The Assessment Of Errors In English Articles With In Academic Writing Of ESL Learners At Tertiary Level In Pakistan

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Abstract
Article errors are normally conducted by the students of all the levels. This study investigated the types of errors ESL (English as a second language) students make in the writings at the undergraduate level. The mixed research methodology was used. Students were required to write an essay, followed by the assessment of the article errors made in the form of numbers. Interviews were conducted with 5 teachers, required to identify the article errors students make. Thematic analysis methodology was applied to generate the results. It was found that students make mistakes when using articles with singular and plural nouns. The study makes significant contributions in limited literature to Pakistan.

Keywords: ESL, error analysis, article.

Introduction

1.1. Background
Language is seen as the medium of communication, and social interaction platform between humans. English is a language and is one of the most spoken languages of the world (Bird & Simons, 2003). Many studies to date have been carried out for finding why English is considered a global language, however, no single statement can be argued (Salehi, & Bahrami, 2018). Some argue that English is easy to understand, while some argue that it depends on the intentions of the
learner. However, it is also observed that some students with learning intentions face issues in learning English (Singh, 2017).

While it is difficult to understand the reasons behind poor learning of the ESL students, a lot of errors might be contributing to poor learning. Some ESL students face issues in using articles, as some studies have argued over the statement (Salehi, & Bahrami, 2018). Students face issues in using articles, as they demand the integration of many functions in a sentence. In a recent study presented by Amiri, & Puteh, (2017), it was found that Pakistani students make eight different mistakes in sentence development. Those mistakes come from tense errors, spelling, capitalization rules, preposition, double negation, verb tense errors, punctuations, articles, and subject-verb agreement (Amiri & Puteh, 2017).

ESL learning depends on many factors and one of them is learning the grammatical concepts. Development of the grammatically correct sentence is necessary (Alharbi, 2019). Grammatically correct sentences demand the use of verb forms, functional words, and articles in an adequate way, as these are important components of a sentence. Hence, it becomes important to keep these factors in consideration in sentence development.

1.2. Statement of problem
The English article structure poses several difficulties for non-native English speakers, much more so when their original language lacks a comparable structure. Due to the fact that articles are one of the most frequently used terms in the English language (Alharbi, 2019), faults in this area are extremely visible to native speakers. In Pakistan, several research on mistake analysis have been done, including a corpus-based study of the errors made by Pakistani English graduates (Sukasame, Kantho, & Narrot, 2014). Prepositional Errors in the Writings of Pakistani ESL Students (Saeed, Hussain, and Fatima, 2015), and Error Analysis of an English Paragraph by Pakistani Undergraduates (Hamza, Khan & Abbasi, 2015). However, no research has been undertaken on an error analysis of English articles in academic writing by ESL learners at the university level in Pakistan, according to internet searches and a search on 'Google Scholar' (Hamza, Khan, & Abbasi, 2015).

1.3. Objectives of the study
The following objectives are addressed in this study:

1. To analyze English article errors in the academic writing of ESL learners at tertiary level.
2. To explore the reasons behind the Article Errors in academic writing of ESL learners at tertiary level.

1.4. Research questions
The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are the types of English article errors in the academic writing of ESL learners at tertiary level?
2. What are the reasons behind the Article Errors in academic writing of ESL students at tertiary level?

1.5. Limitations of study
This study has following limitations:

1. The data obtained from this study is limited to ESL learners at tertiary level.
2. Research only deals with English articles with no investigation of English grammar, English pronunciations, and others.

1.6. Scope of study
This study investigates the errors in using the articles faced by the ESL learners and their solutions. The participants will be able to understand the issues they make in the writings and articles use.

1.7. Significance of the study
The study makes significant contributions to the limited literature of Article Errors made by Pakistani ESL students. The results of this study identify the mistakes committed by ESL at tertiary level.

1.8. Assumptions
This study assumes that in spite of many years of education, students are unable to overcome the errors in writing articles, so far this purpose, necessary measures should be taken to avoid the error in written articles. The study is based on assumption that all the students face issues in article usage.

1.9. Definition of keywords
ESL: English as a Second Language, the teaching of English to people who are living in an English-speaking country but whose first language is not English (ELS, n.d.).

Error Analysis: Error analysis is described as a set of procedures to identify, describe, and explain learner’s errors (Amiri & Puteh, 2017).

Article: In the article is a limiting word, not descriptive, which cannot be used alone, but always joins to a substantive word to denote a particular thing or a group or a class of things, or any individual or of a group or class. (Demeirel, 2017).

Literature Review
In the literature, it is found that many ESL students face the difficulties in the development of sentences because of poor articles knowledge (Chan, 2017). Especially, in the development of long sentences, the students of ESL face problems in articles, and tenses selection. According to the research article presented by Kamiya, & Loewen, (2014), the teachers of the ESL students must make sure that they teach the concepts of the articles with more efforts and quality teaching.
methods. Articles errors are considered as the major blunders in the development of the sentences because every sentence contains at least an article in it.

In many research papers, the importance of articles is explained (Chan, 2017; Kamiya, & Loewen, 2014; Abbott, Rossiter, & Hatami, 2015). The study of Kamiya, & Loewen, (2014), wrote that although ESL students are good at using tenses, they face issues in the use of articles because of poor learning. When articles are not used appropriately, the sentence structure, and meaning becomes hard to understand. However, the study of Chan (2017) argues that when articles are not used appropriately, not only the meaning becomes unobservable; the beauty of the sentence is also lost. In the evaluation presented by Chan, (2017) they found that many ESL students of Hong Kong make errors in the development of the sentences, because of poor knowledge. However, some other studies presented other reasons related to why students make errors in English sentence development explained in later paragraphs.

One of the most difficult tasks for the ESL students is selecting the best articles in the sentence development as argued by Sukasame, Kantho, & Narrot, (2014). According to them, tenses selection, and articles use is a tricky task and one of the reasons behind errors. The statement was also found in the study of Kamiya, (2016) who argues that when the articles are not selected according to the rules, the sentence structure is impacted. Therefore, it is necessary that concepts of articles use must be explained by the teachers with more efforts. The reason behind that is that articles misuse is a major issue in English sentence development and unbearable on international standards (Sukasame, Kantho, & Narrot, 2014; Abbott, Rossiter, & Hatami, 2015).

Although some studies argue that tense selection is a difficult task, some go with articles selection (Chan, 2017; Kamiya, & Loewen, 2014). In the second language writing, the writing proficiency depends on a number of factors, and one of them is articles use. Sukasame, Kantho, & Narrot, (2014) support the argument that English proficiency skills of the English learners heavily depend on correct articles use. However, many teachers do not take this topic seriously. The argument was also reported by the investigation of Chan, (2017) who found that articles errors result in grammatical errors. Grammatical errors are not acceptable on any platform, let it be professional or academic level (Chan, 2017). Based on the arguments presented above, it can be said that articles errors must be avoided as they directly affect English writing quality.

In the assessment of writing, articles use, and vocabulary is the widely used standard criteria of the assessment. Parthasarathy, (2014) write that ESL learners are often unable to use article effectively in their sentences, because of many reasons. Sometimes teachers do not teach them well, and sometimes they do not take the concepts seriously at their own end (Fatimah, 2018). For example, a study presented by Yang (2019) presented the views on the error analysis. He found that writing skills of the ESL students heavily influenced due to lacking intentions towards learning of English language concepts resulting in poor articles use. Some of the other errors made by the students of ESL students are explained in the upcoming paragraphs.
According to the study presented by Kamiya (2016) learners, make many types of mistakes in the sentence development, which include the verbs use, words choice, articles, and passive voice etc. These mistakes add to their poor development of sentences, resulting in the low development of English writing skills. Another study of Sharif & Hassani (2016) writes that if these concepts are not explained by the teacher at the early stages then they become core issues at the later life stages. Therefore, it becomes necessary that students of ESL learners should be given the right concepts from the start.

In some countries, English is now rated as the second most spoken language, therefore, it can be said that it is an important language to survive at the international level (Xie, 2019). Kamiya, (2016) stated in the study that ESL teachers should try to address grammatical issues in the writing, because less grammatical errors, lead to good quality English writing skills development. He emphasized that four major problems are faced by the ESL students, which should be addressed by the teachers (Kamiya, 2016).

- Lack of exposure to the language community where English is spoken as the first language.
- Teachers transferring their poor English writing skills to the students.
- Students with poor English educational background.
- Lacking emphasis on speaking habits by the teachers.

Similar arguments were presented by Chan, (2017) also who argue that when students do not have an adequate educational background in English, the chances of errors in sentence development significantly increase. Grammar is rated as the most important aspect of developing adequate writing skills in a linguistic system (Roongsitthichai et al., 2019). However, the education of grammar cannot be given in a single calendar year, as it carries for a good 5-12 years education. Even after 12 years of education, students are found with committing grammatical errors in the writing. This shows that the teachers were unable to develop the required English writing skills of the students at the early education levels (Kumiya, 2016).

If the students writing skills are not developed in starting 12 years of education, it becomes almost impossible to make them write like natives after that (Sharif, & Hassani, 2016). They keep on committing mistakes especially in using synonyms, and articles because of a lot of confusions. The argument is also found in the study of Pierre, & Bienvenu, (n.d.) who writes that if ESL learners do not understand the concepts of tense, and articles they cannot advance their skills at the high level. According to Sharif, & Hassani, (2016) the problem with these students is that they find issues in using verb tenses on some occasions.

Some more errors committed by ESL learners in the sentence development include using the correct form of verb (35%), punctuations (44%), and articles (21%) as reported by the study of (Sukasame, Kantho, & Narrot, 2014). On the basis of the arguments, it can be said that errors in the field of English writing by ESL students mostly come from punctuations, verb forms, and
articles. Hence, teachers of the ESL students must improve these concepts as they play an influential role in the English writing abilities. Not only this, the English education must be given with full efforts at the early stages of education (starting 12 years), so that base can be effectively built. Two reasons behind the English article errors are reported by most of the scholars above. One is the non-serious attitude of students, and other is non-serious intentions of teachers towards teaching.

**Research Methodology**

**3.1. Research design**

This study follows the content analysis research methodology. The content analysis defines the process of summarizing and reporting written data - the main context data and their messages (Mackey & Gass, 2015). The study falls in the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative data analysis involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data (Flick, 2015). To be specific, the qualitative approach provides the participant's definition, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Mackey & Gass, 2015). Hence, the study followed exploratory study design and qualitative data were collected through interviews and written content by the ESL students. Interviews with the teachers helped in finding the reasons behind the article errors done by the students. The study followed a cross-sectional approach as it was conducted in a very short time period.

**3.2. Population**

The population of the study involves 25 ESL learners and five teachers of Private Sector University in Karachi.

**3.3. Sample and sampling method**

The sample of the study consists of 25 ESL students University and 5 teachers. The sampling method was convenience.

**3.4. Tools**

In order to explore the reasons behind the English article errors, a checklist of the students and interviews with the teachers will be conducted.

**3.5. Data collection**

For the collection of data, 25 students were given a sample test (divided into omission, insertion, and substitution errors) to analyze the errors, through the checklist. Interviews were conducted with five teachers, who were informed prior to the timings and questions as well. Teachers were approached through emails, and the appointment was scheduled. The interview helped in investigating the reasons behind the errors in written articles of the students.

**3.6. Data analysis**

The qualitative data obtained through the written samples of the students and interview from the teachers were analyzed on the basis of thematic analysis and table provided in Appendix
Data analysis

4.1. Overview

The findings of the study are explained by looking at the three different types of article errors (a, an, the). For the evaluation, different texts written by the investigated students are presented according to the classifications of articles.

4.2. Classification of errors

Data was analysed using three themes, addition, omission, and substitution. After analysing the data, it was found that students did the following mistakes in the essays:

**Table 1 Article errors made by the students (Source: self-created)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sentences and phrases</th>
<th>Classification of errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>We are going from 21st century and at the present time….</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Women is a beautiful creature of God….</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>As the first pilot of Pakistan…..</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Unfortunately, some people do not give a proper rights …..</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Women just born for home chores and born as a slave…</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sometimes women are less in the rights …..</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>But in the every field of life…..</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Women play a very significant role in every field…..</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>As they do their job, they should get the rights.</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Being a girl, I am trying to exclude……</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>When a brands were introduced…..</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>…… by their replicates or the copies….</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>And the shop</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Women are very discipline in the time</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Her favorite brand is a Sana Safinaz</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>There is the public to visit</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>But a women power</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>She has the fat body</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>She wears shalwar kameez most of the time</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>…. loves a cat…..</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>the brand consciousness</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Among the theyouth</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Exclude the gender discrimination</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>No discrimination between the men and women</td>
<td>Addition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>They should get a rights</td>
<td>Substitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>….. the brand</td>
<td>Omission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.1. Omission errors
Out of the total 26 errors made by the students, 9 were omission errors made by them. This shows that 34% errors made by the students were omission errors. Most of the omission errors made by the students were found in putting ‘the’ in their sentences. It can be noticed from the above table that 6 of the omission errors came from using ‘the’ in the sentences and 3 from using ‘a’ in their sentences.

4.2.2. Substitution errors
When the results obtained for the substitution errors are looked upon, it is found that students made 7 substitution errors in their essays. 3 errors were missing using ‘a’ in their sentences, whereas 4 errors of using ‘the’ in the sentences. Therefore, it can be said that student made 27% substitution errors in their studies, which is comparatively less than omission errors.

4.2.3. Addition errors
Addition errors made by the students were 10. In those errors, the students made 6 addition errors of using ‘the’ in their sentences, and 4 errors of ‘a’ in the sentences. This shows that students made 60% errors of using ‘the’ and 40% errors of ‘a’ in the sentences. It is noticed that students made most of the errors in understanding of addition errors, as its percentage comes out to be the highest (38%).

Figure 1 Article errors summary with percentages (Source: self-created)
4.3. Findings of the interviews

4.3.1. Theme: type of article errors
The responses received for this question showed that students most of the time forget to put articles in the sentences, while sometimes they remain confused between using ‘a, an’ in the sentences. These are the two type of errors students made as argued by the interviewed teachers.

4.3.2. Theme: Frequency of article errors
In this question, the observations show that student article errors very frequently. Either they forget to use the articles or they use them in a wrong way. The findings are consistent with the study of Amin & Puteh, (2017) who also reported similar results in their study.

4.3.3. Theme: Problems faced in teaching article lessons
Teachers face problems in explaining the topics of articles when it comes to explaining the difference between ‘a’ and ‘an’. In addition, students build their own concept by overgeneralising it as teachers find it hard to deliver these topic related to the difference between the articles.

4.3.4. Theme: Difficulties for students in article selection
In this question, the aim was to understand whether students face difficulties in article selections. Most of the teachers argued that they do not face difficulties in learning, but they do make severe mistakes in applying them.

4.3.5. Theme: Improving article related concepts
Teachers argued that article learning could be improved by showing the student's pieces of writing with a high frequency of articles use. It can also be improved by highlighting the difference between singular and plural nouns concepts and using the articles in it. For example, some people say:

‘Karachi is the Dubai for us’.

Most of the students forget to put ‘the’ in the above type of sentences. Therefore, these type of sentences should be taught to them for improving the concepts.

Discussion
In the results obtained above, several discussion points can be picked up. For example, it is observed that most of the students make mistakes related to the article use in high numbers. In the observations made, it is noticed that most of the students make addition and omission errors in their writing pieces. The results obtained also go with the findings reported by Kamiya & Loewen, (2014) who argued that the performance of the students heavily depends on the type of the errors they make. Most of the time they make the mistakes, which are associated with the
omission or addition. Therefore, these mistakes should be improved among the students writing pieces.

In the results obtained, it was noticed that students made most of the addition errors by using ‘the’ in their sentences (60%). The results obtained were reported by the study of Chan, (2017). While in the omission errors also, they forgot to use ‘the’ in their sentences. These results are consistent with the results obtained in the study of Amoakohene (2017) which was carried out 5 years ago. Based on the findings, an argument can be presented that students need to be explained about the concepts of both addition and omission separately, as they are mixing it up. In addition, teachers should also take note of this misconception, which still remains standing even after five years.

Another discussion point comes from the substitution errors. Although students made fewer mistakes from this category, it cannot be completely ignored. According to the study of Hamza, Khan and Abbasi, (2017), the students make a lot of mistakes in the article use, which must be explained to them. However, the concepts related to differentiating between addition, omission and addition will help them to understand them articles to use in a better way. Therefore, it is recommended that students should be taught about the articles used in a separate manner so that they can differentiate between them and use them accurately in the sentences (Chan, 2017).

If the results obtained in the interviews are discussed, it can be reported that students most of the times students fail to use articles in the sentences. This shows that students do omission errors mostly as argued by the teachers investigated. In addition, the students make errors very frequently, consistent with the findings reported by Hamza, Khan & Abbasi, (2017) and Kamiya, & Loewen, (2014).

Most of the students face difficulties in article selections when putting them with singular and plural nouns, while the teachers find it difficult to explain the concepts of articles because of some confusion. The findings were also reported by Kamiya, (2016) who reported that teachers face several difficulties in differentiating between articles use and also explaining them to the students. In the last question, it was found that teachers found it hard to teach the article related concepts associated with singular and plural nouns. Hence, teaching platform should be improved by making the students understand the concepts of articles use.

Conclusion

6.1. Conclusion

After looking at the results obtained, several conclusion points can be drawn, contributing to the limited literature of article errors among ESL students of undergraduate students. By focusing on essay and interview results, it can be concluded that students make the omission and addition errors in their sentences. In addition, the interview results show that teachers also find it hard to
teach the differences between singular and plural nouns article use related concepts. Students make a lot of article errors in their sentences, because of which they should be taught with the concepts of article use by differentiating them the concepts of ‘omission, addition and substitution’ so that they may not do these mistakes again. This study made a significant contribution in very limited literature to the ESL students, as no other study was carried out in Jinnah University for Women, Karachi in relation to the topic of this study.

6.2. Ethical considerations
During the investigation, many ethical considerations were undertaken. For example, every interviewee was interviewed on pre-set timings. No interviewee was forced to participate in the interview, and mutual consent principles were followed. In the interview, each respondent was allowed to speak for as much time as he wanted, as the longest interview for 10 minutes, while the shortest continued for 3 minutes. While, for the essay writing investigation, the teacher was humbly requested to allow the investigation.

6.3. Recommendations
The study was limited to the investigation in Jinnah University for Women, Karachi and the ESL students. Future studies should collect and compare data from different universities. Future investigations should adopt the critical literature review approach for investigation and compare the results with this study or their own investigation. In addition, future studies should increase the number of respondents and also investigate other areas such as sentence structure issues, fragmentation issues etc. among ESL students.

References


http://www.webology.org


Appendices

Interview questions
1. What types of errors students make in articles use?
2. How frequently students make article errors?
3. What are the problems faced by you in teaching article related topics?
4. Do students face difficulties in learning article related concepts?
5. How the article related concepts can be improved?