

An Analysis of the Common Grammatical Errors in the English Writing

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present an analysis of the common grammatical errors in the English writing. The result study would like to improve the students' English knowledge and design proper teaching material and courses, it is important for researchers and English teachers to initially investigate the English proficiency levels of each particular group of students, and to know what the most important English learning units are that the students should undertake through their errors. The study objectives are to find out answers of the following research questions:

1. What types of grammatical errors are found in the English writing of Thai students?
2. What common grammatical error types are frequently used in their English writing?
3. How do interlanguage errors and intralingual and developmental errors plausibly affect the grammatical error commission in their English writing?

Keywords: Common grammatical errors; English writing

Introduction

Writing is a difficult process even in the first language. It is even more complicated to write in a foreign language. Many studies indicate for the beginning English Foreign Language (EFL) students, there tends to be interference from their first language in the process of writing in English (Benson, 2002; Cedar, 2004; Chen & Huang, 2003; Collins, 2002; Jarvis, 2000; Jiang, 1995; Lado, 1957; Liu, 1998; Mori, 1998; Yu, 1996). Writing in a foreign language often presents the greatest challenge to the students at all stages, particularly essay writing because in this activity, writing is usually extended and therefore it becomes more demanding than in the case of writing a short paragraph.

Writing in general and essays in particular form problems to secondary students in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Teachers of composition or writing classes in the UAE secondary state schools are generally faced with students who have memorized a good amount of English vocabulary and grammar rules, but have seldom put that knowledge to practical use (Wachs, 1993:135). In many cases, the majority of these students are still translating words, phrases, and sentences from Thai to English with often very strange results. The challenge for the composition teacher is to find methods to activate in a meaningful way the passive knowledge

the students possess in terms of the writing skill, as well as to help the students become more proficient while working to eliminate some of their common errors. A better understanding of the L1 influence in the process of EFL writing will help teachers know students' difficulties in learning English. It will also aid in the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies to help beginning EFL students learn English writing skills better. As Richards & Renandya (2002:303) claim; "there is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these notions into legible text". Yet, it is very necessary to look into the dynamics of writing and its teaching, as writing is a skill that not only is tested in every valid language examination, but also a skill that learners should possess and demonstrate in academic contexts. Writing includes numerous considerations and choices to be made regarding "higher level skills", such as content, structure and organization, and "lower level skills", such as punctuation and choice of appropriate vocabulary items and grammatical structures, which are the terms used by Richards & Renandya (2002:63). Moreover, writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience. By putting together concepts and solving problems, the writer engages in "a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987:12). Indeed, academic writing demands conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. Compared to students writing in their native language (L1), however, students writing in their L2 have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills, they want to write close to error-free texts and they enter language courses with the expectations of becoming more proficient writers in the L2.

However, most secondary school Arab students find it difficult to write essays free of errors of various types. Therefore, teachers of essay writing need to anticipate certain common types of errors. They may also find other types of errors, which can be revealed by analyzing the written products or essays of students. These are the conventions, which are usually followed by the teachers of writing when analyzing students' errors.

As mentioned above writing is a complex task; it is the "most difficult of the language abilities and skills to acquire (Allen & Corder, 1974:177). Its level of difficulty varies between native speakers (NS) who think in the language used, in this case it will be English, and non-native speakers (NNS) who think in their own native language, in this case, it will be Thai. While writing, non-native speakers have to think of all those rules they need to apply or use, rules that native speakers are expected to have automatically.

Harold Rosen points out the difficult situation in which a writer can find him/herself:

"The writer is a lonely figure cut off from the stimulus and corrective of listeners. He must be a predictor of reactions and act on his predictions. He writes with one hand tied behind his back, being robbed of gesture. He is robbed too of the tone of his voice and the aid

of clues the environment provides. He is condemned to monologue; there is no one to help, to fill the silences put words in his mouth, or make encouraging noises". (Rosen, 1969: 5).

Tricia Hedge elaborates on the requirements of effective writing:

"Effective writing requires a number of things: a high degree of development in the organization of ideas and information; a high degree of accuracy so there is no ambiguity of meaning; the use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis; and careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and the eventual readers. (Hedge, 1998:5).

The writing skill involves many other sub-skills like the general knowledge about the subject in question and the ability to translate ideas into grammatical sentences. Rivers (1968:243) argues that any academic writer must meet four major conditions:

The student must learn: 1- the graphic systems of the foreign language; 2- he must learn to spell according to the conventions of the language; 3- he must learn to control the structure of the language so that what he writes is comprehensible to his reader; and 4- he must learn to select from among possible combinations of words and phrases those which will convey the nuances he has in mind in the register which is most appropriate.

It's true that non-native speakers are more prone to committing errors. Teachers of English in the UAE are currently facing the challenge of adopting and developing a wide range of methods to accomplish effective teaching of English writing. This, of course, is not an easy task. A large number of students in the Thailand continue to fail to master the basics of the English writing even after long years of formal education. Teachers of English feel satisfied to have a student who speaks and writes correct English. This has been the ambition of all EFL teachers. Students in government schools in the Thailand start learning English from the first primary, and by the end of the secondary stage of education, the pupils have spent more than twelve years of learning EFL. At the end of this period, they are expected to understand advanced English, to communicate with an English speaking person within certain reasonable areas, to read simple English with ease, fluency and understanding, and to write a paragraph in English using basic structures of the language. However, during my long experience as a teacher of English at government schools in the UAE, I have found out that the majority of students at the end of their secondary cycle have great difficulties in reading with comprehension and that very few of them are able to write meaningful and errorfree English sentences. In spite of the fact that they have studied English for more than twelve years and that their vocabulary repertoire is expected to be massive and their knowledge of grammar rules and the mechanics of writing is satisfying, most of the students are still not able to write a correct paragraph using adequately the basic structures of the English language they have learnt. However, why do students still find difficulties in writing in English when their teachers do their best to help them to achieve good results? The answer to this question might be that learning English or any other foreign language is difficult, not only for the Thai students mentioned in this study, but for all

non-native speakers. The main problem is that, even in their very first lesson, the learners of a foreign language do not start learning this new language from zero or a neutral point (Hwang, 1970:26-29). Instead, they interpret the new phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic patterns through those of their native language.

What finally matters, I believe, is that we encourage our students to write. Lynn Holaday (in Stephen Tchudi, 1997:35) points out "the way to become a better writer is to write". She remarks "students who feel incompetent at writing avoid writing. They do not practice. They do not get better." On the light of this introduction the main aim of this study is to explore and analyze the common grammatical error patterns in Secondary male students' English essay writing in UAE state schools in the Eastern Coast. The study will first provide information on types of grammatical errors male students make; second, describe the methodology used in collecting the data; third, display the results; fourth, discuss and interpret the results.

1. Errors and Mistakes

It is essential here to make a distinction between mistakes and errors. According to Brown mistakes refer to "a failure to utilize a known system correctly" whereas errors concern "a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner" (1994a:205). Two things need to be stated here: Firstly, mistakes do not require special treatment assuming they are recognized. Secondly, error here refers to structures only. Both Corder (1967, 1971) and James (1998) reveal a criterion that helps us to do so: A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Errors are "systematic," i.e. likely to happen regularly and not recognized by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or researcher would locate them, the learner would not (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

Norrish (1983:67) made a clear distinction between errors and mistakes. He stated errors are "systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong." He added that when a learner of English as a second or a foreign language makes an error systematically, it is because he has not learnt the correct form. Norrish defined mistakes as "inconsistent deviation." When a learner has been taught a certain correct form, and he uses one form sometimes and another at other times quite inconsistently, the inconsistent deviation is called a mistake. And it is in this light that the researcher has chosen to focus on students' errors not mistakes. An error, however, is considered more serious. In

Contrastive Analysis, the theoretical base of which was behaviourism, errors were seen as "bad habits" that had been formed. The response was based on the stimulus. It was assumed that interference of the mother tongue (L1) was responsible for the errors made during the transition period of learning the target language. As an English teacher, I am well aware of the fact that my Arabic speaking students in grade 12, science section, commit many errors in essay writing. These students have been studying English almost their whole lives and still, their errors are numerous.

In the cognitive approach, errors are seen as a clue to what is happening in the mind. They are seen as a natural phenomenon that must occur as learning a first or second language takes place before correct grammar rules are completely internalized. I think teachers are relieved to find a more realistic attitude towards errors. Errors are no longer a reflection on their teaching methods, but are, rather, indicators that learning is taking place. So errors are no longer "bad" but "good" or natural just as natural as errors that occur in learning a first language. The insight that errors are a natural and important part of the learning process itself, and do not all come from mother tongue interference, is very important. There is variation in learners' performance depending on the task. Learners may have more control over linguistic forms for certain tasks, while for others they may be more prone to error.

2. Significance of Errors

Many educators and theorists in the field of error analysis have focused on the importance of second language learners' errors. Corder (1967) indicates that errors are significant in three different ways. First to the teachers, in that they tell them how far towards the goal the learners have advanced and consequently, what remains for them to learn. Second, they provide to the researchers evidence of how language is learnt or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learners are employing in their discovery of the language. Thirdly, they are indispensable to the learners themselves, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learners use in order to learn. Research has provided empirical evidence pointing to emphasis on learners' errors as an effective means of improving grammatical accuracy (White et al, 1991; Carroll and Swain, 1993). Indeed, as Carter (1997:35) notes, 'Knowing more about how grammar works is to understand more about how grammar is used and misused'. There is a need for students to recognize the significance of errors which occur in their writing, to fully grasp and understand the nature of the errors made. This requires English language teachers to be better equipped, more sensitive and aware of the difficulties students face with regard to grammar. In other words, it is a way the learners have for testing their hypotheses about the nature of the language they are learning. Taking these ideas into consideration, this study attempts to identify the grammatical errors which students make in writing English essays in order to help teachers of English tackle the problem and to indicate the points of weakness in English writing.

3. Causes and Sources of Errors

A lot of causes and sources of errors have been introduced by some theorists. In the following section the primary causes of errors will be reviewed: Interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are those which are related to the native language (NL). That's to say there are interlingual errors when the learners' NL habits (patterns, systems or rules) interfere or prevent them, to some degree, from acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language(SL) (Corder, 1971). Interference (negative transfer) is the negative influence of

the mother tongue language (MTL) on the performance of the target language (TL) learner (Lado, 1964).

Intralingual errors are those due to the language being learned, independent of the native language. According to Richards (1971) they are items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language. The learner, in this case, tries to “derive the rules behind the data to which he/she has been exposed, and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the target language” (Richards, 1974:6). In other words, they produce deviant or ill formed sentences by erroneously applying their knowledge of TL rules and structures to new situations. In 1974, Selinker (in Richards, 1974:37) reported five sources of errors:

- 1) Language transfer.
- 2) Transfer of training.
- 3) Strategies of second language learning.
- 4) Strategies of second language communication.
- 5) Overgeneralization of TL linguistic material.

In 1974 Corder (in Allen & Corder: 130) identified three sources of errors: Language Transfer, Overgeneralization or analogy, & Methods or Materials used in the Teaching (teaching-induced error). In the paper titled “The Study of Learner English” that Richards and Simpson wrote in 1974, they displayed seven sources of errors:

1. Language transfer, to which one third of the deviant sentences from second language learners could be attributed (George, 1971).
2. Intralingual interference: In 1970, Richards exposed four types and causes for intralingual errors:
 - a. Overgeneralization (p. 174): it is associated with redundancy reduction. It covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure based on his experience of other structures in the target language. It may be the result of the learner reducing his linguistic burden.
 - b. Ignorance of rule restrictions: i.e. applying rules to contexts to which they do not apply.
 - c. Incomplete application of rules.
 - d. Semantic errors such as building false concepts/systems: i.e. faulty comprehension of distinctions in the Target language (TL).
3. Sociolinguistic situation: motivation (instrumental or integrative) and settings for language learning (compound or co-ordinate bilingualism) may affect second language learning.
4. Modality: modality of exposure to the TL and modality of production.
5. Age: learning capacities vary with age.

6. Successions of approximative systems: since the cases of language learning vary from a person to another, and so does the acquisition of new lexical, phonological, and syntactic items.

7. Universal hierarchy of difficulty: This factor has received little interest in the literature of 2nd language acquisition. It is related to the inherent difficulty for man of certain phonological, syntactic, or semantic items or structures. Some forms may be inherently difficult to learn no matter what the background of the learner is.

Krashen (1982) suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. This order seemed to be independent of the learners' age, L1 background, and conditions of exposure.

James (1998:178) exposed three main diagnosis-based categories of error:

1. Interlingual: interference happens when "an item or structure in the second language manifests some degree of difference from and some degree of similarity with the equivalent item or structure in the learner's first language" (Jackson, 1981:101).

2. Intralingual:

a. Learning strategy-based errors:

- i. False analogy
- ii. Misanalysis
- iii. Incomplete rule application
- iv. Exploiting redundancy
- v. Overlooking co-occurrence restrictions
- vi. Hypercorrection (monitor overuse)
- vii. Overgeneralization or system simplification

b. Communication strategy-based errors:

- i. Holistic strategies: e.g. approximation and language switch

ii. Analytic strategies: circumlocution (expressing the concept indirectly, by allusion rather than by direct reference).

3. Induced errors: they "result more from the classroom situation than from either the student's incomplete competence in English grammar (intralingual errors) or first language interference (interlingual errors)

- a. Material induced errors
- b. Teacher-talk induced errors
- c. Exercise-based induced errors
- d. Errors induced by pedagogical priorities
- e. Look-up errors

Language transfer is another important cognitive factor related to writing error. Transfer is defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language

and any other language that has been previously acquired (Odlin, 1989). The study of transfer involves the study of errors (negative transfer), facilitation (positive transfer), avoidance of target language forms, and their over-use (Ellis, 1994). Behaviorist accounts claim that transfer is the cause of errors, whereas from a cognitive perspective, transfer is seen as a resource that the learner actively draws upon in interlanguage development (Selinker, 1972). Despite the fact that L1 transfer is no longer viewed as the only predictor or cause of error at the structural level, a writer's first language plays a complex and significant role in L2 acquisition. For example, when learners write under pressure, they may call upon systematic resources from their native language for the achievement and synthesis of meaning (Widdowson, 1990). Research has also shown that language learners sometimes use their native language when generating ideas and attending to details (Friedlander, 1990). In addition, contrastive studies, which have focused on characteristics of L1 languages and cultures, have helped us predict rhetorical error in writing. These studies have been valuable in our understanding of L2 writing development. However, many feel that these studies have also led to reductive, essentializing generalizations about ways of writing and cultural stereotypes about students from certain linguistic backgrounds (Fox, 1994; Leki, 1997; Spack, 1997). As a result, erroneous predictions about students' learning based on their L1 language and culture have occurred regardless of social factors, such as "the contexts, and purpose of their learning to write, or their age, race, class, gender, education, and prior experience" (Raimes, 1998:143).

J. Kerr (1970) based his study on the common errors in written English made by a group of Greek learners of English as a foreign language. It was found that the causes of mistakes were: 1. Ignorance of the words or constructions to express an idea; 2. Carelessness; 3. The influence of the mother – tongue; 4. Mistakes arising from making false analogies with other elements of the foreign language.

On the other hand, Ntumngia (1974) conducted research on error analysis of Francophone Cameroonian secondary school students. The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze the errors of these students with the hope that this identification and analysis would result in implications for instructional strategies used by teachers of English. The result of the study showed that the sources of errors committed by the students were due to both interlingual and intralingual factors. For instance, the writing problems experienced by Spanish speakers living in the United States may be due to a multiplicity of factors, including the effects of transfer and interference from the Spanish language, and cultural norms (Plata, 1995). First of all, learners may translate from L1, or they may try out what they assume is a legitimate structure of the target language, although hindered by insufficient knowledge of correct usage. In the learning process, they often experience native language interference from developmental stages of interlanguage or from nonstandard elements in spoken dialects (a common occurrence in students writing in their native language as well). They also tend to over-generalize the rules for stylistic features when acquiring new discourse structures. In

addition, learners are often not certain of what they want to express, which would cause them to make errors in any language.

Finally, writers in L2 might lack familiarity with new rhetorical structures and the organization of ideas (Carson, 2001; Connor & Kaplan, 1987; Kutz, Groden, & Zamel, 1993; Raimes, 1987). L2 writing relates closely to native-language literacy and particular instructional contexts. Students may not be acquainted with English rhetoric, which can lead to writing that appears off topic or incoherent to many learners of English as a foreign language. The studies relating to the process of language transfer and overgeneralization received considerable attention in the literature. Swan and Smith (1995:ix) gave a detailed account of errors made by speakers of nineteen different L1 backgrounds in relation to their native languages.

Diab (1996:72) also conducted a study in order to show through error analysis the interference of the mother-tongue, Arabic, in the English writings of EFL students at the American University of Beirut. Okuma (1999) studied the L1 transfer in the EFL writings of Japanese students. Work on over-generalization errors, on the other hand, is reported by Richards (1974:172-188), Jain (in Richards, 1974: 208-214) and Taylor (1975:154). Furthermore, Farooq (1998:124) identified and analyzed two error patterns in written texts of upper-basic Japanese learners, in an EFL context. He focused on both transfer and overgeneralization errors. Habbash (1982:74) studied common errors in the use of English prepositions in the written work of students at the end of the preparatory cycle in the Jerusalem area and found out that more errors were attributable to interference from Arabic than to other learning problems. She indicated that students always resort to literal translation before they form English patterns. In other words, they translate the English into Arabic and then the Arabic back into English, word for word (not phrase by phrase. Finally, it is clear from this brief discussion that the learner brings with him one source of error: his mother tongue. Even more importantly, the learning process itself is the source of other errors.

4. Error Analysis

Error analysis is an essential source of information to teachers. It provides information on students' errors which in turn helps teachers to correct students' errors and also improves the effectiveness of their teaching. The study of errors by themselves would have been misleading, but in contrast to the number of correct responses gives a good picture of which items are being mastered and which are not. This study hopes to enlighten teachers on the grammatical errors that require remedial work so that time is not wasted on teaching grammar items or any other linguistic features which pose little or no problems to the majority of the students in relation to writing compositions.

The definition of error analysis by Corder (1974:134) is very close to the Malaysian context: "What has come to be known as error analysis has to do with the investigation of the language of second language learners." In line with the emphasis on examinations in the Malaysian education system, Lim (1976:135), stated: "One of the main aims of error analysis is to

help teachers assess more accurately what remedial work would be necessary for English as a Second Language (ESL) students preparing for an English Language test, so as to help these students avoid the most common errors."

Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the Target Language (TL) and that TL itself. Pit Corder is the "Father" of Error Analysis (the EA with the "new look"). It was with his article entitled "The significance of Learner Errors" (1967) that EA took a new turn. Errors used to be "flaws" that needed to be eradicated. Corder presented a completely different point of view. He contended that those errors are "important in and of themselves." For learners themselves, errors are 'indispensable,' since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn.

Hence, I have decided to conduct an error analysis, the best tool for describing and explaining errors made by speakers of other languages (Johanson, 1975) in order to know the sources of these errors and the reasons behind their continuous occurrence year after year with different groups of learners. We find studies such as Richards's "A non-contrastive approach to error analysis" (1971), where he identifies sources of competence errors; L1 transfer results in interference errors; incorrect (incomplete or over-generalized) application of language rules results in intralingual errors; construction of faulty hypotheses in L2 results in developmental errors. Not all researchers have agreed with the above distinction, such as Dulay and Burt (1974) who proposed the following three categories of errors: developmental, interference and unique. Stenson (1974) proposed another category, that of induced errors, which result from incorrect instruction of the language. In addition to studies focusing on error categorization and analysis, various studies concentrated on these three different areas. In other words, research was conducted not only in order to understand errors per se, but also in order to use what is learned from error analysis and apply it to improve language competence. Such studies include Kroll and Schafer's "Error-Analysis and the Teaching of Composition", where the authors demonstrate how error analysis can be used to improve writing skills. They analyze possible sources of error in non-native-English writers, and attempt to provide a process approach to writing where the error analysis can help achieve better writing skills.

5. Models for Error Analysis

Corder (1967 & 1974) identified a model for error analysis which included three stages:

1. Data collection: Recognition of idiosyncrasy.
2. Description: Accounting for idiosyncratic dialect.
3. Explanation (the ultimate object of error analysis).

Brown (1994: 207-211) and Ellis (1995:51-52) elaborated on this model. Ellis (1997:15-20) and Hubbard et al. (1996:135-141) gave practical advice and provided clear examples of how to identify and analyze learners' errors. The initial step requires the selection of a corpus of language followed by the identification of errors. The errors are then classified. The next step,

after giving a grammatical analysis of each error, demands an explanation of different types of errors. Moreover, Gass & Selinker (1994:67) identified 6 steps followed in conducting an error analysis: Collecting data, Identifying errors, Classifying errors, Quantifying errors, Analyzing source of error, and Remediating for errors.

Systematically analyzing errors made by language learners makes it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching (Corder, 1974:213).

While Sridhar, (1980:222) considered the following steps for error analysis:

1. Collection of data (either from a 'free' composition by students on a given theme or from examination answers).
2. Identification of errors (labelling with varying degree of precision depending on the linguistic sophistication brought to bear upon the task, with respect to the exact nature of the deviation, e.g. dangling preposition, anomalous sequence of tenses, etc.).
3. Classification into error types (e.g. errors of agreement, articles, verb forms, etc.);
4. Statement of relative frequency of error types.
5. Identification of the areas of difficulty in the target language.
6. Therapy (remedial drills, lessons, etc.).

In fact, there has been little research on errors in written English compared with the studies that have concentrated on reading and phonology even within the limited field of error analysis. Ultimately, the use of error analysis and appropriate corrective techniques can aid effective teaching and learning of the English language. It is very essential in this connection to go through some literature conducted in the field of analysis of students' errors in writing.

In reviewing many studies written on this field it has been found out that most students commit many different types of errors in writing English compositions.

Bataineh (2005:46) conducted a research on errors on using indefinite articles made by third secondary students. She found out that secondary students committed nine types of errors, and their frequency computed and then compared across the three levels. The analysis revealed that all errors, except one, are independent of the learners' native language.

In another study done on 80 students at a Jordanian University with an average of 11 years' instruction behind them, in two different studies, Mukkatesh (1981:52) explored the errors in the production of wh-questions by Arab-speaking students. He found that approximately 25% of students' errors involved a failure to invert the subject and verb or auxiliary. The author notes that while this could be a sign of L1 influence, it has also been reported to be characteristic of first language learners and second language learners from other linguistic backgrounds. Students also frequently omitted do in questions formed from sentences in which there was not an auxiliary. Again, this result could be attributed to L1 influence or interlanguage. Students were found to use do or be incorrectly instead of other auxiliaries, which can only be attributed to interlanguage. The author concludes that error analysis is a method which cannot differentiate in many cases between possible sources of error. On the

other hand, Habash (1982:79), studied common errors in the use of English prepositions in the written work of preparatory students in the Jerusalem area and found out that more errors were attributable to interference from Arabic than to other learning problems.

Generally, most studies conducted in the fields of causes and sources of errors and error analysis generated a conclusion that mother tongue interference is the main factor that is responsible for the cause of errors in students' writings. Furthermore, research done on error analysis among Arab and non-Arab students revealed that approximately the most common types of errors are all similar, they are focused on grammatical errors such as the wrong use of prepositions, verb tense, articles and subject-verb agreement.

Knowledge from the Study

If we take a simple sentence, e.g. He went to the shop., and change even just one of the five grammatical elements, you can see their importance in creating meaning. If we change the punctuation, then the factual sentence is turned into a question: He went to the shop? If we change the tense, then one completed task in the past becomes a continuous event in the present: He goes to the shop. If we change the word order, then the normal everyday occurrence is turned on its head by introducing a shop that moves: The shop went to him. If we change the determiner, then instead of going to one shop he is now going to every shop, which would be quite a challenge: He went to every shop. If we change the connector, then we are introducing a second unknown event that almost prevented him from visiting the shop: Nevertheless, he went to the shop. As each element is changed, the meaning of the sentence is changed and the original intended meaning is lost.

The purpose of grammar is to allow writers to convey specific meanings to their audience. It is the difference between "Your dinner" and "You're dinner." If you want to avoid coming across as the wolf from Little Red Riding Hood, read our top five reasons why grammar is the most important part of writing.

1) Convey Your Exact Meaning Through Correct Punctuation

Correct punctuation allows you to convey your meaning easily and smoothly.

Punctuation is a set of symbols used in writing to divide words and clauses and to show how the sentence should be read.

Punctuation allows writers to convey subtle and precise meaning to their readers.

There are 14 types of punctuation used in English, some of these are:

Periods	Question Marks	Brackets
Ellipses	Quotation Marks	Colons
Dashes	Exclamation Points	Hyphens
Commas	Semi-Colons	Braces

They allow you to set the tone, stress certain words or phrases, and create a flow in your writing.

Set the Tone with Punctuation

Two identical sets of words can elicit totally different moods if their final punctuation is changed. Changing a period to an exclamation point can stress a certain idea or create a sense of tension. Changing a period to a question mark adds a sense of doubt and uncertainty. Using punctuation to set the tone is clearer and more concise because it does not add any words.

Stress Words or Phrases with Commas

Commas are powerful tools because they can create different effects by stressing certain parts of a sentence. They direct a reader's attention to key words and phrases, which gives the writer even more control over how their work will be interpreted.

Create a Flow in Writing

As well as stressing words and phrases, punctuation is essential for controlling the flow of writing. Punctuation can slow a reader down, asking them to focus on a certain idea, or speed a reader up, thereby creating a sense of momentum or tension. The flow of writing is created by correct grammar, a logical structure, clear connections, and varied language. All of these elements help the reader to understand the exact meaning of your words.

2) Accurate Grammar Makes Writing Easier to Read

Along with allowing you to control the way that your writing is interpreted, accurate grammar also makes writing easier to read. Bad grammar can make even simple sentences difficult to understand. To demonstrate this, I have taken a quote from the Great Gatsby and added some arbitrary punctuation. “The loneliest moment in someone’s life! Is when they are watching their whole world (fall apart) and all they can do is stare blankly?” Despite making no changes to the words, the meaning of this quote has been almost entirely lost. The correct punctuation is far simpler and more powerful. “The loneliest moment in someone’s life is when they are watching their whole world fall apart, and all they can do is stare blankly.” Along with incorrect punctuation, other common grammatical errors include run-on sentences, misused homophones, dangling modifiers, and sentence fragments.

How to Identify Common Grammatical Errors

To be able to avoid grammatical errors in your writing, it is important first to identify them. Run-on sentences are when multiple complete sentences are attached without any punctuation. For example: Always use punctuation between sentences without punctuation they are difficult to read. Reading this sentence is challenging because it provides no pauses. It can be easily fixed by adding a period after the word “sentences” to give: Always use punctuation between sentence. Without punctuation they are difficult to read. Homophones are words that sound the same but have different meanings. For example: Sometimes it can be confusing to know which homophone to use. This sentence confuses the word “which” with “witch” because they are both homophones. If it was spoken aloud you would not notice this humorous mistake. Dangling modifiers are words or phrases that are separated from the subject they are meant to be describing. For example: Exhausted after hours of editing, the computer

was shut down for the night. Unless this computer has developed the ability to think, it is probably a writer who became exhausted and shut it down for the night, and not the computer itself. Sentence fragments are parts of a sentence that have been disconnected from the main clause. For example: Rode bike to school, arrived late. In this sentence the subject is missing and it is not stated “who” avoided sentence fragments.

3) Incorrect Grammar Can Distort Your Meaning

As we have already established, incorrect grammar can make texts difficult to read but it can do even more than that. It can distort the meaning entirely. Imagine seeing a sign that says: Thank you for your donation! You have helped someone. Get a job. You may be confused and a little offended. Is this sign suggesting that you need to stop donating and go out and get a job? Although grammatically correct, the meaning of the sign has been entirely changed by a single period. By taking out the period, the writer’s true meaning is revealed: Thank you for your donation! You have helped someone get a job.

Now it is clear that the sign is thanking people for helping others to obtain a job and not critiquing them.

How periods can change meaning

Although most people could work out the meaning of this sign even without the commas, there are many times where that is not possible. The sentence No more coffee. has an entirely different meaning if a comma was used after the word “no”: No, more coffee. Both sentences are perfectly logical and credible but have opposite meanings. The first requests that the person be provided with no more coffee and the second demands more. The only way to work out which meaning is correct is by looking at the commas.

4) Good Grammar Increases Credibility

Not only is good grammar essential for meaning, it can also increase credibility. This is really important if you are writing for a business and need to stand out from the crowd.

If a potential buyer reads two ads for similar products, one with perfect grammar and the other peppered with mistakes, which one would they be more likely to purchase? It is not a surprise that most buyers would opt for the product that is marketed with perfect grammar. According to RealBusiness, 60% of people said that bad grammar would stop them from purchasing a product. If a business publishes work containing grammatical errors, it gives the impression that they do not care about details. This makes them look unprofessional which does not reflect well on their product. Keep your competitive edge by making sure that you proofread every single document and prevent those pesky grammatical errors from slipping through the net.

5) Error-Free Grammar Is Important for Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Our final reason why grammar is important, if the previous four have not managed to convince you yet, is that it aids your search engine optimization.

Search engine optimization, more commonly known as SEO, is the process of improving a website's visibility and ranking on Google. How Does Good Grammar Improve SEO? Good grammar improves SEO in a simple four-step process.

Step 1: Grammatical errors make writing more difficult to read.

Step 2: When there are hundreds of articles for each search term, readers will click off a badly written page and choose another.

Step 3: Search engines will see this and understand that your content isn't optimized for user experience.

Step 4: As a result, it will provide your content a lower ranking than higher-quality sites that provide a better user experience.

The opposite is true when a website has perfect grammar. Users will spend longer on the site, giving it more authority and therefore allowing it to rank higher on Google.

Conclusion

The study aimed at identifying, describing, categorizing, and diagnosing the type of grammatical errors made in the Emirati secondary male students' English essays and the sources of these errors. As a result, a number of different grammatical errors were found in their English essays. These were limited to eight major errors: passive voice, verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, plurality and auxiliaries. Simultaneously, the learners will improve their general language proficiency by following these strategies. However, this study dealt with a limited number of the linguistic aspects involved in writing due to the limitations of space and time. Clearly, there is a great deal of work to be done in this area in the future.

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