

ISABELA STATE UNIVERSITY RURAL CAMPUS WRITTEN COMPOSITIONS: AN ERROR ANALYSIS

Hilda A. Manzolim¹, Bernadette Gumpal^{*2}

College of Arts and Sciences, Isabela State University

Echague, Isabela, Philippines

¹ hildamanzolim08@gmail.com

² gumpal.bernadette@yahoo.com

Abstract

Writing has become a difficult task and skill to develop; even to native English speakers. It is a complicated process that requires rigorous application of grammar and mechanics. This study attempted to investigate the grammatical errors in a corpus of 158 compositions written by Criminology students enrolled in English 12 (Writing in the Discipline) during the second semester of school year 2014- 2015 at Isabela State University Echague campus. The study made use of quantitative analysis method as it required a thorough, careful and exhaustive analysis in identifying and categorizing the errors in the written composition. The study specifically determined the profile of the respondents, their morphological errors in terms of tenses, subject and verb agreement and preposition and their Mechanical errors in terms of capitalization, spelling and punctuation. The study also looked into the relationship of the respondents' profile and their morphological and mechanical errors in writing. The results revealed that the respondents' committed the most error in Mechanical terms than in Morphological terms. In addition, it was found that there was a relationship between the respondents' morphological errors and their profiles, particularly in terms of their ethnicity and mothers' educational attainment

Keywords: error, error analysis, essay, composition, writing

I. INTRODUCTION

English language learners always make mistakes and errors in their learning process. As James (1998) mentioned, "Humans are prone not only to commit language errors themselves but also to err in their judgments of those errors committed by others." David Denby also emphasized, "It's the nature of being a student, to be "wrong". Thus, it is inevitable that learners make errors in the process of foreign language learning and they are struggling on the great need to be

competent in four skills of language learning namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Distinctively, they often make errors when they write essays in English. Thus, learner errors have been considered as indispensable for their learning a language, man's most powerful tool for communication. Error- making as emphasized by Robinson (1998) is a natural phenomenon in learning of all kinds. However, reasons why students commit the same mistakes even when such mistakes have been repeatedly pointed out to them is what has been questioned by language

teachers. Yet not all mistakes are the same; sometimes they seem to be deeply ingrained, but at other times students correct themselves with ease. Fluency and correctness of language expression can be fully detected in a composition, which represents one's English ability (Hong, 2007). The ability to write effectively in English is becoming increasingly important in the global community as communication across language becomes ever more essential. Good English writing competence is widely recognized as an important skill for educational, business and personal reasons. Writing is a complex process which demands cognitive analysis and linguistic synthesis. It is even harder to learn to write in a foreign language, and it takes considerable time and effort to become a skillful writer. English writing instruction thus assume an increasing role in foreign language education (Tan, 2001).

Error analysis has become an interesting task for the teachers teaching writing as it helps them identify their own teaching methodologies and their students' ability in writing and also guides them in choosing the strategies and topics that best suit the students' capacity. Moreover, teachers find teaching writing really difficult as it requires a lot of effort and carefulness. Thus, patience is highly required from the teachers in order to improve students' ability to write. In addition to this, teachers suffer the burden in correcting their students' composition because students seem to be writing without using the correct guidelines, grammar and mechanism in writing taught to them. By describing and classifying the students' error in linguistic terms, the researcher can build the picture of the feature of the language, which is causing the students' learning problem. According to Sujoko (1989), an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlingua competence of the learner. In order to analyze the students' error, it is crucial to make an error analysis. By error analysis,

the students will get the correct one and can master English well.

Indeed, a great skill in analyzing errors is a tremendous advantage to both teachers and the students as it leads to better teaching and learning process. Furthermore, teachers will be guided in evaluating the effectiveness of their methodologies and strategies. They may be practically helped in determining the topics and skills that need to be enhanced among the students. In the light of the discussion, the researcher chose to focus on ISU students' errors in their written English compositions.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The researcher made use of descriptive analysis method. Essay test was used as the main instrument for collecting data particularly in determining the grammar errors in terms of Morphological and Mechanical error of the 158 Bachelor of Science in Criminology students enrolled in English 12, Writing in the Discipline during the School Year 2014-2015 at the College of Arts and Sciences.

2.2 Research Instrument

The respondents were asked to write a composition with a maximum number of 300 words on the topic "My First Crush". The students were given one (1) hour to write. The errors were identified and categorized into; Morphological and Mechanical. The test consists of two parts: Part I the profile of the respondents and Part II the essay test.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data gathered were analysed and computer processed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS)

applying the following statistical tools: Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the profile of the respondents and to determine the respondents' Morphological and Mechanical errors. Correlation such as chi-square test and Pearson-r were used to determine the significant relationship in the respondents' profile variables and their grammatical errors.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the distribution of the respondents' profile according to their gender, type of high school last attended, ethnicity, and parents' educational attainment, respectively.

About 7 in every 10 respondents are male, 4 in every 5 attended public school and 2/3 are Ilocano. Only about 11-14% of their parents are college graduates, majority are in high school level or high school graduate totalling to half of the respondents and about 15-10% have either attended elementary or graduated.

3.2 Respondents Morphological Errors in Writing

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the respondents' morphological errors. Error in tenses top the morphological errors committed by the respondents having 58.33 percent.

3.2.1 The top 3 tenses errors of the students

- Inflections of regular verbs. (49.14 %)
- Inflections of irregular verbs. (38.86 %)
- Inflections of simple present tense. (4.95%)

3.2.2 Examples of some of the respondents' tenses errors.

- When I was in first year high school I meet my first crush.
-She take my letter and she read
- I talk to him and said your my princess, im your prince
-because she is simple girl and giniuse compare to me....
-because I don't want to broke my relation to her as her bestfriend.
-she was my girlfriend until now.

As shown in the examples 3.2.2 a and b, the respondents made an error in inflecting the irregular verbs. In examples 3.2.2 c and d, the respondents failed to add "ed/d" to the verb to form its past tense. For examples 3.2.2 e and 3.2.2 f, the respondents inflected the verb into the present tense where it should be in its simple present tense.

In addition to the examples 3.2.2 c and e, though there are other errors on pronouns, the researcher chose not to discuss further since it is of no significance in the study. In example 3.2.2 c, the underlined word "him" should be "her" since the respondent was referring to a girl and the underlined word "your" should be "you're". In 3.2.2 e, the underlined pronoun should be "her" instead of "his" since he is talking about himself.

The result shows that the respondents have not yet mastered inflecting the verbs which caused them commit morphological errors. This conforms with the statement of Johansson and Geisler (2009) who found that the most common errors that learners make are related to verb form which also coincides with the statement of Haryanto, Toni (2007) that, errors in using verb groups are the most frequent errors made by the students. This implies that the respondents really need to improve their grammar particularly on the use of verb. This is in line with the study

conducted by Mohammed (1986) who carried out a diagnostic study of errors in Written English of Pre-Degree students, and later found that the students top three major areas of errors were: First, tenses (82.28 percent), second, prepositions (81 percent), and third, noun and relative clauses (79.14 percent). A study by Nacario (2005) entitled "An analysis of Grammatical Errors in the Written Composition of First

Year College Students at System Technology Institute Santa Rosa". The ranked 1 error made by the students is Error in Verbs (34.1%), followed by error in pronoun (15.4%), Errors in Diction (10.8%), Errors in preposition (10.6%), Errors in noun (3.3%), Errors in punctuation (2.5%), Errors on Adverb (2.1%), Errors on conjunctions (1.4%), and Errors on Abbreviation (0.8%). "The study on the written language

Table 1
Profile of the Respondents

Profile		Frequency (n=158)	Percent
Gender	Male	115	72.8
	Female	43	27.2
Type of High School Last Attended	Public	133	84.2
	Private	25	15.8
Ethnicity	Ilocano	107	67.7
	Tagalog	22	13.9
	Yogad	14	8.9
	Ibanag	5	3.2
	Ifugao	6	3.8
	Itawis	1	.6
	Waray	1	.6
	Kalinga	1	.6
Mother's Educational Attainment	Pangasinense	1	.6
	Elementary Level	14	8.9
	Elementary Graduate	11	7.0
	High School Level	47	29.7
	High School Graduate	33	20.9
	College Level	30	19.0
Father's Educational Attainment	College Graduate	23	14.6
	Elementary Level	20	12.7
	Elementary Graduate	11	7.0
	High School Level	40	25.3
	High School Graduate	38	24.1
	College Level	31	19.6
	College Graduate	18	11.4

Table 2
Respondents Morphological Errors in Writing

Morphological Errors		Frequency (n=158)	Percent	Overall %			
Tenses	Inflections of irregular verbs	204	38.86	58.33			
	Inflections of regular verbs	258	49.14				
	Inflections of simple past tense	26	4.95				
	Inflections of linking verbs	7	1.33				
	Inflections of of verb related	30	5.71				
Total		525	100.00				
Subject and Verb		Substitution	Omission	Addition			
	Is	25	39	35	109	52.90	22.89
	Was	4	7	7	18	8.74	
	Are	10	19	11	40	19.40	
	Has	1	1	0	2	0.97	
	Have	2	2	0	2	0.97	
	Plural to Singular				31	15.00	
	Singular to Plural				5	2.43	
Total				206	100.00		
Pre Position	In	39	50	14	103	60.9	18.78
	On	12	11	6	29	17.2	
	At	9	3	4	16	9.47	
	Of	2	1	0	3	1.78	
	To	1	7	3	11	6.51	
	With	2	0	0	2	1.18	
	For	3	0	0	3	1.78	
	From	2	0	0	2	1.18	
Total				169	100.00		
Grand Total				900		100.00	

proficiency of High School Students of Infant Jesus Montessori School”, conducted by Ramirez (2008) to 140 students enrolled during the school year 2007-2008 has almost the same results.

The second morphological error of the respondents’ was in the Subject and Verb agreement having 22.89 percent.

3.2.3 Top 3 Subject and Verb errors of the respondents

- a. Omission of the use of “is” in the sentence (52.9%)
- b. Omission of the use of “are” in the sentence (19.4%)
- c. The alteration of verb from plural to singular (15%)

3.2.4 Examples of respondent’s errors in Subject and Verb

- a. I meet her in ** canteen when he * moving closer to me my heart is faster for beating.
- b. When her mother and she * going to our house....
- c. She give me inspiration.

In examples 3.2.4 a and b, the respondent dropped the verb “is” and “are” to make the sentence correct. For emphasis, the researcher marked the space with the * sign to replace the omitted verb and ** for the omitted determiner which is the word “the” which is also not of importance with this study. It can also be gleaned in the examples 3.2.4 a and b the disordering error in the sentence made by the respondent. In example 3.2.4 c the respondent made an error by writing the verb into its plural form, wherein, it should be in singular form, since the subject is singular too.

This corresponds to the study of Nayan (2009) in her research entitled, “A study of Subject and Verb agreement: From Novice Writer to Expert Writers”. In her research, the students have difficulties in subject-verb agreement because, in their L1 which is Malay Language, they do not have such rules that subject need to agree with verb. In the long run, mother tongue of the student affects their performance of English grammar.

On account of the least morphological error of the respondents was the usage of preposition having 18.78 percent.

3.2.5 Top 3 preposition errors of the respondents

- a. Omission of “in” in the sentence. (60.9 %)
- b. Substitution of “on” in the sentence. (17.2 %)
- c. Substitution of “at” in the sentence. (9.47%)

3.2.6 Examples of the preposition errors of respondents

- a. When I was * grade 5 I experience what felling of in love.
- b. I greet her on the radio and say I like her.
- c. She is a transferred student and came at alicia national high school

In example 3.2.6 a, the respondents omitted the preposition “in”, committed an error on the spelling of “feeling”, and added the preposition “in”. On account to example B, the respondents substituted the preposition “on” to the preposition “over”, and for example 3.2.6 c, the respondents substituted the preposition “at” where in the correct preposition is “from”. The respondents also committed an error in not capitalizing the name of school which is a proper noun. This concurs with Celce-Mursia and Larsen Freeman (1983, 1999) that English prepositions are so notoriously difficult that even learners with a high level proficiency in English may still have to struggle with them. The result also agrees with the studies of Tang (2004), Tseng (2002), Chen (2002), and Huang (2001) that English prepositional phrases are among the major misuses to account for learners’ error.

Table 3
Respondents Mechanical Errors in Writing

Mechanical Errors		Frequency (n=158)	Percent	Overall %			
Spelling	Addition	66	19.3	34.37			
	Substitution	126	36.84				
	Omission	84	24.56				
	Transfer	18	5.26				
	Over generalization	48	14.04				
	Total	342	100.00				
Capitalization	After period	63	25.51	24.82			
	Name of person	10	4.05				
	Name of place	9	3.64				
	I	108	43.72				
	I'll	6	2.429				
	I'm	51	20.65				
	Total	247	100.00				
Punctuation		Substitution	Omission	Addition			
	Quota	39	0	0	39	9.54	41.11
	Period	2	69	13	84	20.54	
	Comma	9	68	6	83	20.29	
	Apostrophe	2	174	10	186	45.48	
	Question	1	12	0	13	3.18	
	Exclamation	0	4	0	4	0.98	
	Point						
Total	53	327	29	409	100.00		
Grand Total				995		100.00	

3.3. Respondents Mechanical Errors in Writing

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of the mechanical errors of the respondents. The top most mechanical errors down to the least were: Punctuation errors having 41.11 percent, Spelling having 34.37 percent, and lastly, Capitalization having 24.82 percent.

3.3.1 Top 3 punctuation errors of the respondents

- a. Errors in the omission of the usage of apostrophe in each word (45.48%).
- b. Omission of the usage of period in the sentences (20.54%).
- c. Omission of the usage of "comma" in the sentences. (20.29 %).

Table 4
Relationship between Respondents Profile and their Grammatical Errors in Writing

Grammatical Errors	Gender		High School Last Attended		Ethnicity	
	x ² -comp	p-value	x ² -comp	p-value	x ² -comp	p-value
Morphological Errors						
Tenses	16.737 ^{ns}	.080	11.078 ^{ns}	.351	51.997 ^{ns}	.994
Subject and Verb Agreement	3.056 ^{ns}	.691	4.776 ^{ns}	.444	59.873 [*]	.022
Preposition	5.276 ^{ns}	.383	5.721 ^{ns}	.334	54.748 ^{ns}	.060
<i>Over-all Morphological Error</i>	17.296 ^{ns}	.377	12.929 ^a	.678	127.739 ^{ns}	.490
Mechanical Errors						
Punctuation	10.942 ^{ns}	.362	10.917 ^{ns}	.364	77.148 ^{ns}	.570
Capitalization	11.096 ^{ns}	.435	7.718 ^{ns}	.738	59.497 ^{ns}	.991
Spelling	12.685 ^{ns}	.242	11.331 ^{ns}	.332	69.118 ^{ns}	.802
<i>Over-all Mechanical Error</i>	15.972 ^{ns}	.718	15.221 ^{ns}	.764	111.978 ^{ns}	.999
Over-all Grammatical Error	20.059^a	.789	20.954^a	.744	135.338^a	1.00

*significant ns - not significant

3.3.2 Top 3 spellings errors

- Substitution of letters in the word (36.84%),
- Omission of letters in the word (24.56%),
- Addition of letters in the word. (19.3%)

Some examples of substitution in their spelling were: Gerl- The respondent substituted the letter "l" with letter "e" which made the respondent commits error.

The correct spelling should be *girl*. The word *hamble* was misspelled by the respondents committed error by substituting the letter "u" to letter "a". The correct spelling should be *humble*. Some examples of omission in their spelling were: Siting- the respondent omitted the other letter "t" to

make the spelling correct. The correct spelling should be *sitting*. Nervos- The respondent omitted letter "u" to make the spelling of the word *nervous* correct.

Some examples of addition in their spelling were: Geniuse - the respondent added letter "e" to the word which makes the spelling of *genius* wrong. Hearth- the respondent added letter "h" to end the word *heart* which made the spelling wrong.

It can be gleaned in the examples that the respondents committed errors in spelling because of the interference of the mother tongue. The respondents spelled such words the way it is pronounced by the Tagalogs and Ilocanos. This can be reinforced by Simich-Dudgeon (1989) who

Table 5

Relationship between Parents Educational Attainment and their Grammatical Errors in Writing

Grammatical Errors	Mother's Educational Attainment		Father's Educational Attainment	
	x ² -comp	p-value	x ² -comp	p-value
Morphological Errors				
Tenses	-.130 ^{ns}	.103	-.057 ^{ns}	.476
Subject and Verb Agreement	-.121 ^{ns}	.130	-.087 ^{ns}	.276
Preposition	-.135 ^{ns}	.090	-.151 ^{ns}	.059
<i>Over-all Morphological Error</i>	-.208 ^{**}	.009	-.147 ^{ns}	.065
Mechanical Errors				
Punctuation	-.029 ^{ns}	.715	.004 ^{ns}	-.029 ^{ns}
Capitalization	-.028 ^{ns}	.732	.025 ^{ns}	-.028 ^{ns}
Spelling	.117 ^{ns}	.143	.029 ^{ns}	.117 ^{ns}
<i>Over-all Mechanical Error</i>	.018 ^{ns}	.819	.000 ^{ns}	.998
Over-all Grammatical Error	-.114	.155	-.079	.324

** highly significant *significant ns - not significant

found that L2 writers from specific language communities make specific spelling errors because of the influence of the L1 system.

3.3.3 Top 3 Capitalization errors by the respondent

- Capitalization of the pronoun "I". (43.72%)
- Capitalization of the starting word right after the period. (25.51%)
- Capitalization of letter "I" in *I'm*. (20.65%)

Nevertheless, the over-all result of the study conforms to the study of Holling (2004) that in general, the students' mechanical errors, such as capitalization,

punctuation, and spelling were the most frequent committed errors. Whereas, verbal errors, such as subject-verb agreement and verb tense errors, were rarer. This also coincides with the study of Gumpal (2012) which stated that the average group of students has greatest difficulty in Mechanics errors such as: capitalization, spelling, paragraphing, punctuations marks, and syllabication.

3.4. Relationship between the Respondents' Profile and their Grammatical Errors in writing

Table 4 shows the relationship of the respondents' profile and their grammatical

errors. The study shows that there is no significant relationship between the respondents' profile and their grammatical errors in terms of gender and type of high school last attended. In terms of ethnicity, result shows that ethnicity affected the grammatical errors of the respondents particularly in terms of subject and verb agreement. This confirms the studies conducted by Hamidah, et al (2002), Maarof et. al (2003), and Azman, which revealed that the students weakness in English could be attributed to geographical locations and ethnicity.

The findings of Kruekaew et al., (2009) which states that the type of high school attended is a cognitive factor that indicates the relationship with English proficiency. The said statement contradicts to the findings of this study which reveals that the type of high school graduated from has no bearing on the grammatical knowledge of the students.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The study was conducted to determine the Morphological and Mechanical errors in the written compositions of the 158 criminology students enrolled in English 12, "Writing in the Discipline" of the College of Arts and Sciences, Isabela State University during the 2nd semester of the School Year 2014-2015.

The respondents committed the most error on tenses under the Morphological terms. The use of punctuation was the most difficult for the respondents under the Mechanical terms. The respondents encountered more problems in Mechanical terms of writing which includes the use of punctuation, spelling and capitalization than the Morphological terms.

The respondents' mothers' educational attainment has something to do with their performance on their writing tenses, subject and verb agreement and prepositions. The different ethnicity of the respondents has an effect to the subject and verb agreement of the respondents' writing which explains the interference of the respondents' mother tongue in the construction of English grammar. The findings of the study are instructive as they quantify the extent of the problems faced by the respondents. Some respondents' had written only short composition, even though they seem to like the topic and show interest in writing still, some shows resistance because of their incapacity to do so. The study found that ethnicity is significantly related to the grammatical errors of the respondents while gender, type of high school last attended and fathers' educational attainment are not significantly related. Likewise, their mothers' educational attainment is also found to be highly significant on the over-all morphological error of the respondents. Learning second language is unavoidable but it can be lessened and improve with constant practice.

In the light of the findings the following were highly recommended to increase more of the respondents' knowledge in writing good composition with the use of correct grammar: The students must pursue learning English by frequent reading and writing. Cooperate and join English workshops to enhance more their literacy. The teacher must devise strategies or activities such as spelling activities. Further, teachers should also correct and not tolerate the students' error in grammar and lastly conduct workshops and seminars open and required to all courses.

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