

Gender-Based Analysis of Pakistani ESL Learners' Written English Essays

Dr Ahsan Bashir^{1*}, Maryam Aleem^{2*}, M Asif Ikram Anjum^{3*}, Sadaf Qayyum^{4*}

1 University of Education, Lahore

2 University Law College, University of the Punjab, Lahore

3 Lecturer, CUI Lahore Campus

4 M Phil English Scholar, University of Lahore

*ahsan.bashir@ue.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate gender based differences in the written English augmentative essays of Pakistani ESL learners. Being a productive skill, argumentative writing in a second language has always been found challenging for second language learners. Essay writing is an activity which is performed at different levels among students while learning a second language. Forty intermediate class level male and female students of a private college in Pakpatan Sharif were the subjects of the study. Procedural analysis of errors by Ellis (2008) served as the theoretical framework for the present study. The findings revealed that female students made fewer errors as compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, the frequency of spelling and grammatical errors in males is higher as compared to female students.

Keywords (Times New Roman, bold, 9)

Error analysis, English language teaching, English as second language

Introduction

Errors occur due to the result of one's linguistic/systematic competence (Khansir, 2012). According to James (1998), error analysis is a systematic method for documenting the errors that appear in learner's language in order to determine whether those errors are systematic, and (if possible) explain what caused them. Gender difference and error analysis combine to cultivate a process which finds out the relationship between gender studies and errors made by learners. According to Richards (1984), ESL learners' written and spoken discourse are the places of interest where linguistic competence relates to linguistic bits like noun, pronoun etc. Weireesh (1991) opines that error analysis helps us identify and evaluate the issues faced by the ESL students; however, Candling (2001) is of the view that errors are indispensable in the process of second language learning. It is very difficult to believe that ESL learners can earn a second language without making errors because they make errors due to several factors where mother tongue influence outweighs other factors.

Gender Difference and Language

In 1975, Lakoff is believed to be the first one who brought into the consideration of researchers that there exist linguistic differences between genders. Several researches have been conducted regarding analysis of linguistic features through gendered perspective. Few researchers have explored phonological and lexical differences (Trudgill, 1972; Eckert, 1989) while others explored

compliments and apologies (Homes, 1995) or turn-taking (Tannen, 1991) among both genders. However, some corpus-based researches have also been conducted to explore the syntactic and lexical differences between both genders (Newman, Groom, Handelman, & Pennebaker, 2008; Argamon, Koppel, Fine, & Shimoni, 2003; Baker, 2014). Many of these researches have revealed that men and women use language differently.

Many studies are found on gender and speaking but very fewer studies are found on gender and writing. Halpern (1986) focused on the verbal ability of males and females and the findings revealed that during preschool, the verbal ability differences between male and female students are not reliable but during puberty, these are females who demonstrate better verbal performance as compared to males. Behind every piece of writing, writers' gender matters a lot. Writing demonstrates male and female's feelings, knowledge, and identities. According to Ivanic (1998), relationship between writing and gender is very robust because this relationship tells about their knowledge, commitment, assessment and identity. According to Bahman (2012), male and female's social positions can be deliberated through language.

There is scarcity of research available on gender difference in ESL learning. Morris (1998) explored gender difference in English language composition in a school in Canada and the findings revealed that females were more efficient writers as compared with their counterparts. However, a large number of studies on error analysis has been conducted. Abisamra (2003) worked on the errors made by Arabic writers in their English essay writings. He collected data in the forms of essay writings of 100 secondary level students. He analyzed the students' errors of six kinds in their writings: plurality, prepositional phrases, relative clause, past tense, agreement of the place adverb, and articles. Almost 40 percent errors in students' writings were due to the transfer of their native language. The major errors were morphological and syntactical errors. The remaining 60 percent errors were related to the over-generalization of the students' target language. Darus (2009) examined Malay students' errors in their written essays and analyzed 70 narratives of Malay students. The findings revealed that almost every student made errors which were mainly morphological and syntactical in nature and categorized errors into five major categories: Subject-Verb agreement, spellings, punctuation, preposition and wrong use of verb. Sarfraz (2011) studied essays of 60 Pakistani students who were undergraduate and revealed that the students made errors due to the misconception of grammatical rules. Moreover, the overuse of GTM method while learning the target language was also the cause of errors. Another research which was conducted by Ridha (2012) on 100 ESL higher secondary level students explored that the reason of the errors was mainly due to interlanguage process. It was revealed that the transfer of L1 was the main source of errors.

Research Questions

1. Are there any gender differences in the written argumentative essays of Pakistani ESL learners?
2. What types of errors are made by male and female students?

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in its approach. Data was collected through written English

argumentative essays to analyze the gender difference in errors. Random sampling technique was used to select the sample of 80 (40 M, 40 F) students of intermediate level of a private college in Pakpattan Sharif. The research made use of the procedural analysis of errors by Ellis (2008), as it comprises four stages – collection of sample of target language, identification of errors, description of errors and evaluating the errors identified in the data.

Findings

This section deals with the analysis and discussion of errors that were identified in the written argumentative essays of the students. After carefully going through the written scripts of the students, it was revealed that students were unable to apply / internalize the rules of English Language usage.

In order to address research question number 1, two categories are selected for error analysis owing to the thorough analysis of the study: one category is spelling errors and second category is grammar errors. After making the categories, errors are analyzed according to different types. As a result, it became easy to find out the types of errors made by male and female students.

Types of Spelling Errors

The spelling errors are categorized into four types which are given below.

- Error of Substitution is a type of error in which one or more than one letter is substituted by other letters in the word. (Ali played very well but in the end fall down)
- Error of Omission is a type of error in which one or more than one letter is omitted by other letter in the word. (I ? happy whenever I visit the mall)
- Error of Addition is a type of error in which one or more than one letter is added by other letter in the word. (They have eated the meal)
- Error of Segmentation is a type of error in which one word is written as two words. (Every day, we have to come across a different issue)

Types of Grammatical Errors

- Error of verb tense and form is a type of error where there is inconsistency among the verb and the action it is supposed to perform. (I step into the mall and started purchasing the eatables)

- Error of word order is the error where the word order does not follow the rules of grammar. (Ahmad is coming?)
- Error of subject verb agreement is a type of error where subject and verb are not consistent according to the rules of grammar. (Fiza is one of my dream personality)
- Error of articles is the type of error where there is found the wrong use of articles. (Ali lives in ? village)

The overall results of the study revealed that male students made higher number of errors as compared to their counterparts as shown in table 1 below.

	Frequency of Errors	Percentage
Male Students	430	53.75
Female Students	370	46.25
Total Errors	800	

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Errors

From table 1, it's clear that male students made more errors as compared to female students. The present study was delimited to spelling and grammar errors only; therefore the analysis of the errors revolves around spelling and grammar errors only. The analysis of the errors revealed that male students had higher number of spelling (230) and grammar (200) errors as compared to the spelling (190) and grammar (180) errors of female students as shown in table 2 below.

Male Students		Female Students	
Frequency and Percentage of Spelling Errors	Frequency and Percentage of Grammar Errors	Frequency and Percentage of Spelling Errors	Frequency and Percentage of Grammar Errors
230 (28.75%)	200(25%)	190 (23.75%)	180 (22.5%)

Table 2: Comparative analysis of types of errors

From table 2, it can be seen that male students had made higher number of errors in both spelling and grammar types of errors as compared to female students which shows that female students performed better than boys. The in depth

comparative analysis of both male and female students of the types of spelling errors is shown in table 3 below.

Frequency of Spelling Errors of Male Students			
Omission	Addition	Substitution	Segmentation
90	70	50	20
Frequency of Spelling Errors of Female Students			
Omission	Addition	Substitution	Segmentation
70	80	40	10

Table 3: Comparative analysis of spelling types of errors

From table 3, it's quite clear that male students made higher number of errors in errors of omission while the female students made higher number of errors in errors of addition.

As far as the grammatical errors are concerned, the findings revealed that male students have made highest number of errors in verb tense and form (105) while female students made highest errors in the use of errors (90). The types of grammatical errors are discussed under verb tense and form (VTF), word order (WO), subject verb agreement (SVA) and articles (ART). The detailed comparative analysis of grammatical errors of male and female students is presented in table 4 below.

Frequency of Grammatical Errors of Male Students			
VTF	WO	SVA	ART
105	70	15	10
Frequency of Grammatical Errors of Female Students			
VTF	WO	SVA	ART
60	20	10	90

Table 4: Comparative analysis of grammatical types of errors

Discussion and Conclusion

From the above findings, it can be seen that male students have a higher ratio of errors as compared to females because females are naturally very careful in the choice and the usage of the words. Females have a tendency towards kindness, sophistication and making and sustaining relationships while male students are more inclined towards sports, finance, transport and IT etc. That's why, females are very conscious of what they are writing and how they are writing.

Writing is regarded as the most important skill at all levels of teaching and should be treated with equal importance. If we take the mistakes of graduating students into careful consideration, to bring changes in the existing teaching system of writing seems essential now. Effective training for the learners in the learning process is also necessary for their writing to improve adequately. Results demonstrate that male students have to struggle a lot in forming pleasant expositions in English writings. The mode in which they write their essays obviously illustrates their poor command on the fundamental rules of spellings and grammar. As per the types of spellings, male

students have the highest score of errors in the errors of omission which may be due to their tendency towards socioeconomic activities where they are ambitious to express themselves regardless of the proper implementation of the knowledge and skills. Female students had higher number of errors in the error of addition which may be due to the nature of females in building and maintaining relationships where they unconsciously add a few letters/words which are

inconsistent with the rules of grammar. To overcome this chaotic situation, it is better if English language teachers use/devise new techniques to make the writing skills more effective by ultimately minimizing the errors of students. 21st century English language teachers should be better on the use of technology in order to suggest students the relevant stuff and website for practice where they enjoy during their practice session. The possible reason of the students' errors may be due to the excessive use of mobile phone especially for chatting purposes where they don't care for spellings and rules of grammar for effective composition. A large portion of the inaccurate syntactic sentences found in students' essays was due to the poor knowledge of tenses, verb forms and spellings. Although students at college level have a full lecture reserved for grammar, students still lack proficiency in effective writing which may be overcome by grabbing the interest of the students and motivating them to learn English language.

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