

Problems in the Acquisition of English Nouns by Undergraduate Students

Abid Karam

M.Phil. Scholar, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

abidkararam16@gmail.com

Abdul Hamid (Corresponding author)

Assistant Professor, Department of English & FL, University of Swat

abdulhamid@uswat.edu.pk

Syed Shujaat Ali

Assistant Professor, Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat, Pakistan

s_shojaat_ali@yahoo.com

Ghani Rahman

Assistant Professor, English Department, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan

ghani_saba@yahoo.com,

ghani.rahman@hu.edu.pk

Abstract

The present study is an attempt to analyze the problems faced by undergraduate students in the acquisition of English nouns. The Classification of English nouns is as diverse and varied as English Grammar. The researcher in the present study examines how nouns are a source of confusion for students of English as second language learners. This study investigates the errors and also classifies the types of errors made by second language learners. A proficiency test was designed for data collection. The data was collected from a sample of 136 undergraduate students studying in 5th, 6th and 7th semesters from English as well as other departments of Hazara University, Mansehra. The results were statistically analyzed and the problems in the form of errors were pointed out. The results show that grammatical category of gender was less problematic than number and case. The undergraduate students faced problems in learning English nouns mainly due to the students' lack of knowledge. The problems in the correct use of syntactic plural, gender pronoun and the special case of *she*, constant polarity tags, collective nouns, semantic anomaly and imperative interrogative tags were most prominent in the data.

Keywords: nouns, , semantic anomaly, syntactic plurality, question tags, grammatical categories.

Introduction

The present study focuses on the analysis of the problems in learning English nouns. Noun is traditionally regarded as one the eight parts of speech (Huddleston, 1984). Under this categorization of part of speech, pronoun is considered a sub part of noun. One of the reasons which are most relevant to the present study is the similar application of grammatical categories to both noun and pronoun. The importance of noun/pronoun in English language is self-evident. Communication in English language is not possible without the acquisition/learning of English noun. That is why the study specifically focuses

on the analysis of morphological, semantic, syntactic and functional issues in learning English noun.

English Grammatical Categories

Learning the grammar empowers the learners to be conscious about the structure of a language like its grammatical categories. If the learners study the grammar they will comprehend and use the grammatical ideas and concepts very much easily and in a better way (Mulroy, 2003). The grammatical concepts are based on the grammatical categories like noun and verbs etc. Those learners who know these concepts will always have a distinct advantage over the others who do not know the accurate use of the language.

In the grammar of a language, each and every item has a property and that property is called grammatical category. There are two or more than two possible values within each category. Grammatical category is also known as grammatical feature. The different kinds of groups are covered by the term grammatical category. According to Huddleston (1985), there are eight grammatical categories in modern English grammar. The items are categorized on the basis of some properties; these are morphological, semantic, syntactic or functional. In numerous cases, the items of these common categories split into subclasses and carries partial grammatical properties. The following ones are the eight grammatical categories.

- 1) Noun
- 2) Verb
- 3) Adjective
- 4) Adverb
- 5) Preposition
- 6) Determinative
- 7) Coordinator
- 8) Subordinator

For the learners, it is very much important to know the grammatical category of a word before its meaning. For the correct use of the word in a language, it is necessary to know the grammatical category of word. This grammatical category decides different things about the word (i) the placement of the word in the clause e.g. in German language the final position in subordinate clause is for verb while in main clause the verb position is second, (ii) the range of syntactic function – a clause may have noun as a subject but it cannot be an adjective or a preposition, (iii) that kind of word that occurs with it, like determiners with nouns, not with preposition, (iv) that kind of morpheme which the word accept, like verb inflect for tense and so on. It is pretty much sure that the missing word in example (1) is noun; the reason is that every grammatical category has its own unique position in a sentence and noun is preceded by a determiner and also modified by an adjective. Simply, we say it is a noun just because of the grammatical properties it carries. Similarly, from the grammatical categories we know that the word ‘water’ is a verb not a noun or any other thing.

- (1) The black ___ is yours.
- (2) He waters the plant.

The Grammatical Category of Noun

Nouns are words used to refer to people (*boy*), objects (*backpack*), creatures (*dog*), places (*school*), qualities (*roughness*), phenomena (*earthquake*) and abstract ideas (*love*) as if they were all “things”. Noun is that part of speech which indicates phenomena and objects, abstract idea and concepts and things. In English language, nouns can be differentiated as:

- a) Common noun- it has a group of referents:
- b) Proper noun- noun of unique entity and has one referent:
- c) Countable- these are the common nouns which have a plural form and can be used with the numerals or quantifiers (three, four, many) and these nouns can take indefinite article. Such nouns may be divided into:
Individual – a pen – pens
And collective – a team – teams (The team is present. / The teams are present.)
- d) Uncountable- these nouns always take plural or combine with quantifiers e.g.
Concrete- stone, honey
Abstract- illness, hate (abstract nouns refers to concept or ideas)

In a noun phrase, the head word is always a noun or pronoun. The characteristics of the noun phrase are always defined by the head word of the phrase like case (Nominative, Accusative and possessive), gender (masculine and feminine or neuter) and number (singular and plural) (Huddleston, 1984) . The following are the examples of the noun as head word.

[The valuable **paintings**] were brought by Ahmad.

[**He**] tried to bring it.

[The red **car**] that is parked in the parking.

On the basis of grammatical features noun can be classified into different subclasses e.g. common nouns, proper nouns and pronouns. The subclass common noun is identified as the unmarked (default) one while the proper nouns always act as the head word in the noun phrase.

Application of Grammatical Categories to Noun

The term "grammatical category" means that particular characteristics of a word that can affect that word/phrase. Some of These grammatical categories such as number, gender and case are applicable to English nouns. Grammatical Categories of Number means singular and plural forms of a noun. In number plural are made of a singular noun by applying inflectional morphemes. There are different lexemes to which inflections are added thus becomes plural lexemes e.g. a lexeme “boy”, by adding an inflection “s” to lexeme boy, we make plural. It is the inflectional expression of number (Gleason, 1965). The functional property in which the morphological process of making plural form is different, within the letter the singular form is the lexical stem and the plural is formed by adding suffixes. e.g. /iz/, /z/ -churches, garages and roses, /s/ - hates, mints and ropes etc. Another method of making plurals of irregular noun is the changing of letter(s) e.g. man to men, child to children and there are some other nouns having the same singular and plural called syncretism e.g. sheep and fish (Huddleston, 1984).

Gender is a grammatical category which is applied to English noun. All the languages of the world have grammatical gender. In the world, half of the present languages, separate nouns into different classes. Most of the classes carry meaning and some of them are linked with biological sex. That is why most of the languages have the gender categories of “masculine” and “feminine” and in daily speech the term “gender” is linked with the extroverted (social) differences between male and female and the biological sex. So, it seems that grammatical gender is a reflection of natural gender in grammar (Audring, 2016). The linguistic

exponent of sex has the meaning of feminine, masculine and neuter. It is not possible for someone to guess that noun is masculine, feminine or neuter by its form because English noun has no such marks for gender. Semantically, these nouns can be differentiated in terms of number. There is no grammatical mark for nouns in English. There are some nouns which are not limited to any biological sex e.g. teacher, friend and classmate etc. some nouns are lexically marked e.g. husband – wife, daughter – son, male – female. Some of the nouns have morphological suffixes for marking the gender e.g. tiger – tigress, actor – actress, usually we add certain words like she, he lady, male, girl and boy etc. when we want to mark the gender e.g. a lady doctor, a he cat and a she cat. Pronoun resolution is the process of determining which preceding nouns are referred to by a particular pronoun in text. Read the example carefully.

i) Glen told Glenda that she was right about Glendale.

The pronoun resolution system explains that pronoun *she* refers to noun *Glenda*. If the pronoun *she* is replaced with he in example (i) then Glen become an antecedent. This pronoun resolution is quite challengeable because one should have a lot of word information about the noun gender. The difference between English language and other French and German languages lie in that gender. In inherent grammatical properties, gender is not one of them rather it belongs to the real world. Some of the common nouns can have different meaning in different context e.g. semantically the word ‘*lawyer*’ can be feminine in one context and masculine in another.

Case is a grammatical category which is applied to English noun. The difference between lexemes and inflectional forms is more complicated to apply to the close class of pronouns than to the open class of ordinary nouns, verbs or adjectives. The clearest example of an inflectional category in pronouns is case, with nominative *I* and accusative *me* being forms of a single lexeme. The syntactic rules specify when the pronoun may or must appear in one or other case, and the morphology specifies the form - though we cannot give any worthwhile rules for deriving the forms (Huddleston, 1984).

Statement of the Problem

The second language learner should know the grammatical categories of the target language. The reason is that these grammatical categories decide the placement of the grammatical categories like noun, verb etc. in the clause/sentence. Due to the lack of the knowledge of grammatical rules, the learners of the second language make error at any stage and these errors or problems are numerously present in grammatical category of noun. These problems are especially prominent in the application of the grammatical category of number, gender or case to noun in English sentences. These rules create problems for the students/learners and these problems are persistent even at undergraduate level. The present research study investigates such problems in learning English noun at undergraduate level. The present study focused on those uses which are supposed to have been learned by undergraduate students.

The Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of this study.

- 1) To analyze the Problems in learning English noun by Undergraduate Students in Hazara University.
- 2) Frequency of errors in learning English noun.

- 3) To classify the types of errors in the application of grammatical categories to English noun.

Literature Review

The hallmark feature of language is generativity (Chomsky, 1957). All the second language learners must learn all the regularities of a grammar and they should know how to use these rules (patterns) in a general way to new learned items. The application of generativity is quite difficult task because the linguistics items (categories) are quasi-regular in nature and the learners need to categorize these items. Most of the languages have such quasi-regular categories, are grammatical gender, number and case etc. Although all the languages are different in gender marking with respect to the degree of phonological, morphological and semantic. Among all the languages, no language has regular and transparent method of marking these grammatical categories (Corbett, 1991). Most of the previous works written on the noun is based on the error analysis, learning and the usage of noun. Some of these works are the work by Huddleston (1984), Gleason (1965), Stone (1993), Corbett (1991), Greenberg (1963a), Greenberg (1963b), Quirk (1972) and (Corbett, 2000).

A lot of languages have the same distinction that English does because this not the only attested system in all the languages. Another fairly frequent type of language distinguishes between the SINGULAR (exactly one), the DUAL (exactly two), and the PLURAL (more than two). For example, in Upper Sorbian (a Slavic language spoken in Germany), we find singulars like *hród* 'castle' and *d'z'ełam* '(I) work', duals like *hrodaj* 'two castles' and *d'z'ełamoj* '(we two) work', and plurals like *hrody* 'castles' and *d'z'ełamy* '(we) work' (Stone, 1993) and (Corbett, 2000).

Saudi learners frequently misused the singular and plural nouns in English sentence (Alahmadi, 2014). It has been revealed by cross-linguistic typological studies that among the grammatical number system of numerous languages a huge amount of variation is there and that variation lies within fair limits. The typological study of Greenberg over 34 languages make him to propose a lot of universal generalizations, both as absolutes and tendencies. With singular and dual some languages have even TRIAL number, trial mean exactly three (Greenberg, 1963). This distinction is present in the subject agreement prefixes for human referents in Larike – a Polynesian language spoken on Ambon Island (Laidig, 1993). The construct of gender is complex and is a significant factor influencing language ideology (Bilaniuk, 2003). Zhang (2011) claimed that gender has characteristics to influence language attitude, has been recognized and proven true through culture and communities. In some languages gender is the core, general and attractive category while in some language it is completely missing. To gather/collect gender knowledge a lot of researchers use WordNet classes (Soon et al., 2001; Harabagiu et al., 2001). In addition to using WordNet classes, Soon et al. (2001) assign gender if the noun has a gendered designator (like *Mr.* or *Mrs.*) or if the first token is present on a list of common human first names. Hubbard (1983) say all incorrect forms produced by students are errors but it is important to make a difference between genuine errors caused by the lack of knowledge about the target language or incorrect hypotheses about it and mistakes caused by temporary lapses of memory confusion, slips of the tongue and so on (p. 134). The common sources of errors in L2 are:

a) The Learners

(Dulay and Burt, 1974)

- b) Teaching Materials or Methods (Hadely, 1993)
- c) Interference from L1 into L2 (Corder, 1974)
- d) Difficulties inherent in the language (Senders, 1992; Richards, 1971)

Errors in the language learning were categorized into two major types by Littlewood (1984), Hadley (1993) and Corder (1974).

- a) Inter-lingual (Shekhzadeh & Gheichi, 2011)
- b) Intra-lingual (Richards & Schmidt, 2010)

Lengo (1995) classified errors into four different categories.

- a) omission errors
- b) Addition error
- c) Selection error
- d) Ordering errors.

(Lengo, 1995).

Richard (1974) specified that those errors which are committed by the learners of the second language are noteworthy in the learning process of a second language. These errors give us information about the approaches and the procedures which are used by a learner in the learning of second language, furthermore; he added that committing of these errors is part of learning process (Corder, 1973). Ellis (1997) agreed with Corder, he said that "it is possible that making errors may actually help learners to learn when they self-correct the errors they make." Corder proposed that "errors are evidence about the nature of the process and of the rules and categories used by the learner at a certain stage in the course". In his book "Error Analysis and Interlanguage" (1967), he said that the errors of learners are important in three ways. The first one is, these errors are indicators for the teachers, they give him the idea that the learner have progressed or not and what is still important for them. Second one is, these errors give proof of the process of the second language learning, and how the language is acquired. Third one is these errors are significant for the learner also because producing errors is supposed way used by the learner to his hypothesis about the language he is learning. Corder believed that making these errors is an approach used by both the children for acquiring their mother tongue and by the adults in the learning of a second language. Yadav (2014) states that in teaching and learning process the influence of the first language will be positive or negative, positive transfer or negative transfer respectively. According to Abergo (2013) the learners always depend on the mother language when they face any kind of hurdles, especially in the start of second language learning. This is the reason behind negative transformation in SLA. This is very much natural that learners use their native language to speak fluently in target language.

Komba and Bosco (2015) examined the educational system of Tanzania, he explained that according to the medium of instructions in the primary schools there are two types of schools. The first one is, in which Swahili is the medium of instruction at primary level, the learners of such institutions could not do very well at secondary level. The second one is, in which the medium of instructions is English at primary level, the learners of such institutions were good in English at secondary level. The research study theorise that first language has a negative influence on the second language acquisition. Bolton and Kachru (2006) finds that there are some characteristics of the first language which are transferred to second language due to the negative influence. Karim and Nassaji (2013) agree with them, they further added to Bolton and Kachru that it is the learners' incompetency in target language which leads them to use the rules and patterns of mother tongue to pass on

their point of view. To keep themselves at ease they always rely on the first language they had already learnt. Javid and umer said that among the other skills writing skill is the most important one so a lot of studies have strongly recommended that English as a foreign language (EFL) learners always encounter so many problems in written language that have slowed down their academic progress (2014).

Intervention is quite natural in any second language. These interventions can occur anywhere in language, like spellings, syntax, vocabulary, pronunciation etc. (Sultan, 2013).

Research Methodology

The current study has adopted a descriptive survey research design to collect the data from the selected participants. This design enables the researcher to grab the data from the students on the problems faced by them in learning English nouns. The population of the present study was the students of Hazara University at undergraduate level. From the target population, a representative sample was selected for the study consisting of hundred and thirty-six students through simple nonrandom convenient sampling techniques from ten different departments of Hazara University, Mansehra. The research instrument of the present study was a proficiency test. The focus of the proficiency test was, on the applicability of different grammatical categories to English nouns. The test contained 136 different items about different uses of English nouns. Every item in the test was about particular use of English noun. The problems in these uses were specifically focused in the test. These problems were morphological, Semantics, syntactic and grammatical category in nature. The problems in the application of grammatical categories of number, gender, case, definiteness, sepecificness, genericness and ambiguity to English nouns were investigated in the test. The test was comprised of ten different types of questions for the elicitation of desired data, these are:

- i) Multiple choices
- ii) Fill in the blanks
- iii) Possible meaning of the given sentences
- iv) Correction of the given sentences
- v) Completion of sentences
- vi) Capitalization
- vii) Use of words
- viii) Identification of possible interpretation
- ix) Identification of semantic anomaly
- x) Explanation and separation

The data has been analyzed quantitatively and appropriate statistical measures were applied to analyze the data. The test was checked for the correct and incorrect responses. In the test those mistakes were highlighted which were related to the incorrect use of noun. In the test all correct and incorrect options were marked. The percentage of these incorrect and correct responses helped the researcher to confirm the hypotheses about the different uses of noun. After the calculation and tabulation of the obtained data, the results were analyzed and discussed in the light of research question asked.

Results

The proficiency test designed for this was checked for the semantic, syntactic, morphological and grammatical errors committed in learning English noun. The

researchers had tried to find out how these nouns are the source of ambiguity and create problems for learners. The results are presented according to these uses.

Results of the Grammatical Category of Number

Both nouns and noun phrases accept the system of number – singular and plural. The number is an inflectional category with nouns, for example the singular *book* and plural *books*. In a noun phrase, the number is generally determined by the noun functioning as head word of the phrase: the number (plurality) of the noun phrase *the books* is derived from that of the noun *books*. The results for the grammatical category of number were further divided into twelve different subparts. All these subparts were dually related to number which were used to investigate the use of number in English sentences in different structures. These sentences were about regular plural nouns, syntactic plural nouns, pronouns used as subjects, collective nouns referring to a group, inherently singular nouns, collective nouns referring to individual members, demonstrative pronouns, interrogative pronoun, coordinated subjects, anaphoric use of pronouns and cataphoric use of pronouns.

Table 1: Showing results of the grammatical category of number

Category	Incorrect responses%	Correct responses %
Syntactically plural nouns	88	12
Collective nouns referring to individual members	83.5	16.5
Coordinated subjects	70.1	29.9
Pronouns used as a subject	63.75	36.25
Anaphoric use of pronouns	61.5	38.5
Cataphoric use of pronouns	54.6	45.4
Collective nouns referring to a group	40	60
Relative pronouns	30.2	69.8
Inherently singular and plural nouns	28	72
Regular plural nouns	24	76
Demonstrative pronouns	17.3	82.7
Interrogative pronoun	15.1	84.9

The above table shows that the correct responses (12%) for syntactic plural noun were less than the incorrect responses (88%), the correct responses (16.5%) for collective nouns referring to individual members were less than the incorrect responses (83.5%), the correct responses (23%) of coordinate subjects were less than the incorrect responses (77%), the correct responses (36.25%) for pronoun used as a subject were less than the

incorrect responses (63.75%) the correct responses (38.5%) for anaphoric use of pronoun were less than the incorrect responses (61.5%), the correct responses (45.4%) for cataphoric use of pronoun were less than the incorrect responses (54.6%) suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning all these uses of English nouns showing number from different perspectives.

But the results of other uses of nouns showing number were comparatively easier for students. The above table shows that the correct responses (60%) for collective noun referring to a group were more than the incorrect responses (40%), the correct responses (69.8%) for relative pronouns were more than the incorrect responses (30.2%), the correct responses (72%) for inherently singular and plural nouns were less than the incorrect responses (28%), the correct responses (76%) for regular plural nouns were more than the incorrect responses (24%) suggesting that undergraduate students had comparatively less significant difficulty in learning these uses of English nouns. While, the correct responses (82.7%) for demonstrative pronoun were more than the incorrect responses (17.3%) and correct responses (84.9%) for interrogative pronouns were more than the incorrect responses (15.1%) suggesting that undergraduate students had no significant difficulty in learning English demonstrative and interrogative pronouns.

Results of Grammatical Category of Gender

The selected sentences in the test for grammatical category of gender were five in number. These sentences were used to investigate the use of gender in English sentences in different structures. Three were about the neuter gender and two were about common gender and pronoun she.

The following table shows the results for these neuter genders.

Table 1: Showing results of grammatical category of gender

Category	Incorrect responses %	Correct responses %
Neuter gender and its pronouns	52.3	47.7
Common gender and its pronouns	73.5	26.5

The above table shows that the correct responses (47.7%) for neuter gender and its pronouns were less than the incorrect responses (52.3%) and the correct responses (26.5%) for common gender and its pronouns were less than the incorrect responses (73.5%) suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning the grammatical of English gender and its pronouns.

Results of Grammatical Category of Case

According to case, English nouns and pronouns are divided into three categories: nominative, accusative and genitive. The nominative acts as a subject of a clause, the accusative acts as an object of a verb or a preposition and the genitive case shows possession of something else.

Table 3: Showing results of grammatical category of case

Case	Incorrect responses %	Correct responses %
Genitive	34.4	65.6
Nominative	11.7	88.3
Accusative	11.6	88.4

The above table shows that the genitive case was more difficult (34.4% incorrect responses) than nominative (11.7% incorrect responses) and accusative case (11.6% incorrect responses) suggesting that student had less knowledge of genitive case than other cases.

Results of Grammatical Category of Definiteness, Indefiniteness, Specificness and Genericness

The test included sentences about the grammatical category of definiteness, indefiniteness, specificness and genericness.

Table 4: Showing results of grammatical category of definiteness, indefiniteness, specificness and genericness

Sentences	Incorrect responses %	Correct responses %
Definiteness	28.5	71.5
Indefiniteness	56.8	43.2
Specificness	54.5	45.5
Genericness	46.7	53.3

The above table shows that the correct responses (71.5%) for definiteness were more than the incorrect responses (28.5%) suggesting that undergraduate students had no significant difficulty in learning English definiteness. But the rest of the grammatical categories, i.e. indefiniteness, specificness and genericness had significant difficulty for students. The correct responses (56.8%) for indefiniteness were more than the incorrect responses (43.2%) and the correct responses (35.2%) and the correct responses (45.5%) for grammatical category of specificness were less than the incorrect responses (54.5%) and the correct responses (53.3%) for grammatical category of genericness were more than the incorrect responses (46.7%) suggesting that undergraduate students had no significant difficulty in learning English grammatical category of indefiniteness, specificness and genericness.

Results of Interrogative Tag

The interrogative tag is a special kind of non-*wh* interrogative. The interrogative tags are mostly used to confirm the statements. It could be attached to three types of clauses; these

are declarative, imperative and exclamative. The selected sentences were used to investigate the use of number, person and gender in English sentences in different structures. Some of these sentences were about reversed polarity tags, constant polarity tags, command imperative tags, request imperative tags and exclamative interrogative tags.

Table 52: Showing results of interrogative tag

Tag	Sub-type	Incorrect responses %	Correct responses %
Declarative interrogative	Reversed polarity tags	62.6	37.4
	Constant polarity tags	98	08
Imperative interrogative	Command imperative interrogative tags	75.5	24.5
	Request imperative interrogative tags	76.5	23.5
Exclamative interrogative		62	38

The above table shows that all tags and their sub-types had significant difficulty for students. The correct responses (37.4%) for reversed polarity tags were less than the incorrect responses (62.6%), the correct responses (08%) for constant polarity tags were less than the incorrect responses (92%), the correct responses (24.5%) for command imperative interrogative tags were less than the incorrect responses (75.5%), the correct responses (23.5%) imperative tags were less than the incorrect responses (76.5%), the correct responses (38%) for exclamative imperative tags were less than the incorrect responses (62%) suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English interrogative tags.

Results of Ambiguity in Noun, Gerundal noun and Capitalization of noun

The test included sentences about ambiguity in noun gerundal noun and capitalization of noun. These sentences were used to investigate the use of number, person and gender in English sentences in different structures.

Table 63: Showing results of ambiguity in noun, gerundal noun and capitalization of noun

	Incorrect responses %	Correct responses %
Results of capitalization of noun	54.6	45.4
Results of ambiguity in noun	48.3	51.7
Results of gerundal noun	34	66

The above table shows that the correct responses (45.4%) for capitalization were less than the incorrect responses (54.6%) and the correct responses (51.7%) for ambiguity were

more than the incorrect responses (48.3%) suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English capitalization of noun and ambiguity in noun. while the correct responses (66%) for gerundal noun were more than the incorrect responses (34%) suggesting that undergraduate students had no significant difficulty in learning English gerundal noun.

Results of Function and Position of Noun

The selected sentences were used to investigate the use of function and position of noun in English sentences in different structures. These sentences were about nouns used as subjects, nouns used as direct objects, nouns used as objects of preposition, nouns used as indirect objects, nouns functioning as complements of verbs and nouns used as modifiers of another noun.

Table 74: Showing results of function and position of noun

Function	Incorrect responses %	Correct responses %
Nouns used as indirect objects	73	27
Nouns used as objects of prepositions	67	33
Nouns used as modifiers of another noun	54	46
Nouns used as subjects	27	73
Nouns functioning as complements of verbs	25.5	74.5
Nouns used as direct objects	15.5	84.5

The above table shows that the correct responses the correct responses (27%) for nouns used as indirect objects were less than the incorrect responses (73%), the correct responses (33%) for nouns used as objects of prepositions were more than the incorrect responses (67%) and the correct responses (46%) for nouns used as a modifier of another noun were less than the incorrect responses (54%) suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English nouns used as indirect objects, objects of prepositions and modifier of another noun. While the correct responses (73%) for noun used as objects of prepositions were more than the incorrect responses (27), the correct responses (74.5%) for noun used as complements of verbs were more than the incorrect responses (25.5) and the correct responses (84.5%) for noun used as direct objects were more than the incorrect responses (15.5) suggesting that students had less difficulty in learning English noun as subjects, complements of verbs and direct objects,

Results of Semantic Roles of Nouns

The selected sentences were used to investigate the semantic role of noun in English sentences in different structures. These sentences were about role of agent, experiencer, instrument, goal and source of noun.

Table 85: Showing results for semantic roles of nouns

Semantic role	Incorrect responses %	Correct responses %
Agent	97	03
Experiencer	77	23
Instrument	76	24
Goal	65	35
Source	45	55

The above table shows that the correct responses for semantic roles of nouns were less than the incorrect responses, suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English semantic roles of nouns.

Results of Diminutive Noun

The selected words and sentences in the test for diminutive noun, ellipsis and semantic anomaly were used to investigate English sentences in different structures.

Table 96: Showing results for diminutive nouns, ellipsis and semantic anomaly

Sentences	Incorrect responses %	Correct responses %
Semantic anomaly	77.5	22.5
Ellipsis and noun and pronoun	70.3	29.7
Diminutive nouns	41.3	58.7

The above table shows that the correct responses (22.5%) for anomaly were less than the incorrect responses (77.5%), and the correct responses (29.7%) for ellipsis and noun and pronoun were less than the incorrect responses (70.3%) suggesting that undergraduate students had significant difficulty in learning English semantic anomaly and ellipsis and noun and pronoun. While the correct responses (58.7%) diminutive nouns were more than the incorrect responses (41.3%) suggesting that undergraduate students had comparatively less difficulty in learning English diminutive nouns.

Discussion

The results show that undergraduate students had no significant difficulty in learning English regular plural nouns. While, they had significant difficulty in learning English syntactic plural nouns suggesting that the plural markers for noun are easily learnt compared to syntactic plural nouns in the absence of morphological markers. The findings confirm that students face fewer problems in morphosyntactic plurality of noun than syntactic plurality of noun. This makes the internal morphology of noun comparatively

easier than syntactic issues in learning English noun. Similar was the case with English pronoun representing singular and plural nouns which were equally difficult for students but less difficult than syntactic plural noun. Similarly, the grammatical category of number for demonstrative pronouns was quite easy for students and they did not face any significant difficulty in the use of singular and plural. Likewise, the interrogative pronoun used as a singular or plural subject has no significant difficulty for students and the integrative pronoun used as a subject complement had no difficulty for students like their use as a direct object and object complement where the problems were negligible. The pronoun used as indirect object were comparatively difficult than that used as direct object. The indirect object function is always difficult than the direct object function. The findings revealed that inherently singular nouns were learnt more than collective nouns referring to individual members. The students confused these collective nouns with inherent singular referring to individual members of group/team and commit errors in their use. The conjunctive coordinate subjects similarly were comparatively easier for students than prepositional coordinate subjects because of the complex structure of prepositional coordinate subjects demanding the agreement of verb with the closest noun/pronoun. The results reveal that that syntactic complexity make learning of English noun create difficulty for students compared to morphological and semantic properties of noun. The students take help from inherent semantic or morphological properties of noun and ignore the syntactic properties of English noun. The resolution of English noun like the anaphoric resolution and cataphoric resolution were also difficult for students. The anaphoric resolution was more problematic than cataphoric resolution because the anaphoric resolution mostly involves a generic use of second and third person pronoun. Further, the cataphoric use introduces the antecedent before the anaphor making resolution easier for students. The issues of gender in English nouns also created problems for students. The neuter gender and pronoun (it/they etc.) though was problematic for students but these problems were less than problems for common gender and pronoun with *she* only if used for noun like for a country name, animal etc. in the context of a political notion or affection making the neutral gender into a feminine gender. The students had enough knowledge about masculine, feminine and neutral gender of noun but they had not enough knowledge about the contextual use of these gender exchange. The results also showed significant difficulty in learning the grammatical category of case. Interestingly, the nominative and accusative cases were almost equally not significantly difficult for students. It was mostly because of the nature of the test conducted where the questions were simple and students had no difficulty in answering the questions. The possessive pronoun on the other hand, was a bit difficult for students. The attributive possessive pronouns were easier for students than absolute possessive pronouns because of the possible ellipsis of words/phrases in the structure of the clause. The grammatical category of definiteness through determiners and indefinite pronoun functioning as subjects or objects in the data were also analyzed. The definiteness through determiner was found quite easier compared to indefinite pronoun functioning as subjects or objects because of the requirement of the semantic knowledge on the part of the learners. The indefinite pronouns' use in English require reference to the lexical meaning of those individual pronouns making their use difficult to show definiteness/indefiniteness than the same use through determiners. On the other hand, the grammatical category of specificness through determiners was a bit difficult for students because the

overgeneralization of determiners for definiteness instead of specificity. Similarly, the generic use of pronoun was easier than the use of pronoun for specificity.

The students had significant problems in the use of pronouns for polarity tags. The constant polarity tags were more difficult than reverse polarity tags because of the less use of constant polarity tags. The constant polarity tags similarly, are used for negation while the reverse polarity tags are used for confirmation. The confirmation of the information provided in the preceding sentence was easily confirmed than negated. The reverse polarity tags were difficult in imperative sentences than in other types of sentences like declarative and exclamative sentences because of the grammatical requirement of a different auxiliary verb in the tags in the imperative sentences and the recovery of the elliptical pronoun in the imperative sentences.

The ambiguity resolution for English nouns was difficult but not significant enough for students like the gerundal nouns in English. The students had significant problems in capitalization of letters in nouns. The function and position of noun in a sentence had no significant problems for students except the function of noun as object of preposition or indirect object which had significant problems for students because of the double objects in the sentence. The indirect object was especially difficult because of its use before the direct object and having no [morphological] marker for it. Similarly, the nouns acting as a modifier of another noun was significant difficult for students because of having no ideas of functioning like other part of speech (noun functioning as an adjective here). The semantic roles of nouns likewise were significantly difficult for students and they had no ideas of semantic roles of the noun. The diminutive nouns were difficult for students but the problems here were not significant enough. The ellipsis in nouns or pronouns, on the other hand, was significantly difficult for students because of the missing elements and created ambiguity in the structure of the sentence. Similarly, the students had significant problems in identifying the anomaly in the structure of the phrase/clause containing noun. For example, the sentence 'Colourless green ideas sleep furiously' has anomaly mostly because of the noun '*ideas*' allowing modifiers having particular meaning and restricting other modifiers. The lack of this semantic consideration though may result in syntactic correct structure but semantic anomaly.

Conclusion

The present study was concerned with the analysis of the problems in learning English nouns. The study specifically focused on those problems which were hypothesized to be problematic for undergraduate students. These problems were about different uses of noun in different semantic and syntactic contexts and about the internal and external morphology of English nouns. The problems in the application of grammatical categories were also analyzed. The results revealed that the problems in morphosyntactic plurality of noun/pronoun were less than the problem in syntactic plurality of noun/pronoun. This makes the internal morphology of noun/pronoun comparatively easier than syntactic issues in learning English noun/pronoun. Similarly, the grammatical category of number had no significant problems for students. While, their function as indirect object was significantly difficult than other functions.

The findings also revealed that inherently singular nouns referring to individual members of group because of their confusion with collective nouns were also problematic. The syntactic complex structure of noun/pronoun in terms of agreement etc. compared to morphological and semantic properties created significant problems for students. The

students took help from all available semantic and syntactic clues in resolution of ambiguity etc. The contextual use of noun/pronoun created significant problems. The possessive cases were found out difficult than nominative and accusative cases. The indefinite pronouns requiring reference to their lexical meaning were also found out problematic making definiteness/indefiniteness difficult. The specificness grammatical category was found out more problematic than definiteness overgeneralization of determiners for definiteness. The recovery of missing/elliptical elements also made constant tags difficult. All those nouns/pronouns requiring semantic knowledge carrying inherent meaning had problems for students. The absence of morphological markers made the position and function of some noun/pronoun indirect object difficult than the dative alternation. The semantic roles of nouns and capitalization of letter in nouns were the most problematic of all in the data. The lack of semantic consideration made semantic anomaly difficult for students. The study concludes that students have problems in learning English noun. The identified problems should be given special attention and the students should be trained in all grammatical categories applicable to noun. The syntactic aspects in the use of noun should specifically be focused in English noun teaching and learning. Similarly, the semantic roles of nouns should be explicitly taught to students to help them understand the transformation and derivation of words/phrases and clauses in the light of the role played by English noun. The study is highly significant from pedagogical perspective and recommend teaching English nouns in the light of the problems identified in the study.

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