

Analysis of Morpho-Syntactic Errors in the Narrative Writings of Pakistani O' Level Students

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Abstract:

Since the teaching of English as second or foreign language, it has been the dream of all the teachers that their students should compose error-free piece of writing. The primary goal of this study is to explore morpho-syntactic errors of Pakistani O' Level students while writing English narratives. The study was conducted in five leading schools of O' Level in Lahore, Pakistan. The most important errors found in the students' essays included: tense, subject/verb agreement, spellings, punctuation, articles and prepositions. The errors were classified according to frequency and percentage in the students' narratives. The research sample consisted of 200 students who were asked to compose a narrative write up reflecting their attitudes and opinions towards the writing skill of English language. The findings revealed that the Pakistani O' Level students make different types of morpho-syntactic errors which are mostly due to intralingual transfer, though interlanguage errors are not an exception. It was suggested that the English writing skills of Pakistani O' Level students need extensive practice for meeting international examination standards.

Key terms: Error analysis, English Second Language, first language, language acquisition, language learning, morphological errors, syntactical errors, frequency of occurrence, tense, subject/verb agreement, spellings, punctuation, articles and prepositions.

Introduction

Early researches about the process of second language writing were influenced by research in L1 writing (Cumming, 1995; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Specifically, it has been influenced by product, process and post-process writing theories and approaches (Abas & Aziz, 2016). With the expansion of global village, English language has played a very pivotal role in the socioeconomic uplift of developing countries like Pakistan (Muhammad, 2013). In Pakistan, Urdu holds the status of national language (Rahman, 2015) while English is the official language of Pakistan and is acknowledged passport to better education, social and economic mobility, privileges, and prestige in Pakistan (Mohammad, Masum, Ali & Baksh, 2017). Majority of the Pakistani population is in favour of English language to comply with the needs and requirements of modern age (Gillani & Mahmood, 2014). According to National education policy (2017), English as compulsory subject shall be taught from grade one. This situation has created a healthy competition of teaching and learning of English language in the academic world, resulting in the boom of English medium schools in Pakistan (Din, Khan & Ghani, 2018). English as medium of instruction in mainstream schools has created significant challenges for English language teachers. Frequently, the demand for English-medium education has been termed as the fever for English in Pakistan (Manan, Dumanig & David, 2015). Pakistani English language teachers have been found deficient even in the basic understanding of English sentence structure because in the rural area English language teachers prefer to use Urdu or local regional language as medium of instruction ((Fareed, Jawed & Awan, 2018). This situation clearly shows the failure of Pakistan's Language policies since its existence (Rahman, 2008). This situation creates challenges for many talented Pakistani students whose native languages have nothing to offer them any socioeconomic advantage and they have callous attitude towards English language. So, being a vital part of life, it is essential to know and master English language better than other languages for the survival in the national and international level. Writing

is a skill that is hard to master, as many different types of errors can occur during this process (Gayo & Widodo, 2018). Many ESL/EFL learners face writing difficulties where most of these are concerned with English grammar (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017), as the knowledge of grammar determines the success of a writer. In writing, the role of grammar is very significant. So, all grammatical elements are essential to learn and teach English grammar. The function of morphology and syntax in the grammar is really imperative (Stump, 2017), as morphology deals with the formation of words while syntax is all about the formation of sentences. The present study analyses the morphological and syntactical errors made by the Pakistani O' Level students in their narrative writings.

Error Analysis

Error Analysis has always been popular among second language researchers (Heydari & Bagheri, 2012). Learners' errors are not just because of their mother or national language but also due to some universal approaches (Mammeri, 2015). Error analysis is a systematic procedure popular among researchers and teachers, as it involves the collection of learner's write up for identification and classification of errors according to their nature and causes (Corder, 1967). Intralingual errors are of four types: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules and false concepts hypothesized (Richards, 1974). Errors are basically divided into two types: morphological and syntactical. In the production of the language, the learners are supervised and appraised on their basic level of learning. For the judgment in the output of the students in form of written discourse, the language teachers test their writings on the basis of error analysis.

The errors related to the morphology are classified into word formation and morphemes. These categories of errors are done by the pupils due to the lack of knowledge related to morphology and its rules for word formation. However, the errors which are categorized under the heading of syntactic errors are those errors which are related to the syntax. The construction of the sentences; simple and compound sentences, complex and compound complex sentences comes in this type of errors.

Brown (2007) claims that errors are caused by the two major resources: Interlingual and Intralingual. With the passage of time and research on error analysis, it was suggested by the linguists that there are some shortcomings in the prediction of errors and Contrastive Analysis was considered to be the method to predict errors (Mukarromah, 2020). These errors might be related to the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Erdogan, 2005) and these errors are unavoidable in the process of learning a second or foreign language.

Abeywickrama (2010) conducted a study on the errors Sinhala undergraduates in English composition and it was found that negative first language transfer may be a reason of errors in the write up. In another study, Gustilo and Magno (2012) explored the sentence-level errors of students at three proficiency levels and the findings revealed that all students committed errors regardless of their proficiency levels. Faisyal (2015) worked on the analysis of morpho-syntactic errors in the English language write ups of Daarut Taqwa Islamic boarding school and the findings revealed that overgeneralization was found to be the highest source of errors. In an attempt to explore Morphosyntactic errors of EFL Students in Written Compositions, Mammeri (2015) found the errors of word order, subject-verb agreement, verb structure, noun/adjective/adverb structure, word/morpheme addition, word/morpheme omission, short forms/abbreviations and conversational informal words. Agustiani (2019) worked on the morphosyntactic errors in the students' written descriptive texts and it was revealed that the most dominant errors belong to misformation of verb in subject-verb agreement.

Sarfraz (2011) explored the errors of Pakistani undergraduate level university students and the findings revealed that most of the errors were grammatical in nature due to interlanguage process. In another study on error analysis, Ijaz, Mahmood and Ameer (2014) found that Pakistani learners made verb tense, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, articles, preposition, subject verb agreement and double negation errors where

the frequency of verb tense errors outweighed the other types of errors. Saeed, Hussain and Fatima (2015) conducted a study on the Prepositional Errors in the Writings of Pakistani ESL Students and it was found that there are various types of prepositional errors in the participants' writings. Moreover, these errors were higher among females as compared to males. Ahmed, Amin and Qureshi (2017) conducted error analysis of Pakistani second language learners' written compositions and the findings revealed that a greater part of these errors is related to interlingual competency ---- learners' first language is the primary cause for such errors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are several methods which could be used in educational research; they are historical research, descriptive research and experimental research. For the investigation of morpho-syntactic errors made by Pakistani O' Level students in their narrative writings in terms of number and type, the writer used descriptive quantitative approach of research. To obtain Pakistani O' level students' data to identify the morphological and syntactical errors, the writing task was used as an instrument. The sample consisted of 200 randomly selected Pakistani O level male students of 15 years age from five leading schools (Beaconhouse School System, Lahore Grammar School, The Green School, Bloomfield Hall School, American Lyceum School) of Lahore. The students were directed to compose the narrative text writing of at least 350 words within 90 minutes only. The writing task was chosen from CIE past papers, as it requires serious efforts on the part of the students to organize their ideas and express these ideas in their own words. Before the formal start of research process, informed consent of all the stakeholders was ensured. The present study applied Sridhar (1980)'s approach to analyze learners' errors. Moreover, Politzer and Ramirez (1973)'s Taxonomy of linguistic errors was adapted according to the need of the study along with Brown (2007)'s depiction of errors to explain the type and frequency of errors.

Data Analysis

The collected data was classified into the following categories of problem areas:

- i. Tense
 - A. Present Simple
 - B. Present Progressive
 - C. Past Simple
 - D. Past Progressive
 - E. Future Simple
- ii. Subject Verb agreement
 - A. The Compound Subjects
 - B. Each and Every
 - C. One of, Each of, and Every one of
 - D. EitherOr and Neithernor
- iii. Spelling
 - A. Capital Letters
 - B. Attaching the indefinite articles
 - C. Keeping the letter 'e'
 - D. The Contracting Form
 - E. Similar in Pronunciation
- iv. Punctuation
 - A. Comma
 - B. Semicolon
 - C. Period

- D. Quotation Marks
- v. Articles
 - A. Indefinite Article
 - B. Definite Article
- vi. Preposition
 - A. Wrong Substitution
 - B. Unnecessary Insertion
 - C. Preposition Omission

The primary focus of the researcher was on the following categories.

- Tense
- Subject-Verb Agreement
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Articles
- Preposition

The list of all the errors found in the write up was prepared according to frequency and percentage of errors committed by the Pakistani O' Level students and presented in tables and graphs.

The following morpho-syntactic categories were analyzed.

- i. Tense
- ii. Subject-Verb Agreement
- iii. Spelling
- iv. Punctuation
- v. Articles
- vi. Preposition

Classification of Errors

Tenses

Tense is a type of a verb and is used to show time – present, past and future. Tense is referred to time in most of the languages.

Table 1

Total Errors in TENSES

No.	Error Classification	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
1.	Present Simple	65	25 %
2.	Present Progressive	45	17 %
3.	Past Simple	90	35 %
4.	Past Progressive	35	13 %
5.	Future Simple	25	10 %
	Total	260	100 %

In table 1, the frequency and percentage of each type of tense error can be observed independently. The number of errors committed by Pakistani O' Level pupils in the exercise of tense was 260. The maximum

errors in tenses made by the subjects were from the dominion of *'past tense'* (90) which appeared to 35 % for errors in tense. They committed least errors in the use of *'future simple tense'* (25) which came to 10 % for errors in tense.

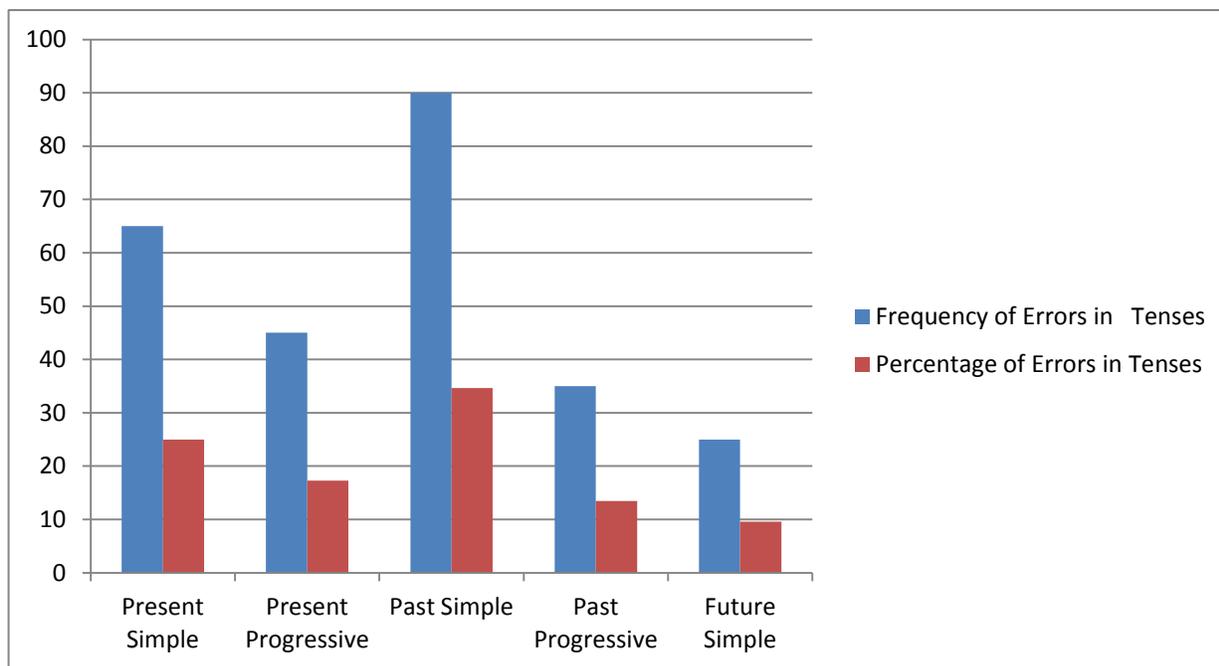


Figure 1. Total frequency and percentage of errors in tenses

Figure 1 shows the frequency of tense errors found in the Pakistani O' Level students' narratives. Above cited graph clearly shows that the most common errors were related to tense and were mostly related to *"past tense"*. 90 errors which constitute 35 % of errors related to past tense. Next comes *"present simple tense"* 65 errors which constitutes (25%) second after past tense. 45 Errors are related to *"present progressive"* which constitute (17%). Errors related to *"past progressive"* are (35) forming (13%). Looking at *"future simple tense"* errors (25) which constitute (10 %) of errors prove that these errors are the lesser in number found in the narratives of the students'.

Subject/Verb Agreement

The agreement of subject with its verb is compulsory. For example, "I am writing." This sentence shows that the subject 'I' is agreeing with the verb 'am'. Quirk et al (1985) stated that the concurrence among the subject(s) and the verb(s) as the relationship between two grammatical units such that one of them displays a particular feature that accord with a displayed feature in the other. It was found that S-V Agreement was one of the main problems among most O level students. The agreement between the subject and verb not only gives the right structure of the grammatical items but also creates the coherence in the logical order. Different types of errors were categorized by the researcher in terms of frequency and percentage.

Table 2

Total Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

No.	Error Classification	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
1.	The Compound Subjects	110	55 %
2.	Each and Every	28	14 %

3.	One of, Each of, and Every one of	38	19 %
4.	EitherOr and Neithernor	24	12 %
Total		200	100 %

From table 2, we can see the frequency and percentage of each type of subject – verb agreement error independently. The number of errors made by Pakistani O’ Level students in subject verb agreement was 200. The maximum errors in subject - verb agreement made by the participants were from the area of ‘*the compound subject*’ agreement (90) which came to 55 % for errors in S-V agreement. They least amount of errors done by the participants was related to the use of ‘*EitherOr and Neithernor*’ (24) which came to 12 % for errors in subject – verb agreement.

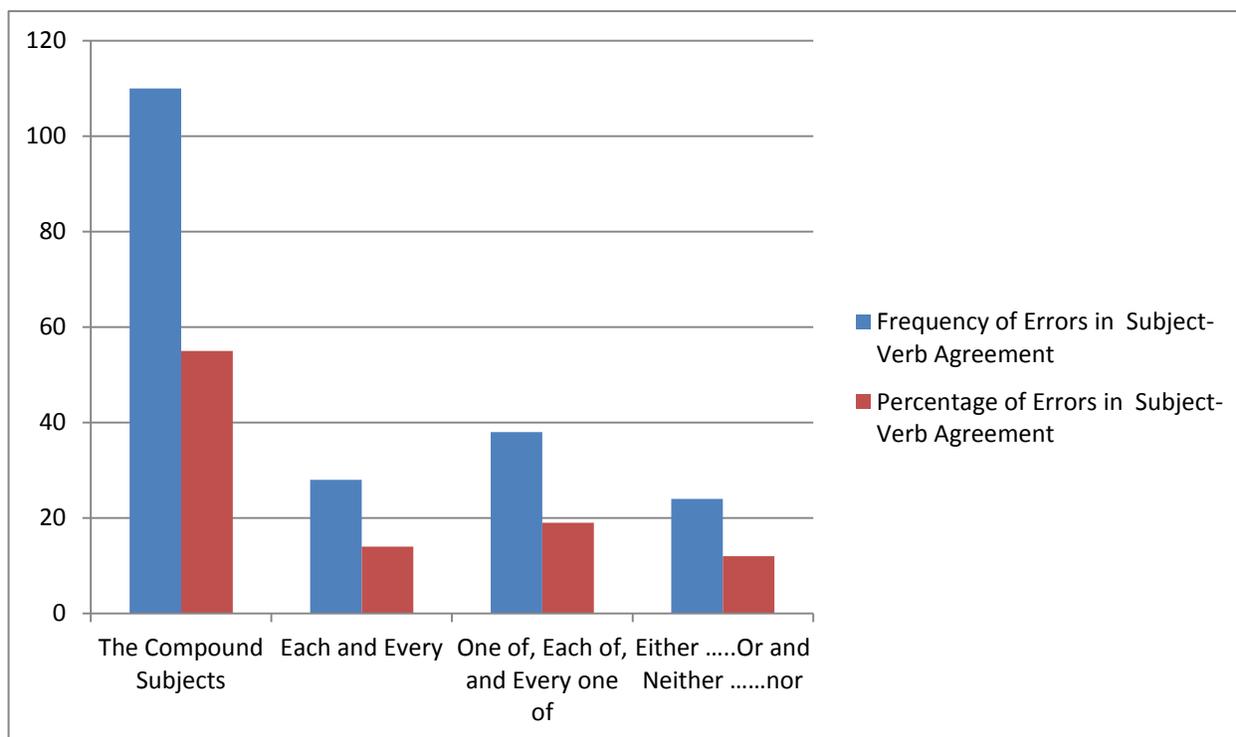


Figure 2. Total frequency and percentage of errors in subject-verb agreement

Figure 2 shows the frequency of S-V (subject and verb) errors found in the Pakistani O’ Level students’ narratives. Graph clearly shows that the most common errors were related to subject – verb agreement and were related to “*compound subjects*”. 110 errors which constitute 55 % of errors related to the agreement of the compound subject. Next comes 38 errors in the agreement of “*One of, Each of, and Every one of*” which constitute (19%) second after the compound subject. 28 Errors are related to “*Each and Every*” which constitute (14%). Looking at “*EitherOr and Neithernor*” errors (24) which constitute (12 %) of errors which shows the negligible percentage of S – V agreement errors.

Spelling

Spelling is considered to be the most vital part of the writing. If the learners misspell the general words used in narratives they lose marks. Treiman (1998) states that the use of correct spellings in narrative writing is very essential. It not only gives good impressions on the readers mind but also has a positive effect on the writers.

Table 3
Total Errors in Spellings

No.	Error Classification	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
1.	Capital Letters	130	48 %
2.	Attaching the indefinite articles	24	10 %
3.	Keeping the letter 'e'	36	13 %
4.	The Contracting Form	60	22 %
5.	Similar in Pronunciation	20	7 %
	Total	270	100 %

From Table 3, one can observe the frequency and percentage of every category of spelling error independently. The number of errors committed by Pakistani O' Level pupils in the application of correct spellings was 270. The maximum errors in spellings made by the subjects were from the realm of 'capitalization' (130) which appeared to 48 % for errors in spellings. They committed minimum errors related to misunderstanding the spelling of a word by confusing it with other 'words that are similar in pronunciation but different in spelling'. They were (20) in numbers which came to 7 % for errors in spellings.

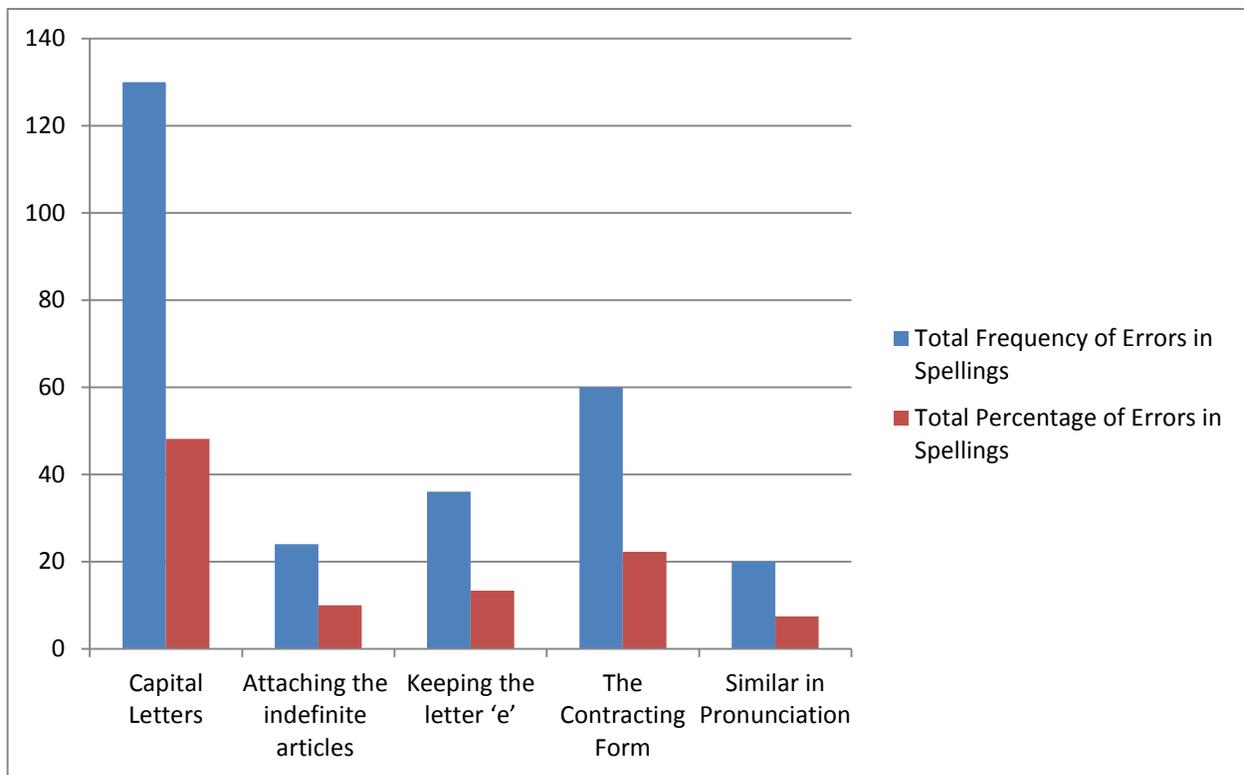


Figure 3. Total frequency and percentage of errors in spellings

Figure 3 shows the frequency of spelling errors found in the Pakistani O' Level students' narratives. Graph shows that the most common errors were related to spelling and mostly related to "capital letters". 130 errors which constitute 48 % of errors related to capitalization form the highest percentage. Next 60 errors in the use of "the contracting form" which constitute (22%) second after the contraction. 36 Errors are related to "the misuse of the letter 'e' in correct spelling" which constitute (13%). Errors related to the wrong "attachment of the indefinite articles" are (24) forming (10%). Looking at the errors related to the

pronunciation “*Words similar in Pronunciation*” errors (20) which constitute (7 %) of errors which prove that students can easily overcome spelling errors.

Punctuation

The role of punctuation in the writing is just like a backbone of a body. There are a lot of punctuation marks which can be used for the good writings. If you do not apply the rules regarding punctuation your writing would be totally opposite of your thought. Lukeman (2006) states that the use of punctuation is quite tricky. There are definite distinct rules implemented by all; the mastery of these will make one proficient of choosing where rules do not pertain.

Table 4

Total Errors in Punctuation

No.	Error Classification	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
1.	Comma	115	49 %
2.	Semicolon	25	11 %
3.	Period	65	28 %
4.	Quotation	30	12 %
Total		235	100 %

In table 4, one can observe the frequency and percentage of each type of punctuation error separately. The number of errors made by Pakistani O’ Level students in punctuation was 235. The maximum errors in punctuation made by the subjects were from the area of ‘comma’ (115) which appeared to 49 % for errors in punctuation. The least figure of errors committed by the participants was related to the use of semicolon (25) which came to 11 % for punctuation errors.

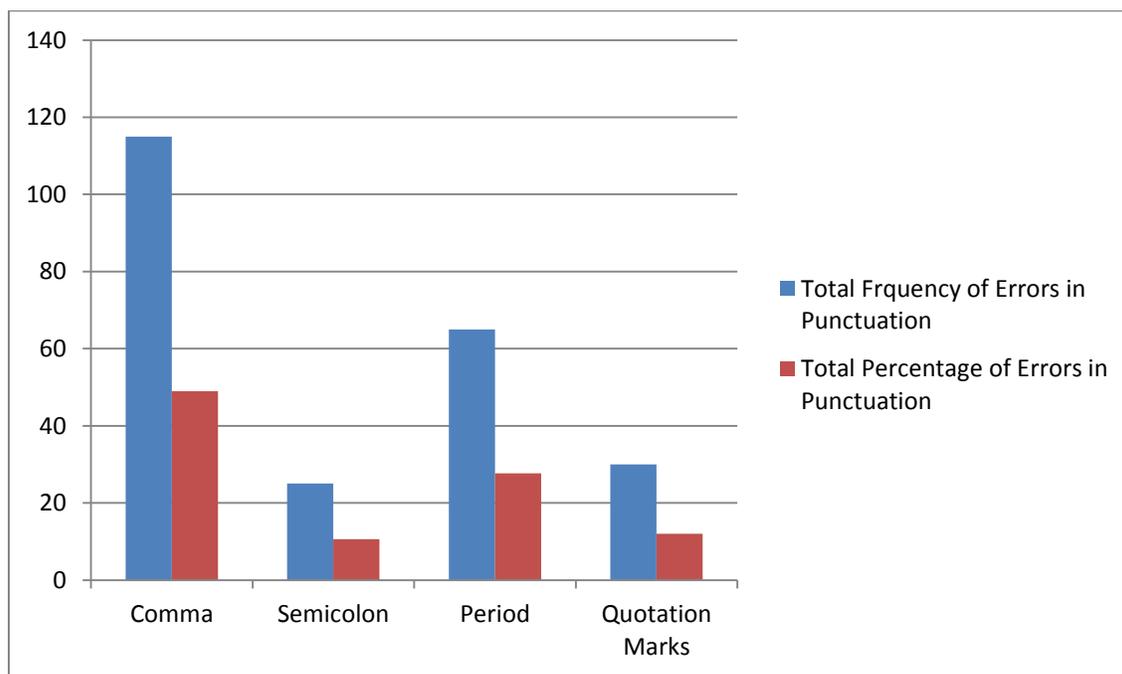


Figure 4. Total frequency and percentage of errors in punctuation

Figure 4 shows the frequency of punctuation errors found in the Pakistani O’ Level students’ narratives. Graph shows that the most common errors were related to punctuation and they were about the wrong use of “*comma*”. 115 errors which constitute 49 % of the errors outweigh the other types of others. Next comes 65 errors in “*period*” which constitute (28%) second after the comma errors. 30 Errors are related to “*quotation*”

marks” which constitute (12%). Looking at “*semicolon*” errors (25) which constitute (11 %) of errors which narrate the negligible amount of errors as compared to other types of others.

Articles

Articles are used to refer the type of noun. There are two types of articles; definite and indefinite. ‘The’ is a definite article and ‘a & an’ are indefinite articles. When you want to specify any noun you use definite article. And when you want to vary the specification of the noun you use indefinite article. These two types of articles can be applied with general nouns which can be counted.

For example;

- i. “My mother always adds sugar in my milk which I do not like.” (Correct)
“My mother always adds *a* sugar in my milk which I do not like.” (Incorrect)
- ii. “My brother is going to Canada for higher studies.” (Correct)
“My brother is going to the Canada for higher studies.” (Incorrect)

Table 5

Total Errors in Articles

No.	Error Classification	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
1.	Article (a/an)	65	54 %
2.	Article (the)	55	46 %
	Total	120	100 %

In table 5, one can observe the frequency and percentage of each type of article error independently. The number of errors made by Pakistani O’ Level students in articles was 120. The maximum errors in punctuation made by the subjects were from the realm of ‘indefinite article (a & an)’ (65) which appeared to 54 % for errors in the articles. The least errors committed by the participants was related to ‘definite article (the)’ (55) which came to 46 % for errors in the articles.

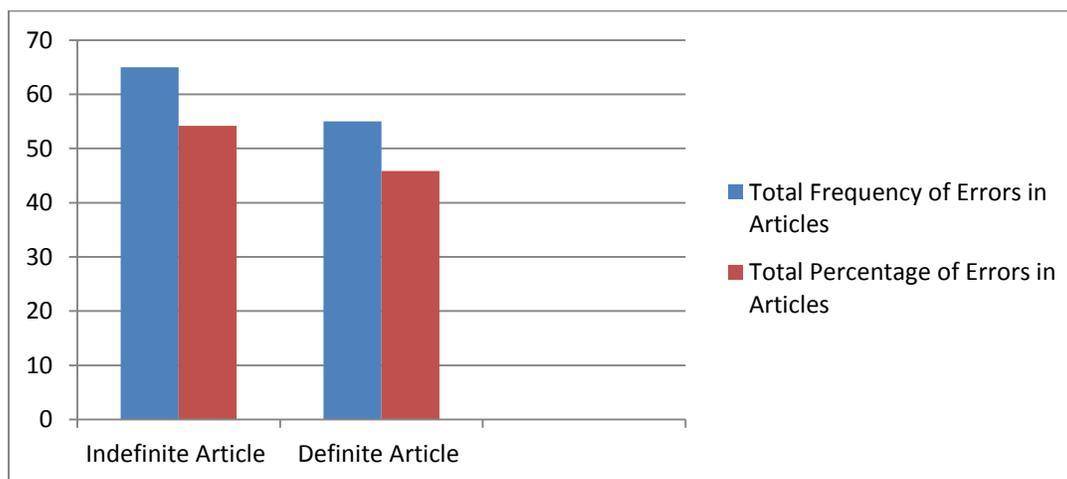


Figure 5. Total frequency and percentage of errors in articles

Figure 5 shows the frequency of articles errors found in the Pakistani O’ Level students’ narratives. Graph shows that the most common errors were related to articles and were mostly related to the wrong use of “*indefinite articles (a & an)*”. 65 errors which constitute 54 % of errors related to comma. Next comes 55 errors in the “*definite article (the)*” which constitute (46%) second after the comma errors. Looking at the “*definite article*” errors which is the least dominant area.

Preposition

A preposition is a part of speech that initiates a prepositional phrase. Prepositions can convey sense of position, time and place. It is basically before a noun, gerund or even a pronoun to join its relation with other linguistic item in the sentence. Williams (2002) states that the word preposition is divided morphologically into 'pre' and 'position' which shows that it always comes before any noun to show its relationship with other grammatical item."

But it is not necessary that it should come before a noun as earlier stated that it can be before a pronoun or gerund.

Table 6

Total Errors in Preposition

No.	Error Classification	Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
1.	Wrong Substitution	60	43 %
2.	Unnecessary Insertion	35	25 %
3.	Preposition Omission	45	32 %
	Total	140	100 %

In table 6, one can observe the frequency and percentage of each type of preposition error independently. The number of errors made by Pakistani O' Level students in preposition was 235. The maximum errors in preposition made by the subjects were from the area of 'wrong substitution of preposition' (60) which appeared 43 % for errors in preposition. The least errors committed by the participants were related to 'unnecessary insertion' of preposition (35) which appeared 25 % for errors in preposition.

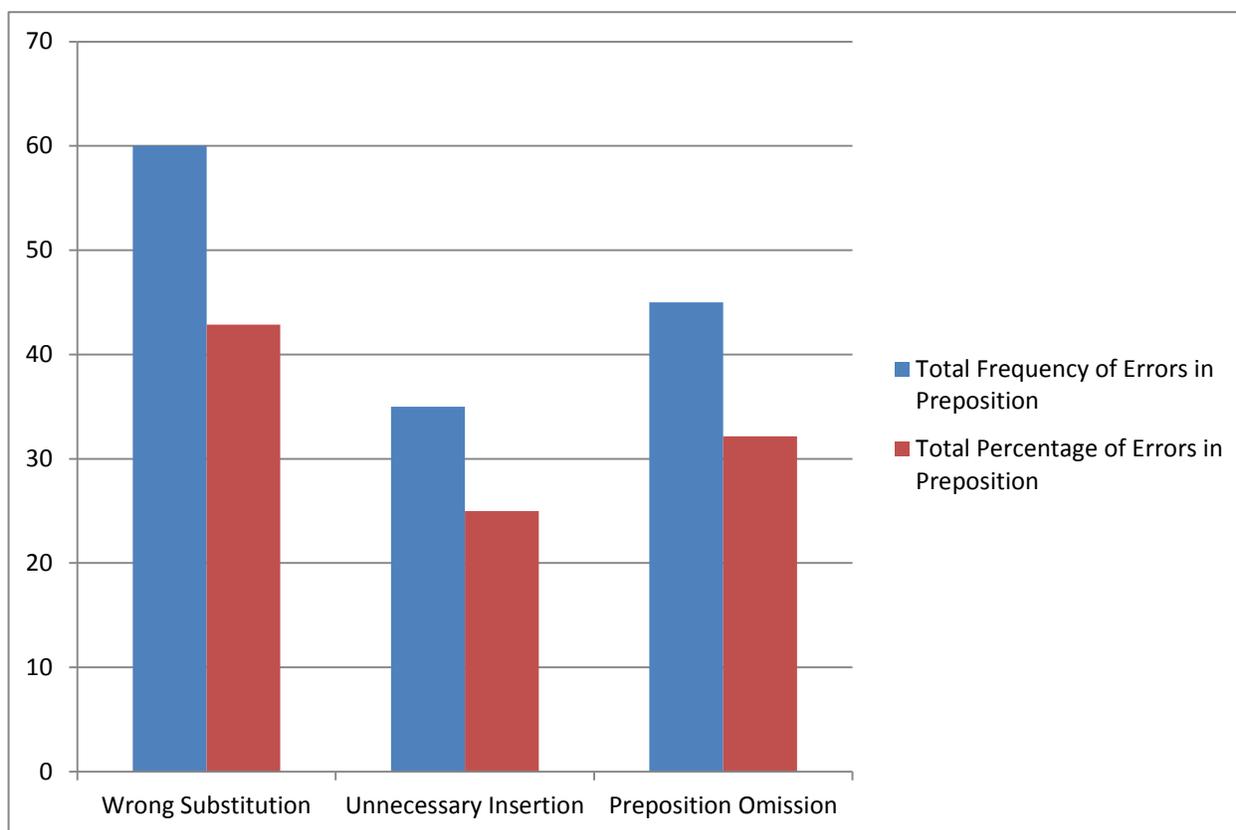


Figure 6. Total frequency and percentage of errors in preposition

Figure 6 shows the frequency of preposition errors found in the Pakistani O' Level students' narratives. Graph shows that the most common errors were related to preposition and were about the use of "wrong substitution". 60 errors which constitute 43 % of errors related to wrong substitution. Next comes 45 errors in "omission of preposition" which constitute (32%) second after the comma errors. Looking at "unnecessary insertion" errors (35) which constitute (25 %) of errors and shows that their least dominance in the students' narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The basic aim of the present study was to investigate and analyze the morpho-syntax errors in narrative write ups of Pakistani O' Level students. There were 1225 errors in terms of numbers which were highlighted in Pakistani O' level students' writing and were divided into six major kinds; tense, subject/verb agreement, spellings, punctuation, articles and prepositions. These six major categories are presented in table 31 below.

Table 7

Total Frequency and Percentage of Errors in the Narrative Writings

No.	Error Classification	Total Frequency of Errors	Total Percentage of Errors
1.	Tense	260	21%
2.	Subject-Verb Agreement	200	16%
3.	Spellings	270	22%
4.	Punctuation	235	19%
5.	Articles	120	10%
6.	Preposition	140	11%
	Total	1225	100%

Table 7 portrays that the highest errors done by O' Level students were associated to 'spellings' (270). The frequency of students' errors done in narratives in spellings was 270 that highlighted 22% spellings errors. Thus, "spelling" errors were recorded on top category. The students' errors in articles were 120 in numbers which approached to 10% for errors in article. Thus, least errors in terms of numbers noted in students' narratives were associated with the use of "article". Additionally, the other categories of errors are varied in terms of numbers, were: 'Tense' (260). The students did 260 errors which appeared 21% of the errors in tenses. 'Punctuation' (235), the students' errors were 235 in numbers which came to 19% of errors for Punctuation. 'Subject-Verb Agreement' (200), the students' errors were 200 which appeared to 16% of errors for subject-verb agreement. 'Preposition' (140), the students' errors were 140 in numbers which appeared to 11% of errors for preposition.

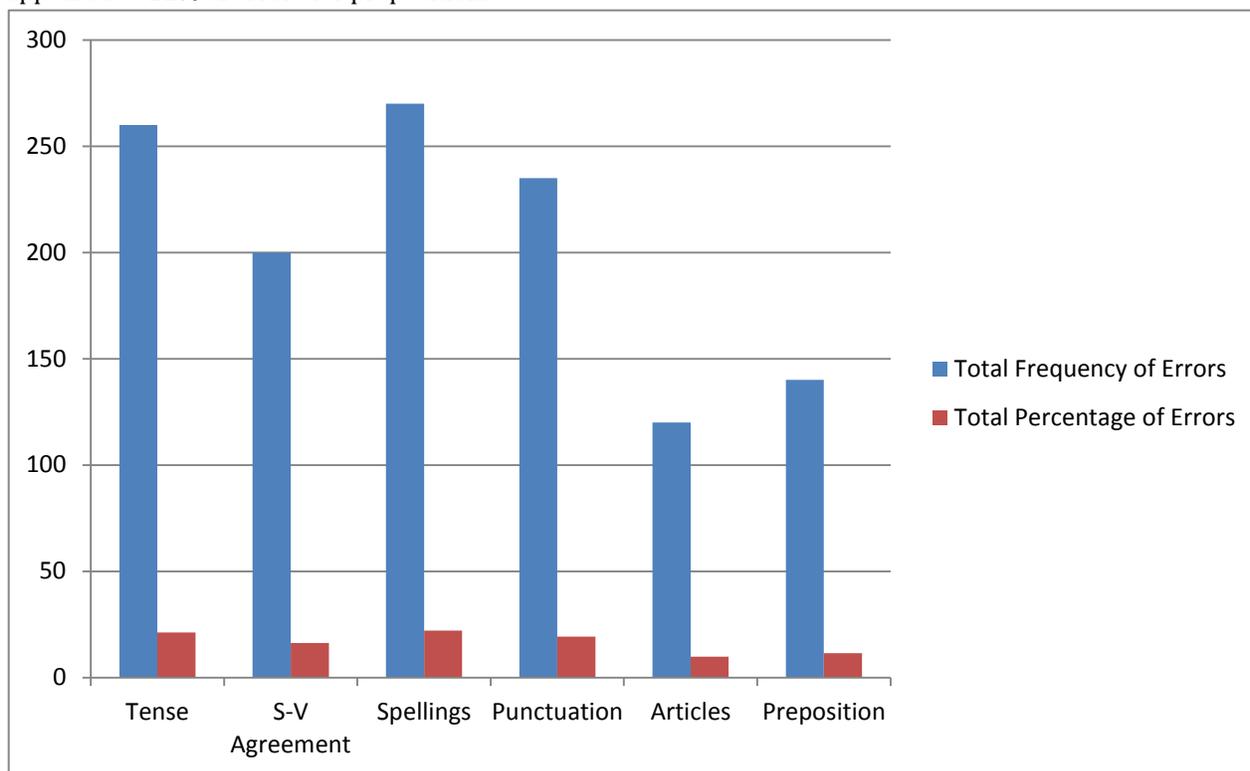


Figure 7. Total frequency and percentage of errors in narrative writings

Figure 7 shows the total frequency and percentage of morphological and syntactical errors found in the students' narrative writings. Findings of the graph reveal the most frequent errors (270) with 22% in the write ups were related to "spelling". Lower in number as compared to spelling are the "tense" errors with a number of 260 which constitutes (21%) of the errors. "Punctuation" errors 235 in numbers and constitute 19% of errors hold third position in the order of occurrence. Errors in the "Agreement of Subject and Verb" were also evident; they formed 200 (16%). Errors in the use of 'Preposition' were 140 and constitute 11% for the errors. Looking at the "article" errors 120 (10 %) reveals the lowest frequency of errors found in the write ups.

The basic aim of the present study was to identify, describe, categorize and diagnose the morpho-syntactic errors in the English narrative writings of Pakistani O' Level students which were categorized into six major errors: tense, subject/verb agreement, spellings, punctuation, articles and prepositions. The findings revealed that Pakistani O' Level students must know the English writing skills especially narrative writing. They should also focus on the morphological and syntactical elements for well-formed writings. Syllabus designers and

English language teachers should cater for the students' writing skills in order to attain desired results. English language textbooks, in the schools, should be based more and more on activities which would certainly improve the writing abilities of the students. As far as teachers are concerned, they should use diverse teaching methodologies for making their students better writers.

Reason of Errors in English Writing

Teaching Methods

After a careful and thorough analysis of the data collected from the students' responses through narrative writings, it can be concluded that majority of the students believes that teaching methods often help in overcoming their weaknesses in the English writing skill. In the researcher's opinion, use of traditional methods in teaching writing are not likely to work properly at least for the O' Level students. So the teachers especially English language teachers should not stick to the old methods of teaching. It can be stated that modern classroom teaching methods should be employed in developing the writing skill of the students.

Lack of Writing Practice

Lack of writing practice often results in the inefficiency in the writing skill which results in the poor performance of the students while writing essays. As far as the findings of the data are concerned, students believe that the least emphasis on writing activities and homework may be the basic significant reason behind their weakness in the English writing skill. Most of the teachers hold the view that the writing exercises in the curriculum don't offer the mastery skills to students while some teachers are of the view that these results may also be due to no writing practice on daily basis. Therefore, it can be deduced that lack of writing activities has been the basic reason behind the poor writing skills of the students.

Implications and Recommendations

The researcher has devised few implications which are beneficial for EFL/ESL teachers and O' level English language teachers. The present study highlights the major areas of grammar and linguistic items, and English language teachers should identify the students' errors. They should make such teaching plan through which they could teach language using modern methods. Like O' level students are not interested to learn grammar but it depends on the teachers that how they incorporate the linguistic categories in their teaching lesson plans. Through free writing techniques the teachers should judge the students at the very early stage and highlight the major areas of errors for the guide of the students. There are many sites and handouts available on the net and in the modern grammar books from which the effective techniques of correct writing can be drawn. CIE (Cambridge International Examination) board has also given very useful resources on the internet which can be utilized. Language teachers should give proper homework and mini projects to improve the students' language skills. They should not stick to the reading and writing only but other skills of English language like listening and speaking must be improved. The students must be given some group work and peer work writing tasks so that they may develop their writing skills through coordination and cooperation.

In addition, the teachers should also explore new methodologies for their students. They must explore new sites and research work of the researcher available in the library and on the internet. From the past papers of O' level English language it has been noticed that the examiner is very much interested in social sciences articles and journals. So the teachers should guide the students to bring such magazine and journals from which the students could get information and utilize in their final exams.

The morphological and syntactical errors which are studied in this research showed that Pakistani O' level students need to master the basic grammatical rules for scoring good grades in their final CIE papers. They must practice more and more the rules of grammar especially related to nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs and prepositions. They should start from the scratch; morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences and discourse. Surfing internet related to the use of grammar is very important because they can solve online grammar tests which are very useful for learning grammatical rules without the present of the language teacher. If they get difficulty they can consult with their teachers and solve their problems.

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