong usage of modals.

The highest error rates in this study came from the intralingual group and errors in SVA had the highest percentage which was 24%. A total of 108 errors related to SVA in were found in their writings out of a total of 441 errors.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study is to identify, categorize and analyse the type of grammatical errors made in polytechnic degree students' English essays and the sources of these errors. Accordingly, a number of different grammatical errors were found and the analysis showed that the students made grammatical errors due to two main reasons; interlingual and intralingual. The data revealed that polytechnic students make different types of grammatical errors, and most of these errors were due to intralingual transfer. Their essays also proved that the polytechnic degree students are facing major problems in writing even passable essays in English. It can be seen from their composition that they obviously have incompetent grasp of the basic tenets of English grammar. This study is believed to be helpful to revamp students' writing as the researcher found that English written by polytechnic students contained various types of errors and some of these errors could lead to readers' misunderstanding. These findings are hoped to result in a more successful teaching methods and useful teaching materials which can contribute to polytechnic students' writing improvement.

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