

Error Analysis of English writing problems faced by undergraduate students of GCU Lahore, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: Error Analysis is one of the appropriate mean to provide students the better way of writing. The study focuses on the English writing problems of undergraduate students of Government College University, Lahore, Pakistan. The study is carried out qualitatively under the lens of Error Analysis to find out what kind of errors students commit in writing even during their undergraduate degree programs. The data in this study is collected through Open-ended Questionnaire. The collected data is analyzed and thus results are in the form of spelling mistakes, wrong use of grammar, mixing of tenses, wrong use of punctuation marks, capitalization and missing of light verbs etc. The study will help teachers to check the kind of mistakes generally committed by the students and ultimately correct them.

Keywords:- Errors, Pedagogy, English writing problems, Undergraduate students

I. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan uses English as an official language of the country, but still there are numerous writing problems for the people. It is the need of hour to master the particular language in early age. The case is totally different even after getting the official status. People of Pakistan consider English language much superior to their languages and use it as a Foreign language. Very few people use English language as their mother tongue or second language in Pakistan.

English writing is obvious out of four primary skills of language. One reason for this is the examination process, as undergraduate students are required to write in English language during their exams to prove the learning they did during lectures. The students of undergraduate are unable to show their competency even after higher secondary passing certificates. The proficiency and competency of students in writing is not up to the mark.

In Pakistan, numerous public and even private sector universities offer compulsory courses related to English language other than core courses. They offer such courses to enhance the competency for writing English language. Such courses help them a lot in increasing the level of proficiency for social, academic, personal and professional purposes. They are achieving very less positive feedback from students, and the main reason behind it is their background and First Language interference. One reason of this situation is their attention towards core courses which hinders the ways for students to pay proper attention on English language course. They just want to clear the exam with just passing marks. Such negative attitude of students toward English language leads to limited progress in society because English has become the basic need in our country. The need is for writing and as well as for speaking purposes. The reason behind such attitude can be the role of teacher. Teacher does not motivate the students for learning English language for writing purpose and due to less or no motivation they become very stressed in lectures.

Government college university Lahore is an institute which holds population of backgrounds representing various ethnic and linguistic differences. The students of GCU Lahore thrive for learning English language for writing purpose because of present day need of the society. The level of writing problem depends upon the regional backgrounds and their gender more specifically. For example girls are more conservative in writing English language than boys. With growing need of English language for professional usage, people are trying their level best to overcome the problems of writing English language. The problems may occur in the

form of wrong grammar, sentence structure, spellings, wrong usage of tenses, mixing of tenses in a single sentence, and starting the arguments with adjuncts and compliments. The deficiencies related to writing English language for academic means are inevitable in Pakistan. In order to overcome the problems, students must be guided with proper techniques and teaching methods of present day need.

David Nunan (2003) defines writing as mental and physical notion. On the one hand he argues that at primary level the writing is physical phenomena as you commit the words to any kind of medium. On the other hand, it is mental act as it helps and provides a platform to invent new ideas, think more on the existing ideas and organize those accumulated ideas in the form of words.

Bjork and Raisanen pass very solid and unique argument for the importance of writing. They say that it is very important to write not only due to the reason of its immediate practicality but much more than that. They argue that writing should be placed in the category of thinking tools. It helps a lot for the development of a language. It also contributes in increasing critical thinking of people and to extent their scope for learning other disciplines in a better way.

Khan and Akhtar (2011) tell in their study about the Bangladeshi education system and their focus on writing English language. They argue that it is compulsory in their country to teach English in all phases of education. They clearly say that the learners of their country are evaluated on the basis of writing abilities in examination. They states that in their country the skill of writing is given importance over others skills. Writing is the only skill to provide evidence that ESL students got command on English language or not.

One more Bangladeshi writer Uddin argues in the article that writing is the most important and inevitable principle but the least developed skill of the students of Bangladesh. He says that it is not only important in social sciences or arts only but have much more importance in technology related science subjects too.

The well handling of summaries, reviews and essays in writing for the purpose of successful career in particular fields is explicated by Dudley Evans and St. John. This type of statement is for every kind of discipline whether they are learning English as their major subject or not.

The problems of students regarding second language writing are highlighted by Alam in perfect manner. He argues that even after possessing abundant knowledge about lexicons and grammar students face numerous problems to express them in coherent ways. They are also not able to form correct structures in writing and restructure them many times.

1.1. Purpose

It is general notion that beginners of undergraduate studies possess serious writing problems in GCU Lahore. The reason of this is their background. Most of the students belong to rural areas of different cities and learned their entire life through Grammar Translation Method. GTM does not allow them to internalize the grammar rules and this also leads to the wrong way of writing English language. The students of A-levels are best in writing English language because they know the usage of proper English language in writing due to internalization of grammar rules.

The purpose of the study is to focus on the writing problems of the undergraduate students in semester one to four. It is also the prime focus of the study that getting awareness about the rough percentage of students having problems with writing English language. The types and repetition of problems faced by the students is also the purpose of the study.

1.2. Implications

The study aims to provide platform for the ESL teachers and learners about getting awareness about writing problems of the students. It will give teachers the idea about changing the methodology of teaching English language. They will come to know about the problems faced by the students in writing English language and possible solutions to overcome them. Students will also be able to overcome their errors by getting to know about the issues in their writings. The research will provide very understandable suggestions to the students to overcome their problems on their own or with the help of the teachers.

1.3. Objectives

- To identify the English writing problems of undergraduate students of GCU Lahore
- To show prime reasons of students with low quality of writing English language
- To identify the pressure of First language in writing second or foreign language (English)

1.4. Research Questions

1. What are the main English writing difficulties faced by the undergraduate students of GCU Lahore?
2. What is the role of Rural/Urban background in defining English writing problems?
3. How Gender is playing its role in writing English language?
4. How mother tongue is hindering in the way of writing English language?
5. What is the role of Syntax of first language in writing English as second or foreign language?

ii. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is carried out under the shadow of Qualitative design. The setting of the research is purely natural as it is carried out in class rooms. The students are unaware about the task which is to be given them in the class room. The data is collected through questionnaires comprising of paragraph writing test. Entire population is of students comprising of disciplines as major other than English language or literature.

2.1. Theoretical Underpinning

The research carried out is of descriptive nature coming under the theory of content analysis. The content under this theory is divided in different forms. The data in bits is then analyzed separately. Mostly it is used as quantitative technique but also helpful in qualitative form of research.

2.2. Data Collection

Data Collection covers the population, nature of the data and ethical considerations.

2.2.1. Population

The population comprises of undergraduate students from different departments of Government College University, Lahore. The population covers Eighty (80) students of GCU Lahore with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

2.2.3. Nature of the Data

The nature of the data is purely qualitative. The qualitative questionnaires comprising of two topics were distributed to the students. The first topic asks about a place that is special for you and the second one about a moment that makes you proud. The questionnaire takes basic information of the students which inquires about their backgrounds, gender, degree program, semester and First Language (L1).

2.2.4. Ethical Considerations

It is make sure that students feel comfortable with the questionnaire. It is written on the questionnaire in special note that it is humble request to write your ideas on the particular topic. At the last page the remarks of gratitude are also written. It says: Thank You for your time. The students are explained clearly what the questionnaire is about. It is told to the students you are not supposed to write your name or any other information which will reveal your name. This is to make feasibility for you to write ideas on the particular topics. It is also ensured that the questionnaire be used only for the research purpose and not for any other mean.

2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed by using the theory of content analysis tool of research. The content is analyzed on semantic and syntax level of the paragraphs written by the population. The questionnaire is checked dually by the researcher and mistakes are written on the side of the paper. The mistakes are listed on one paper and checked that how many students are doing the same problems and which problems are found in some students. It is also observed that which students are doing no errors and what is the reason behind it. The mistakes of the students are compared with the information provided on the first page about their home town, degree program, gender, semester, rural or urban residence and the mother tongue. It is explained by the researcher that their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are coming in the way of writing correct English language.

iii. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The carried out research showed that students of GCU face numerous problems in writing English language. One cannot deny the fact that the knowledge and application of English grammar is very essential for everyone. The analysis of the results clearly indicates that various cultural and linguistic backgrounds contribute in wrong writing of English. The atmosphere of students in which they grew are hindering in the way of writing correct English language. The First language interference is one of the huge problems for students to overcome. Many of the students cannot organize their ideas coherently during writing.

The students faces difficulties in usage of punctuation marks, spelling mistakes, wrong use of plurality marker, repetition of plurality markers, capitalization, wrong use of pronouns, wrong use of articles, missing or wrong usage of possessive markers, wrong usage of do/doing, use of slang expressions, wrong usage of verbs, missing of light verbs, use was with plurals, wrong usage of is/are, use of capital letters where they are not needed, etc. some students also have problems like starting the sentence with adjuncts or compliments. They also write totally ungrammatical sentences, mixing of tenses, and extending the sentence too much by using conjunctions.

3.1 Spelling Mistakes

The mistakes of spelling are more than any other in the entire research. The students tried to write the spellings of the words according to the pronunciation and sense. For example gose (goes), hungry (hungry), palace (place), discribe (Describe), achived (achieved), studen (student), Governmen (Government), colloge (College), momen (moment), prod (Proud), compitition (Competition), livining (living), memorible (memorable), proudist (proudest), prad (proud), supports (Sports), etc.

The students who omit the alphabets from certain above mentioned words are basically from Lahore and have Urdu as their first language. They belong to the urban area and doing B.S Hons degree in psychology, Accounting and Economics. Mostly these mistakes are committed by Male students. The wrong spellings like Palace, prad, support are because of the putting spellings on a paper by making sense and the way they pronounce that words. Such mistakes are made by students from rural areas and having their first language Punjabi, Saraiki and Sindhi. These mistakes are also mostly committed by males. They are doing their B.S Hons in Urdu, Islamic Studies, Punjabi and Persian.

3.2 Wrong use/ No use of Punctuation marks

Many students without any knowledge of complex and compound-complex sentence tried to write them. By doing this their sentences are making no sense because of the wrong usage of the punctuation marks. Some students wrote very long sentences with just the use of comma. Some of the students just wrote very complex sentences without using any kind of punctuation mark. This leads to no sense of the sentence. One cannot dig out what is being conveyed by the writer. The commotion of thoughts is revealed clearly through such sentences.

There are some sentences in which the complex sentences are written so long just simply with the use of punctuation marks. For example: *'Once a time, I went to Punjab college situated in my town for debate competition, and I became confuse, when I saw only girls in audience, and then I decided to win this competition at every cost.'* This student who wrote this is from district Nankana and possessing Punjabi as his First language. The student is Male and is studying in first semester of B.S in GCU. The usage of right tense and spelling will be analyzed in their respective headings.

Consider another example: *'My Home is my special place because I love in being home I feel relax in home I can do whatever I want and some special persons My family is lived there so that's why I loved that place too much'*. The too long sentence without any punctuation mark is written by a Female student having Urdu as her first language. She belongs to Lahore and is enrolled in undergraduate degree. She wrote sentence comprising of Forty One words without any punctuation mark. Not even full stop in used after the completion of sentence. Many other mistakes are also checked regarding punctuation marks which are not explicated in the paper.

3.3 Capitalization

Many students started the sentence without a capital letter. Most of them used capital letter in between the sentences where the capitalization is not required. Let's examine some of the mistakes regarding capitalization. For example: *'And Some Special Persons My family is divided..., took admission at GCU on Merit Base not on..., made me To realize, about me Than was expecting, We are 7 Sisters and no Brothers. and my..., because i was born..., etc'*

All these students were doing this unconsciously because they don't give attention on the capitalization of words. They don't care where to use the particular capital letter and where not to use. This problem is of almost every student of semester one of GCU. Both male and female commit this big problem with equal ratio. Maximum students have Urdu, Punjabi as their first language.

3.4 Ungrammatical sentences/ Mixing of tenses

Many students wrote ungrammatical sentences in writing English. They cannot distinguish between grammatical and ungrammatical sentence. The reason is lack of grammatical knowledge and its application. They don't prefer to write in English or read in English. Due to this reason when they write, they produce ungrammatical sentences. For example: *'Once a person was so hungry and I give 20 rupees of shopkeeper that give him 2 piece of bread'*. In the sentence student is mixing past and present tense in a single sentence. The wrong use of spellings and inflection is also there. He uses was and give in a single clause which is pointing towards two tenses: Past and Present. The student is basically from Lahore and the gender is Male. His first language is Punjabi and language may be a hindrance for producing grammatical sentences of English because the structure of English is SVO and of Punjabi is SOV. Punjabi is a hindrance for such students because it is from Indo-Iranian family of languages and English is from Germanic family of languages.

Some other similar examples are: *'We live in home. We will very happy'*, *'The place is GCU inspired me'*. Both students are having Punjabi as their first language and both are male from shahdra and Phool Nagar.

They mix the tenses by using live (Present) and Will (Future), is (Present) and Inspired (Past) to produce ungrammatical sentence.

3.5 Use of was with plurals

Some students wrongly used 'was' with plural words which is very big mistake in English language. For example: *'My marks was highest..'*, *'that his seniors was admiring him'*, etc. one student is male and one is female who wrote such sentences. Male possess Saraiki as his first language and belong to the district Gujarat. Female student is having Punjabi as her first language and is resident of Lahore. In both the sentences 'were' should be used instead of 'was'.

3.6 Missing of Light Verbs

Light verbs are very important in sentences. The sentence is mostly incomplete without the usage of such verbs. Some students while producing sentences missed light verbs which is very big blunder as the message which is to be conveyed lacks proper sense and automatically the sentence become ungrammatical. For example: *'Although, there (are) many places where I feel at peace'*, *'My all relatives (are) together in our village'*, *'proudest moment in my life (is) when I got desire result'*. The bracketed words in the above mentioned examples are the missed light verbs which are compulsory in a sentence. The mistake is committed with two ratio one from females and males. The one female which committed this error is having English as her mother tongue and others have Punjabi as their first language.

3.7 Minor errors

The minor mistakes of students include the wrong usage of pronoun (it and city together). It also include the wrong use of article 'A' with plural nouns (A places), mixing of 'a' and 'an' in the usage, wrong use of is and are (our people is very honest), starting of sentences usually with adjuncts and compliments. It also includes the repetition of plural markers, wrong usage of possession markers and inflections.

iv. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study carried out is covering the population of eighty students of one semi-government institute. The study cannot be generalized because one institute cannot represent the writing problems of Pakistani students. It can only be generalized to Government College University Lahore. The study also not tells about the methodologies utilized by teachers to eradicate such problems.

v. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are based on the research done and analyzed results. The language courses must be latest and selective. Teachers should opt new methodologies for teaching language and be asked to pay more attention on writing skills. The writing practices should be one of the main activity in the class rooms and proper feedback be provided to the students. Like this they would be able to correct themselves. Separate language classes should be given to students other than course of English language. Best books of language must be taught to the students for better understanding of the grammar rules and structures of English language. The role of motivation and solidarity is inevitable to enhance the learning process for the students. The teacher should not discourage students for their wrong doings. They should encourage their writing and provide friendly feedback to students for the sake of solidarity with them.

vi. CONCLUSION

The research points out English writing problems of students of the Government College University Lahore. It reveals the fact that they are facing numerous grammatical and structural problems while English language. The students of undergraduate are still not having command on structural and grammatical position of the English language. The mistakes reveal that in primary, secondary and higher secondary school teachers are not seriously and sincerely working on their students for producing correct English language. The language which possesses the official status in the country is not mastered by the generation due to old curriculum designs, old methods of teaching, lack of motivation and student-teacher gap. Teachers do not provide proper guideline to students for flourishing in the world of English. They are just focusing on the course outline and time limit. The students are just going forward without having the concepts of courses they studied. They must be taught for the sake of training them not for passing the particular degrees. The students who were from background of O-level and A-level had command on the English language during writing. There was near to zero mistakes of those students not just because of the degree they got but also due to the updated curriculum and motivational teachers. The background, city, village, and rural/urban status is not affecting the use of English language in writing because the curriculum and schooling matters a lot. The effective and competent teacher matters more than anyother. There is half role of mother tongue and gender on the writing practices of English language as the Punjabi, saraiki or pushto speakers faces numerous problems and women are more conscious and correct in writing English language. Students belonging to different cultural and linguistic

background can be corrected by effective teachers. There modern way of teaching can solve many problems in writing English language. They can be taught other than course books through visual aids, extra materials and more written exercises regarding material provided or visuals shown. The level of confidence must be increased by showing solidarity with the student and decreasing power relation among students and teachers. The interest of students must be increased in language related things by telling them its importance and need for the globalized world.

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