

A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF COMMON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN UNDERGRADUATE EFL WRITING

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Abstract: This article provides a descriptive analysis of common grammatical errors in the written work of undergraduate students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and proposes effective pedagogical methods to address them. The study is based on corpus-based research and internationally conducted EFL studies. The causes and main types of grammatical errors, along with methodological approaches to reducing them, are examined, and strategies for enhancing grammatical accuracy and fluency in students' written discourse are discussed.

Keywords: grammatical errors, written work, EFL learners, corpus analysis, linguistics, pedagogical methods.

Introduction

English is one of the primary tools of global communication and is widely used in schools and higher education institutions worldwide. For undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language, the development of full language competence heavily relies on writing skills, as scientific, academic, and social communication requires precise, grammatically accurate expression of ideas. However, in practice, many students make grammatical errors in their written work, which negatively affects their academic performance, communicative effectiveness, and motivation to learn the language. Therefore, identifying and addressing grammatical errors remains a pressing issue for language teachers and methodologists. This article analyzes grammatical errors commonly found in undergraduate students' written work, examines their underlying causes, and presents effective strategies for error correction.

The analysis of EFL learners' written work indicates that the most frequently occurring grammatical errors are related to the use of articles, the correct selection of verb tenses, the application of prepositions, subject–verb agreement, and adherence to spelling conventions. The primary cause of these errors is structural differences between the learners' native language and English. In particular, the absence of the article category in the learners' mother tongue leads to difficulties in the appropriate use of English articles such as a, an, and the.

In addition, the complexity of the English tense system results in considerable confusion among learners. In some cases, incorrect verb forms, violations of sentence word order, or improper punctuation make the text's intended meaning difficult to comprehend. Language transfer, that is, the direct transfer of grammatical rules from the native language to English, also contributes significantly to the prevalence of these errors.

Literature Review

In recent years, the issue of grammatical errors in the written discourse of students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been widely studied in linguodidactics and applied linguistics. Researchers regard writing as a crucial component of language competence and emphasize that grammatical accuracy in written discourse is a key factor in academic success and effective communication.

Numerous international studies have reported that the most frequent errors in EFL students' written work include the incorrect use of articles, verb tenses, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, as well as errors related to spelling and punctuation (Corder, 1967; Richards, 1971; Ellis, 1997). These errors are often attributed to structural differences between learners' native languages and English.

Among the approaches to analyzing learner errors, the Error Analysis approach holds a particularly significant position. According to this approach, errors are considered an integral part of the language learning process, as they provide insights into learners' stages of language acquisition. Richards and Sampson (1974) associate errors with language transfer, overgeneralization, and incomplete mastery of the target language rules.

Ellis (1997) and Ferris (2002) argue that the persistence of grammatical errors in written discourse is largely due to insufficient writing practice and the lack of effective feedback. They emphasize that theoretical grammar instruction alone is not sufficient to ensure accuracy in students' written production.

Furthermore, contemporary research highlights the important role of corpus-based studies in corpus linguistics. By analyzing authentic written texts produced by EFL learners, corpus-based research enables the precise identification of error types and their frequency (Granger, 2003). This approach is widely regarded as an effective tool for developing pedagogical recommendations.

Overall, the literature review indicates that reducing grammatical errors in EFL learners' written discourse requires systematic error analysis, regular writing practice, effective feedback, and the development of self-monitoring and self-analysis skills. These theoretical perspectives form the foundation of the present study.

Methods

In conducting this study, a mixed-methods research design was employed to comprehensively analyze grammatical errors in EFL learners' written work. Since the

mixed-methods approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, it enabled a more in-depth identification and analysis of the frequency, types, and underlying causes of grammatical errors. This methodology plays a significant role in the systematic investigation of errors in written discourse and in the development of effective pedagogical recommendations to reduce them.

Results

Within the scope of this study, grammatical errors in the written works of EFL students were analyzed comprehensively. The study examined the compositions in terms of structural aspects, sentence and clause constructions, verb tenses, article usage, prepositions, and word order. In addition, the causes of errors, the most frequently occurring error types, and their impact on the written texts were identified.

Furthermore, the study investigated the process of evaluating students' written works, their proficiency in applying grammatical rules, and their independent analytical skills. The frequency of errors, the various types of mistakes, and recommendations for their correction were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative indicators.

Common Grammatical Errors in EFL Learners' Written Work

Table 1.

Type of Error	Brief Description	Example (Incorrect – Correct)
Article errors	Incorrect use or omission of English articles (<i>a, an, the</i>)	<i>I saw dog – I saw a dog</i>
Verb tense errors	Inappropriate selection or misuse of verb tenses	<i>He go yesterday – He went yesterday</i>
Preposition errors	Incorrect use of prepositions such as <i>in, on, at, for</i>	<i>I live at Tashkent – I live in Tashkent</i>
Subject–verb agreement	Lack of agreement between the subject and the verb in person or number	<i>She play football – She plays football</i>
Spelling errors	Incorrect spelling of words in written discourse	<i>becouse – because</i>
Word order errors	Incorrect word order influenced by the learners' native language	<i>Always I go school – I always go to school</i>
Punctuation errors	Incorrect or missing use of punctuation marks (commas, periods, etc.)	<i>I like reading but I have no time – I like reading, but I have no time</i>

The analysis presented in Table 1 reveals that EFL learners' written work is characterized by a range of recurrent grammatical errors. Among these, article errors appear to be particularly frequent, which can be attributed to the absence of an article

system in many learners' native languages. As a result, learners often omit articles or use them incorrectly, especially in contexts requiring the definite or indefinite article.

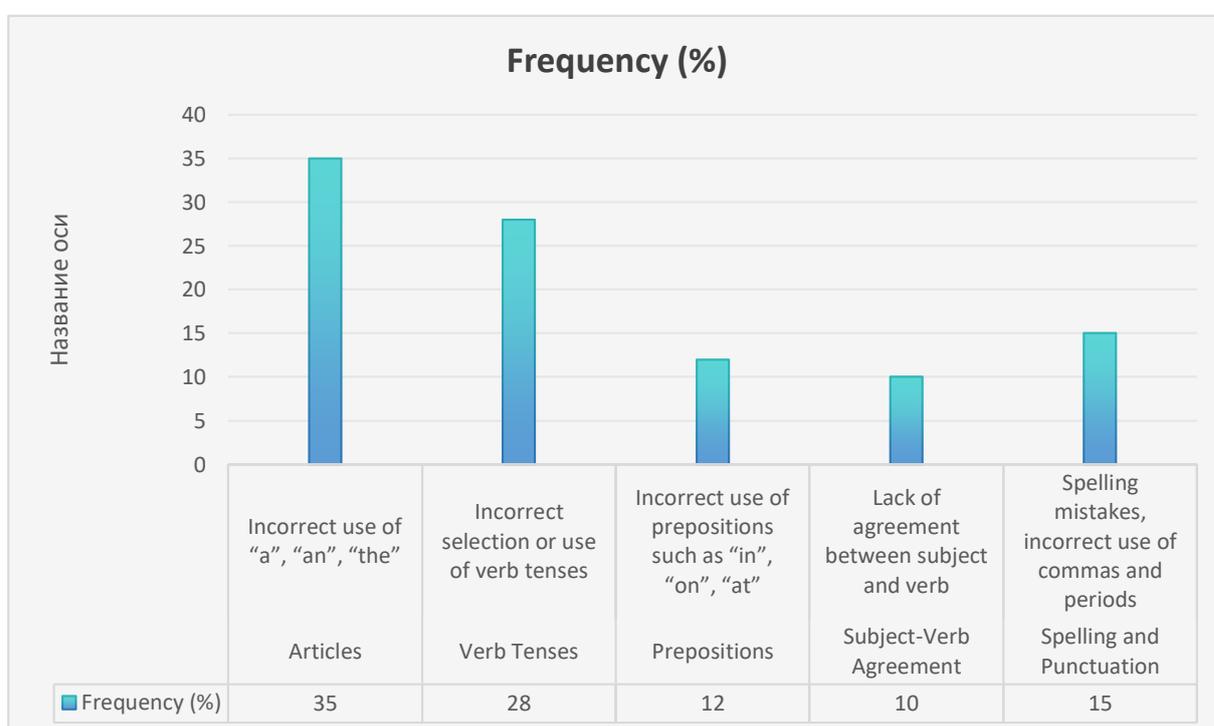
Verb tense errors constitute another major category of mistakes. The complexity of the English tense system, combined with limited exposure to authentic language input, leads learners to select inappropriate verb forms, particularly when referring to past events. Similarly, errors in subject–verb agreement indicate insufficient mastery of the basic grammatical rules governing person and number, which negatively affects sentence accuracy.

Preposition errors are also widespread, as English prepositions often lack direct equivalents in learners' first languages. Learners tend to rely on literal translation from their native language, resulting in inappropriate preposition choice. In addition, word-order errors reflect the influence of native-language syntactic patterns, demonstrating the impact of negative language transfer on written production.

Spelling and punctuation errors, although sometimes considered minor, significantly reduce the overall clarity and readability of written texts. Such errors suggest limited attention to editing and proofreading strategies. Overall, the findings indicate that insufficient practice in written communication and limited opportunities for corrective feedback contribute to the persistence of these grammatical inaccuracies. Therefore, targeted pedagogical interventions focusing on form-focused instruction, guided writing practice, and systematic error correction are essential for improving grammatical accuracy in EFL learners' written discourse.

Analysis of Common Grammatical Errors in EFL Students' Written Works

Graph.1



The analysis of EFL students' written works shows that articles are the most frequently misused grammatical element, accounting for 35% of all errors. This indicates that students often struggle with the correct use of "a," "an," and "the," consistent with the fact that many learners' native languages lack an article system. Incorrect use of articles can significantly affect the clarity and precision of written expression.

Verb tenses are the second most common source of errors, representing 28%. Many students struggle to select the appropriate tense or to use verb forms correctly, which often leads to ambiguity in their expression of time and sequence in their writing. This aligns with research highlighting the complexity of English tense structures for non-native learners.

Errors related to prepositions account for 12%, while subject-verb agreement errors represent 10%. Though less frequent, these errors disrupt sentence cohesion and grammatical accuracy, affecting overall readability. Spelling and punctuation mistakes, comprising 15%, further impact the flow and comprehension of written texts.

The graphical representation reinforces the trend observed in the table: articles and verb tenses constitute the majority of errors, indicating areas where targeted instruction and practice are essential. Prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and spelling/punctuation errors, while less frequent, still require attention in teaching strategies to improve overall writing competence.

Overall, the analysis suggests that systematic error correction, guided practice, and feedback mechanisms are necessary to reduce recurring grammatical errors and enhance EFL students' written proficiency. Focusing on high-frequency errors, such as articles and verb tenses, can yield the greatest improvement in writing clarity and accuracy.

Analysis

At present, studies of EFL students' written work show that certain types of grammatical errors are more prevalent and consistently observed across contexts. As financial markets are influenced by regulatory reforms and interest rate fluctuations, the frequency and severity of grammatical errors in students' writing are affected by multiple pedagogical and linguistic factors.

Articles and verb tenses play a crucial role in conveying clear and accurate meaning, just as bonds do in financing projects. Errors in these areas often reflect learners' linguistic transfer from their native language and insufficient practice in applying grammar rules. Systematic error correction and continuous guidance from instructors can enhance students' responsibility in producing grammatically accurate writing, just as regulatory reforms in European bond markets improve investor confidence and market stability.

The analysis also shows that external factors, such as the complexity of English grammar rules and limited opportunities for independent writing and feedback, significantly influence the occurrence of errors. Just as investors need to monitor interest rate dynamics to make informed decisions, students require ongoing observation and feedback to recognize and correct recurring grammatical mistakes.

Furthermore, comparative studies of students from different countries and educational backgrounds indicate variations in error patterns, similar to differences in market shares among European countries. For example, some students consistently demonstrate greater mastery of articles and verb tenses, akin to France maintaining a stable position in the bond market, while others require more targeted instructional support to achieve the same level of writing proficiency.

Overall, these findings suggest that addressing high-frequency errors, providing regular feedback, and promoting autonomous editing and reflection are critical to improving writing clarity, accuracy, and overall language competence in EFL students.

Conclusion

In summary, the analysis of EFL students' written works demonstrates that grammatical errors are a consistent and significant factor affecting writing proficiency. The most frequent errors are related to articles, verb tenses, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and spelling/punctuation, with articles and verb tenses being particularly prevalent. These errors often arise from structural differences between English and students' native languages, limited practical writing experience, and insufficient opportunities for independent revision and feedback.

The study highlights that grammatical accuracy, much like stable financial instruments in economic systems, is essential for effective communication. Just as financial mechanisms redistribute surplus resources to areas of need, targeted instruction and corrective feedback help students address recurring grammatical weaknesses and improve the overall clarity and precision of their writing.

Using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative analysis of error frequency with qualitative insights into the causes and patterns of mistakes, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of EFL learners' challenges in written English. The graphical and tabular analyses clearly show the distribution of errors, emphasizing the importance of focusing on high-frequency mistakes such as articles and verb tenses.

Overall, the findings suggest that systematic error analysis, guided practice, and reflective learning strategies are crucial for enhancing students' writing competence. Educators can use these insights to design effective teaching interventions, while students gain the skills to produce grammatically accurate and coherent texts. This approach contributes not only to improved academic performance but also to greater confidence and motivation in using English for academic, social, and professional purposes.

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