Syntactic Errors in Pakistani Undergraduate Students' Written English

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Abstract: *This paper investigated the syntactic errors prevalent in Pakistani undergraduate students' written English. It also sought to outline the possible causes of these errors. The study employed content analysis by basing it on Corder's error analysis methodology to accomplish the research objectives. The study was conducted at a renowned private university. Participants for the study were those BS first year students who had obtained their higher secondary school certificate from Karachi Intermediate Examinations Board. The writing samples of eighty eight o students from this group were obtained. The corpus was then analyzed to discover the syntactic errors, and determine their frequency, types and causes. The major syntactic errors that emerged from the analysis were erroneous verb phrases, run-on sentences, semantically and syntactically ill-formed clauses due to literal translation from mother tongue, and faulty vocabulary respectively. An equal number of interlingual and intralingual errors were found. Students' inadequate competence, insufficient training, and limited exposure to the target language are considered to be the major causes behind the thence discovered errors.*

Keywords: Syntactic errors, error analysis, written English

Introduction

Indeed, grammatical accuracy becomes the lifeblood of writing. Teaching the difference between speech and writing entails generating awareness particularly regarding the structural and grammatical difference between the two modes of communication. It is a challenging task for a language teacher to make students realize the distinctions between speech and writing with special reference to syntax and grammar. In order to make students competent writers, they have to be taught how writing is an entirely different mode of communication and how strict adherence to grammatical and syntactic rules as well as other mechanics become a distinguishing feature of writing. It can be concluded that teaching written English to English as second language (ESL) learners then becomes a more daunting task.

Excellent English language proficiency is the key to economic development and access to technology (Mahboob, 2003). Consequently, good command on English is seen as a pre-requisite for progress at both the individual and national level (Shamim, 2011). Therefore, the state's educational system must not only teach English but also develop desirable speaking and writing skills in the language.

Good writing skills are as significant as superior speaking skills to be able to pursue a successful academic and professional career. Effective writing skills require a sound knowledge of syntactic and grammatical rules, genre and document structure, and a rich vocabulary. However, Pakistani students' written English proficiency is alarmingly below par. Since error analysis is a widely explored field of study in applied linguistics across the world and Pakistan, many error analysis studies of undergraduate and intermediate level Pakistani students' written English have contributed by illuminating concerned stakeholders about the nature and types of errors prevalent in students'

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written English. However, there is insufficient research on syntactic errors in Pakistani students' written English when syntactic correctness is the most vital characteristic of writing. Researchers seem to have paid little or no attention to analyzing the learners' inter-language for discovering syntactic errors in particular. Unless this overlooked phenomenon is addressed, required remedial action cannot be taken to address the issue.

In Pakistan, undergraduate students' written English has been analyzed to identify the different types of errors as well as their causes. A recent study revealed that tenses were the most problematic area (Ijaz, Mahmood, & Ameer, 2014). It also identified errors in spellings and capitalization rules, preposition omission and placement errors, article placement and omission errors, and lack of knowledge about degrees of adjectives in the writings of Pakistani learners (Ijaz et al., 2014). The syntactic errors that it highlighted were word order errors or missing constituent errors, sentence fragments, and faulty relative clauses (Ijaz et al., 2014). Another study conducted to explore the errors in the written English of Pakistani ESL learners reported incomplete sentences, fragmentary sentences, and grammatically unacceptable sentences as errors pertaining to syntax (Hussain, Hanif, Asif, & Rehman, 2013). In fact, Hussain et al. (2013) maintained "there was not even a single text without syntactic errors" (p. 838).

First language interference, over-generalization, and little knowledge of written English rules and conventions can be accounted for as the major causes of errors (Hussain et al., 2013). Pakistani English teachers regard first language interference, large classes, lack of motivation both on the part of learners and teachers, inadequate teacher training, and lack of knowledge regarding modern instructional and error analysis methodologies as the prime factors behind errors in students' written English at the degree level (Butt & Rasul, 2012). Another study confirmed that majority of the errors in Pakistani students' written English resulted from mother tongue interference (Sarfraz, 2011). Furthermore, another study revealed that 47% errors found in Pakistani undergraduate students' written English were related to verbs, tenses, and subject-verb agreement (Parvaiz & Khan, 2010).

Although, error analysis of undergraduate Pakistani ESL learners' English writing has been conducted, there is a notable lack of researchers exploring the syntactic errors in particular in learners' written English. Researchers have focused more on the nature and causes of grammatical errors pertaining to structures, spellings, and punctuations. This is a significant area for research provided that excellent writing skills are essential for the country's progress in economic, educational, and scientific arenas. There is a need for a scientific investigation into the syntactic errors to assist the concerned stake holders in taking the required measures to address the issue of poor English writing skills in Pakistan.

Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the types and the causes of syntactic errors in the written English of Pakistani undergraduate students at a university level. Moreover, it seeks to identify the types and possible causes of the syntactic errors to illuminate the concerned stake holders so that effective remedial action can be taken to resolve the issue.

The present study is a worthy contribution as it will brings to light the syntactic errors in learners' written English. It addresses the syntactic errors in written English only as this have received insufficient or no attention by the researchers in Pakistan. It investigates the errors in the written English of first year university students coming from the Karachi Board background. Therefore, it holds special significance for the Karachi Intermediate Board, its curriculum and textbook developers, and most importantly, the teachers. It will throw light on the relevance of the textbook and curriculum and the effectiveness of the teaching methodologies in achieving the curriculum objectives. It will provide useful information to all the stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of their decisions and actions in teaching learners written English.

It is also beneficial for university language course developers and language teachers. It will inform them about the learners' current competence level regarding written English and the problem

areas, and consequently it will play a significant role in helping the concerned stakeholders take remedial action and develop courses aligned with learners' needs and developmental stage.

The study is limited to undergraduate Pakistani students at the Computer Science department of a private university. Also, the target research subjects are only those BS first year students who obtained their intermediate certificates from Karachi board be it from a private or public college. Therefore, this may limit the generalizability of the results when the all the graduates of the Karachi Board are taken into account.

The areas outside the scope of the study are punctuation errors, collocation errors, spelling and capitalization errors, and an evaluation of the stylistic quality of the students' written English. The study does not address the learners' overall knowledge of written English including paragraphing rules, cohesion and coherence rules, and awareness about the genre. It restricts itself to discovering syntactic errors in the students' written English. It also aims to provide a grammatical description of the syntactic errors and discuss their possible causes.

Review of Related Literature

Researchers' attitude towards ESL learners' errors has changed with increasing researches into the phenomenon. Errors were seen as intolerable and unacceptable items by the behaviorists as they considered errors to be the results of negative interference from the first language (Ellis, 1985). However, when Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis was challenged in the light of the researches on errors and inter-language conducted by Richards and Corder, error analysis and learner errors became significant issues for inquiry (Ellis, 1985).

Corder and Corder (1981) differentiates between errors and mistakes. Mistakes are those deviations that occur because of slips of the tongue or pen, memory lapses, and certain physical and psychological conditions (Corder & Corder, 1981). In fact, native speakers of the target language may also make mistakes in speech and writing owing to the above mentioned factors (Corder & Corder, 1981). On the contrary, an error is that deviation or violation of a grammar rule that reveals the learner's "underlying knowledge of the (target) language to date" (Corder & Corder, 1981). The learner is unaware of errors; however, s/he is not only aware of mistakes, but can also rectify them without any instruction if provided an opportunity to revise. Hence, mistakes can be termed as "errors of performance" and errors as "transitional competence" (Corder & Corder, 1981).

Error analysis can therefore be termed as a branch of applied linguistics which started to gain popularity through the writings of S.P. Corder (Ellis, 1985). It can be defined as "the investigation of the language (inter-language) of the second language learners" (Corder & Corder, 1981). Errors reveal that second language acquisition (SLA) resembles first language acquisition in that in both cases, learners explore and investigate the system of the language under study by formulating and testing hypotheses (Corder & Corder, 1981; Ellis, 1985).

Therefore, error analysis must be undertaken to uncover the nature of SLA, types of errors, and their causes so that remedial action can be taken to facilitate learners. To sum up, error analysis concerns itself with two functions: that are determining the methodology to investigate the language learning process when viewed from the theoretical point of view, and guiding in taking remedial action when considered from a practical viewpoint (Corder & Corder, 1981).

Errors can be broadly categorised into two types-interlingual and intra-lingual (Richards, 1974). Interlingual errors are caused by mother tongue interference, and are also referred to as language transfer errors (Richards, 1974). On the other hand, intra-lingual errors are those that occur when learners formulate a faulty rule pertaining to the grammar of the target language in their attempts to understand the system of the target language (Richards, 1974). These errors do not have their roots in first language interference; in fact, they point towards the fact that learners use the same

strategies to learn a second language as they adopt when acquiring their first language (Richards, 1974). Richards (1974) identifies four types of intra-lingual errors namely-over-generalization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized.

A significantly large number of error analysis studies have been conducted to ascertain the types of errors present in ESL learners' inter-language so that appropriate and required remedial measures can be taken to resolve the issue. As far as syntactic errors are concerned, numerous researches have been conducted to determine their types, nature, and causes. Many researchers shed light on the common types and causes of syntactic errors in undergraduate level ESL learners' written English.

Furthermore, a recent study reported that the common syntactic errors prevalent in the Malaysian learners' written English were faulty construction of verb phrases and subject verb agreement errors (Tse, 2014). Another study also reported that the verb phrase construction was the most difficult area to master for the Malaysian ESL learners (Basri, Ampa, & Junaid, 2013). Faulty constructions of noun and verb phrases have been the commonly found syntactic errors in Malaysian students written English (Ahour & Mukundan, 2012). Bennui (2008) employed multiple techniques, namely, contrastive analysis, error analysis, inter-language analysis, and contrastive analysis, and found errors of word order, subject-verb agreement, tenses, infinitives, and many other to be the errors resulting from mother tongue syntactic interference.

Mother tongue interference was found to be the dominant factor behind syntactic errors in Indian and Thai ESL learners' writing respectively (Benzigar, 2013; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2012). In addition to errors of coordination, sentence structure, and word order, fragments and run-ons/comma splices were identified as the major syntactic errors by the two studies respectively (Benzigar, 2013; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2012).

The types and frequency of syntactic errors resulting from language transfer in Chinese ESL learners' expository essays were 42% run-on sentences, 96% and 44% disagreement in number and tense, and 50% incorrect forms of passive voice (Wang & Liu, 2013). In addition to other grammatical errors, a study found errors of coordination and subordination and run-ons in the writings of Chinese English learners and recommended that non-native Chinese English teachers should work harder to facilitate student learning (Chou & Bartz, 2007).

Arabic EFL learners exhibited sentence fragments, formation of verb phrases, and word order to be the most dominant syntactic errors upon the error analysis of their writing (Sawalmeh, 2013). An error analysis of Spanish ESL learners' writing revealed mother tongue interference to be the major cause behind the errors (Urdaneta, 2011). The syntactic errors were mostly word order problems (Urdaneta, 2011). On the other hand, 80% of the Sri-Lankan ESL learners' written English errors belonged to grammar, orthography, and syntactic categories (JMPVK & Premarathna, 2012). Misuse of conjunctions, duplicated comparatives or superlatives, mis-ordering of constituents in indirect questions, use of independent clauses as subjects or objects, omission of subjects, etc were found to be the common syntactic errors in the written English of Cantonese ESL learners (Chan, 2010). Also, most of the errors appeared to be results of mother tongue interference; however, intralingual errors were also present (Chan, 2010). Contrarily, Korean ESL learners were found to make less syntactic errors in their writing, and the syntactic errors that were found were misuse of conjunction and faulty verb phrase construction (Hinson & Park, 2009). Insufficient practices of rules or faulty learning were suggested as the major causes of errors (Hinson & Park, 2009).

Errors of sentence structure reported were 69.40% as a result of the error analysis of medical students' writing in Bangkok (Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong, 2008).

To sum up, the various categories of syntactic errors that emerge from the review of error analysis studies are phrase construction (particularly verb phrases) and placement errors, word order errors, clause construction and placement, coordination and subordination errors (conjunction

usage, omission, addition errors), and sentence structure errors.

Research Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative research analysis approach to achieve the objectives. Content analysis is significant in identifying the themes prevalent in the data. The themes assist in an organized analytic study of the data in order to discover the answers to the research questions (Cohen & Manion, 2007) This study bases its content analysis on the error analysis method put forth by Corder as cited in (Ellis, 1985). The first step of the method is to select subjects for analysis. Subjects must be selected considering homogeneity of age, first language background, and developmental stage. The researchers must then choose the medium of communication, that is, oral or written, to collect samples of learners' inter-language. The obtained corpus is then examined to first find errors and then categorize them by assigning each error a grammatical description. Next, the errors are explained by identifying their psycholinguistic causes. Finally, the errors are evaluated to assess their gravity so that required remedial action or guided teaching decisions can be made.

Corders' error analysis methodology is selected as content analysis refers to a systematic, rule-governed study inspired by a theoretical framework (Cohen & Manion, 2007). Content analysis requires coding and categorizing the data into meaningful classes (Cohen & Manion, 2007). Error analysis technique suggested by Corder as cited in (Ellis, 1985) also needs the same to be done.

The target population for the study were those BS first year students who had obtained their higher secondary school certificate from the Karachi government board. However, a single private university was selected through non-random convenience sampling. The selected university offers BS, MS, and Ph. D programs in Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, and Business Administration. It is a popular and recognized university and enjoys the honor of being the pioneers of Computer Science education in Pakistan. Consequently, through purposive sampling the Computer Science department was selected for the study. Applying convenient sampling, the two out of the four teachers teaching the English Language course with code SS102 to BS first year students at the department of Computer Science were chosen.

Furthermore, each teacher is assigned four sections with twenty five students in each. The researcher selected four sections of one of the two willing teachers and two sections of the other teacher. Through purposive sampling, the paragraphs of the Karachi Board students were analyzed. The rationale for this purposive sampling is to specifically illuminate the national curriculum developers, regional textbook developers for intermediate English course, and the public/private college instructors teaching the textbook regarding students' command on English syntax, awareness about syntactic differences between speech and writing, the need for remedial action, problem areas, and effective measures to address the problem areas.

First year is targeted as in the two semesters of BS first year, students are taught the English language course and the Academic Writing Course. The knowledge of students' current command on English syntax will be extremely significant for course developers and instructors in taking remedial action. The results of the study will provide useful insight into learners' knowledge of the syntactic rules and their application in writing, and enable the instructors design the upcoming Composition course accordingly.

Ethical Consideration

The consent letter from the university is obtained to get formal permission for research. Also, the head of the department of Computer Science at the target university was informed who was kind enough to grant permission for data collection.

The selected students were handed over a form containing a section for demographic information and space for writing the final draft (see Appendix 2 for the form). The demographic information that was collected form the students was their school name, college name, board of education and gender. Further, they were asked to write a body paragraph on any one of the topics which were "Internet is the death of Newspaper", "Grades matter", and "The biggest problem of Pakistan is pollution".They were strictly instructed to follow the writing process. In fact, they were provided a separate rough sheet for brainstorming, rough draft writing, and editing (rough sheets were provided for editing). There was no time limit prescribed to them.

Data Analysis

Corder's procedure for error analysis cited in (Ellis, 1985) was employed for error analysis of the obtained corpus. The students' writings were initially examined to locate any syntactic errors (see Appendix 3). The syntactic errors thus discovered were then categorized according to their grammatical nature. Taxonomy of syntactic errors was developed on the basis of the initial analysis. The writings were analyzed again to first determine the frequency of the different syntactic errors. Then, the psycholinguistic causes of the errors were determined by classifying errors as intralingual or interlingual/developmental errors. The reliability of the coding was checked by requesting five coders to provide their views regarding the categorization and labeling of errors (see Appendix 4). The online Kappa calculator was used to find the reliability. The coding was found to be reliable as the score thus obtained was 0.87 (see Appendix 5). Finally, the errors were evaluated from the pedagogic point of view to make relevant recommendations to the concerned stakeholders.

Findings of Qualitative data

A total of 88 body paragraphs were analyzed to find syntactic errors and also determine their possible causes. The entire corpus was found to contain approximately 585 sentences. Table 1.1 presents the syntactic errors that emerged from the analysis. It also shows the frequency (f) of occurrence and percentage (%) of each error.

Table 1: Types of Syntactic Errors With Frequency and Percentage

Error Types	f	%
Article dropped (Noun Phrase)	35	5.4
Other (Noun Phrase)	37	5.7
SVA (Verb Phrase)	75	11.5
Tenses (Verb Phrase)	47	7.2
Passive (Verb Phrase)	13	2
Other (Verb Phrase)	28	4.3
Prepositional phrases	35	5.4
Fragments	39	6
Run-ons	91	14
Conjunctions	29	4.4
Misplaced relative clauses	19	2.9
Dropped words/constituents	23	3.5
Ill-formed clauses	79	12.2
Faulty vocabulary	97	14.9
Total	647	100

According to the table, the corpus was found to contain errors in the construction of noun phrases, verb phrase, and prepositional phrases in particular when analyzed at the phrasal level. At the clausal level, the errors that the corpus contained were fragments, run-on sentences, conjunction errors, misplaced relative clauses, dropped words/constituents, semantically ill-formed clauses,

and wrong diction. The corpus contained approximately 647 errors in total with the highest number of errors being that of erroneous verb phrases. The number of verb phrase errors is 163, and among the different types of verb phrase construction errors, subject verb agreement (SVA) errors were the highest in number (75). Faulty vocabulary is the second most committed error (14.9%). Furthermore, run-on sentences emerged as the third most frequently occurring error (14%), and 12.2% errors were semantically and syntactically ill-formed clauses due to mother tongue interference.

The pie chart in appendix 6 summarizes the syntactic errors discovered from the analysis. Following is an in-depth analysis of the errors from the grammatical perspective, and contemplation of the possible causes of these errors.

Phrase Construction Errors-Noun Phrases

As far as the noun phrases are concerned, the most common error was that of omitting the article. For instance,

"in good college", "very big and serious problem", and "in form of thousands of searches".

This can be termed as an interlingual error as most students' first language is Urdu. As Urdu does not contain articles, it becomes challenging for Urdu speakers to learn articles and the rules of their usage. Students also omit articles considering them unnecessary or redundant; moreover, the rules of article usage are also not taught very well at the secondary school level. Second, the category ?other? includes the following errors.

Placement of wrong article was one of the errors committed by the students, and they can be attributed to ignorance of rule restriction. For example, "an healthy environment", "a old age way" and "a biggest problem of Pakistan" are evident of the students' lack of knowledge of the rules of the given articles and limitations regarding the application of the concerned rules. Errors of addition were also present. Unnecessary addition of articles can be due to false concept hypothesized that "the" must be used whenever we refer to a specific count noun ignoring the fact that it is not used with proper nouns; hence, in the example "the Pakistan country" the student has assumed that since s/he is referring to a specific country, "the" must be placed. Furthermore, other errors in noun phrases included dropping the apostrophe, the "s" or "es" morphemes in case of plural nouns, addition of unnecessary prepositions, and use of the wrong word. Some examples are

"many problem", "student life become difficult", and "using of internet is easier".

These errors depict the learners' insufficient mastery of the grammar of English even after twelve years of formal English learning at all levels.

Phrase Construction Errors-Verb Phrases

The corpus contained a variety of verb phrase errors. Verb phrase construction errors emerged as the most problematic grammatical structure. The highest numbers of errors were those of subject verb agreement. Some instances of subject verb agreement errors are depicted in Table 2. It is interesting to note that most of the learners have used plural verbs with singular subjects and singular verbs with plural subjects in the present indefinite tense. A possible cause of these errors can be that students have formed a false concept that 's' or 'es' with the first form of verb are markers of the present indefinite; hence, whenever they used the present indefinite, they used the singular verb. On the other hand, using plural verb with the third person singular in the present indefinite is due o the over-generalization of the rule which dictates the usage of plural verbs with all other persons except the third person singular. These errors are therefore intralingual.

Table 2: Examples of Verb Phrase Errors

Error Types	Examples
SVA	"Bad grades effects* health."
	"People of Pakistan thinks* that...."
	"Everyone have* internet."
	"and they do not cares*"
	"Air pollution cause..."
Tense errors	"in professional life people asked* you...."
	"now only the people who did* not know to use computer..."
	"grades are* matter"
	"dusts are* go* into human"
	"water pollution is* happens"
	"you had to bought*"
	"pollution is become*"
	"which we can easily found*"
	"if grades would not have matter*, a student..."
Passive Structures	"no action taking as yet*"
	"as internet launched*"
	"news which are provided*"
	"we breathe the air which polluted*"
	"many questions arises at the concreteness and correctness of the news providing* by the internet"
	"when we talking* about the grades" "Pollution causing* various...."

The number of tense errors found in the corpus is 44. A few examples are given in Table 2. Most of the tense errors pertain to the use of the erroneous form of the verb in a particular construction, like, "we can easily found*" and "you had to bought*". In many cases, learners have used the past tense to refer to the present time as is evident in the first and second example in Table 2 in the tense errors section. The possible causes of these errors are lack of knowledge of the English tenses, insufficient practice, or inadequate mastery of the rules. In addition, in other cases, students have used an auxiliary verb unnecessarily to indicate a particular tense when the main verb was sufficient to signify the tense as is clear form examples three, four, and five in Table 2/Tense error section. These errors are false concepts hypothesized by the learner according to which s/he has assumed that the auxiliaries 'is' and 'are' are markers of the present indefinite, and thus must be used when talking about the present. In addition, the last example in the tense error section of Table 2 depicts that learners lacked mastery of more advanced structures such as conditional sentences which are not taught at the intermediate level.

Moreover, passive structures were few in number and most of them were erroneous. The erroneous passive constructions are depicted in Table 2, and in these instances, learners have dropped the auxiliary verbs. It seems to be the result of incomplete application of rules. They lack knowledge of passive structures. Other errors include those errors that are a result of language transfer. Some examples are "when we talking* about the grades" and "Pollution causing* various..."

Phrase Construction Errors-Prepositional Phrases

The errors in the construction of prepositional phrases were addition of unneeded propositions as indicated by the following examples in Table 3. The cause of these errors is ignorance of rule restriction.

Table 3: Examples of Prepostional Phrase Errors

Error Types	Examples
Errors of Addition	"enter in* the room" "one can easily excess to* internet" "itaffects on* physical and mental health"
Errors of Omission	"Due* less education" "Kids and start to go* school"
Errors of Wrong Preposition Use	"dropping garbage on* sea" "Give your respect from* other person" "Grades matter for a student life"

Errors of omission were also found and some are indicated in Table 3. Also, use of wrong preposition led to erroneous prepositional phrases. Some examples are depicted in Table 3. These errors can be termed as caused by ignorance of rule restriction. Moreover, interlingual or mother tongue interference can be accounted for as a cause of these errors.

Clause Construction Errors

At the clausal level, the most recurrent error was the use of run-on sentences. In addition, fragments were also found in the corpus. Some examples are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Examples of Run-ons and Fragments

Error Types	Examples
Fragments	"Even though they spit on roads on foot path, on building and everywhere." "Grades for best colleges and universities." "People facing difficulties in breathing and living in this polluted environment of Pakistan."
Run-ons	"Many things depend on grades, we need to study hard for best grades." "On the contrary you can access any news on internet instantly another main reason for newspaper failure is limitation." "There are no dustbins used at all that's why peoples keep so many things on the road."

In addition to fragments and run-ons, the study discovered conjunction errors, word for word translations, misplaced relative clauses, faulty vocabulary, and dropped words and constituents as the syntactic errors present in the corpus.

As far as fragment and run-ons are concerned, these errors are indicators of students' unsatisfactory knowledge of the grammar and conventions of written English. Despite following the writing process, students failed to identify fragmentary constructions and run-ons. These errors can be termed as intralingual errors and are evidences of the students' limited knowledge or ignorance about the difference between spoken and written English especially pertaining to syntax. Similarly, errors regarding conjunctions also largely result from incomplete knowledge of written English grammar. In subordination, an unneeded conjunction was added. For instance, with 'although', the conjunction 'but was also used. This can be a false concept hypothesized by the learner that 'but' signifies contrast, and thus to show contrast they had inserted 'but' ignoring the fact that 'although' has already accomplished that objective. The use of 'that' in place of 'so' is another example of wrong conjunction usage as is seen in the following example.

"it has a lot of information that* people has no need to get any info from newspapers."

Beginning sentences with coordinators, like, 'and' and 'but' was also noted. These errors are a result of the learners' ignorance of rule restriction and lack of knowledge of the uses of different conjunctions. Conjunctions are taught; however, their uses are not taught. Since the students are unaware of the structural and grammatical differences between speech and writing, they have

also failed to comprehend the relevance of conjunctions and their role in building meaningful relationships between clauses. The complexity of sentences in writing requires thorough knowledge of conjunctions and their uses in constructing effective sentence.

In the context of this study, the term 'ill-formed clauses' is used to refer to interlingual errors. Inadequate reading and limited exposure to English are the causes of these errors. The learners think in Urdu and due to their lack of knowledge of the English style, vocabulary, and structure in which the thought should be expressed, they translate the Urdu ideas into English. The result is ill-formed or awkward clauses at both the syntactic and semantic level. One example is "In future, may be the internet will finish the base of the newspaper." In this sentence, 'the' is omitted in the prepositional phrase and 'the base of newspaper is a direct translation of the Urdu expression. Another example "Grades will make your respect in society" is the Urdu expression directly translated into English. Some more examples are

"They also forget at cheating time that they actually selling their religion with just rupees."

"There should be merit test for knowing good and keen students."

"Nowadays people more rely on internet."

The highlighted phrases in the above sentences are examples of Urdu expression translated verbatim into English. All the sentences are both syntactically and semantically ill-formed owing to the word or word translation from Urdu to English.

Table 5: Examples of Misplaced Relative Clauses and Faulty Vocabulary

Error Types	Examples
Misplaced Relative Clauses	"It is also destroying the ozone layer which is harmful for live on earth." "A long traffic jam is always seen in the cities which is one of the source of sound pollution and smoke pollution which is very dangerous for health." "Now only those people didn't know to use computer system read newspaper, but some people read who know to use computer read newspaper."
Faulty Vocabulary	"Good grades are easily adopted* by faculty offices*." "Trucks produce pollution by pass* the smoke." "Newspaper removed* the habit of..."

The corpus also contained errors pertaining to the placement of the relative clause and the use of wrong diction. Table 5 provides some of the examples of these errors. The relative clauses in the examples presented by Table 5 are not placed next to the noun they are meant to define or describe, and their misplacement generates awkward meanings. These errors are a result of incomplete application of rules.

Use of wrong diction is a significantly high error. Students have particularly confused similar sounding words. This is a common problem among language learners, and many vocabulary books are available on the "confusing words" topic. An example is the use of 'excess' instead of 'access' in the example, "by internet, we have excess to the old newspaper...". Wrong diction also reveals students' lack of knowledge of the target language. They are signs of learners' ignorance of rule restriction specifically stylistic and semantic constraints on the use of different synonyms in different contexts. Wrong diction errors also resulted from language transfer as in second sentence in the examples given in Table 5.

The grammatical descriptions of the errors found in the corpus along with their possible causes are provided in this section. The commentary on noun, verb, and prepositional phrase construction errors was followed by that of clausal errors. The types and causes of the errors were also described.

Discussion

In reviewing the literature, the frequently occurring syntactic errors in ESL learners' written English were mostly related to verb phrases, fragmentary constructions, run-ons, coordination and subordination, and word order. In the Pakistani context, fragments, word order errors, ill-formed sentences, subject verb agreement emerged as the most commonly occurring syntactic errors. The results of this study are to a large degree consistent with the findings of the previous studies carried out both in the Pakistani and international contexts.

According to this study, verb phrases are the most challenging grammatical structure for the learners to master, especially the rules pertaining to subject verb agreement. Previous Pakistani studies have also come up with the same results (Ijaz et al., 2014; Sarfraz, 2011; Parvaiz & Khan, 2010). The error analysis of the writings of Malaysian, Chinese, Korean, and Arabic ESL learners at the university level also revealed verb phrase construction and specifically subject verb agreement to be the most problematic area (Tse, 2014; Basri et al., 2013; Ahour & Mukundan, 2012; Wang & Liu, 2013; Sawalmeh, 2013; Hinson & Park, 2009). Moreover, Hinson and Park (2009) found less syntactic errors in the writings of Korean learners, but the syntactic errors that they did find were related to verb phrase construction and conjuctions.

In majority of the colleges and schools in Pakistan, English is taught through the grammar translation method. The learners are technically aware of the tenses and the structure of each tense; however, they are not taught the usage of these tenses. The mechanical teaching has led learners to treat grammatical structures like formulas which have no real life application. In addition, insufficient practice further makes it difficult for the learners to use a given tense correctly both in terms of use and structure. Therefore, despite studying English since grade one, the learners failed to use tenses correctly in their writings and also relied on translations when they completely failed to determine how a certain time should have been expressed in English. Another evidence of learners' poor competence in the target language is the fact that majority of the learners have avoided using more advanced structures, like, passive voice and conditional sentences.

Run-on sentences emerged as the second biggest category of syntactic errors in this study. This finding is consistent with the findings in the Indian and Thai context. Most of the syntactic errors that Indian and Thai learners were found to commit were the use of run-ons (Benzigar, 2013; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2012). In addition, word for word translations form mother tongue to English led to a significantly high number of ill-formed clauses according to this study. Another study in the Pakistani context revealed that the error analysis yielded syntactically inappropriate sentences as major errors (Hussain et al., 2013). However, the current study had enlightened more in this regard. The ill-formed sentences were interlingual errors; they were both semantically and structurally unacceptable. In the light of studies conducted in the Malaysian, Indian, Thai, and Cantonese, and Spanish contexts, mother tongue interference was accounted for as the major factor behind the syntactic errors in the learners' English writings (Bennui, 2008; Benzigar, 2013; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2012; Urdaneta, 2011; Chan, 2010). However, in addition to mother tongue interference, the current study found inadequate mastery of the system of the target language to be an equally significant cause of the thence found syntactic errors. It can be concluded that direct translations from the mother tongue into English clearly indicates the learners' limited exposure to English. Pakistani learners at the target university have poor reading habits, and thus relied on translations as they were ignorant about how to express a given idea or thought in English.

Also, a large number of run-ons and other errors can safely be attributed to the learners' lack of knowledge of written English. They are not taught written English. To be more specific, they are not taught the structural and syntactic difference between speech and writing. They are totally oblivious of the common sentential errors in writing, and thus despite having been provided an opportunity to revise and edit their drafts, the students failed to identify run-ons, and other syntactically ill-formed clauses and phrases. They have used the style of spoken English in writing.

This deduction form the data analysis is a vital contribution of this study as no previous study conducted on ESL learners' written English has implicated this issue to be one of the major causes behind errors in learners' English writings.

Furthermore, the phrase and clause related errors in the students' written English primarily result from lack of sufficient training and practice, poor reading habits, limited exposure to the target language, lack of awareness regarding the difference between speech and writing especially pertaining to syntax and structure, the adoption of grammar translation method at the schools and colleges for English language teaching, and a curriculum and textbooks that are inadequate and do not address students language needs.

The study also revealed that the learners completely lack knowledge of the grammar of written English. They have not used connectors, clear and comprehensive sentences, and punctuations where necessary.

Recommendations based on the Findings

To eliminate verb phrase errors, it is imperative that grammar be taught in context. The concerned stakeholders, including curriculum and textbook developers, teachers, and examiners, must teach English adopting modern communicative methodologies. Learners must be trained and taught to use tenses effectively in real life usage of the target language.

The study is significant in bringing to light an important issue which is students' lack of awareness regarding the difference between speech and writing. They are ignorant of the grammatical and syntactic differences between speech and writing. The intermediate English textbooks prescribed by the Karachi board do not illuminate students in this regard. The difference between speech and writing is not formally or even implicitly taught at the colleges or even schools. In addition, most of the Pakistani English learners get their exposure to English through movies, blogs, social networking websites, and therefore they lack knowledge about formal written English. Consequently urgent measures need to be taken to resolve this problem.

First, the syntactic and structural as well as stylistic differences between speech and writing must be taught explicitly at all levels to bring about the needed improvement in the learners' written English. The curriculum and prescribed textbooks are in dire need of revision. Teaching the syntax of written English along with formal vocabulary should be included in the curriculum objectives. The prescribed textbooks must include units and chapters on the speech and writing difference addressing syntax and vocabulary differences separately. More recent English writings form different domains, like, history, science, journalism, autobiographies, biographies, etc must be added to the textbooks as they merely contain literary writings form the 19th century. The writing process must also be taught. There should be a separate chapter on it with special emphasis on the revision and editing phase of the writing process. It is unfortunate that the intermediate textbooks lack any information on this extremely important topic. In addition, sentence structures and common sentential errors must also be included and addressed in the textbooks.

It is also significant that first of all teachers are made critically aware of the speech and writing difference, and the importance of strict adherence to grammar in writing, and the students' writing needs in the future academic and professional life. Teachers must be provided in-service training to effectively teach students written English and the writing process. They must be encouraged to use supplementary material to not only improve learners' writng skills, but also develop in them a sense of the difference between spoken and written English.

Teachers must also work on developing good reading habits in the learners. They must be exposed to high quality English writing so that they can learn the grammar of written English and formal English vocabulary. It is significant that learners also be assessed in this regard. The intermediate board examinations paper must test learners for their critical awareness of the spoken

and written English difference. This will provide a good incentive to learners to make efforts to understand and master written English.

At the university level, zero credit courses on written English must be offered to the learners coming from Karachi board background as the regular courses are insufficient to assist learners in mastering written English style and grammar.

Recommendations for the Future Research

The study aimed to highlight the syntactic errors in students' written English. However, when analyzed from a stylistic point of view, the corpus contains writings that are below average with the exception of a negligible few. Therefore, there is a need for researches exploring the qualitative dimension of the learners' written English. These studies must also particularly investigate the learners' familiarity with the style and vocabulary of formal English because the grammatically correct clauses found in the corpus were stylistically inappropriate.

Furthermore, there must be more researches to bring to light the nature and causes of syntactic errors in the written English of learners associated with other boards and cultural groups in Pakistan. Future researches must also probe into the punctuation errors in the written English of learners. Punctuations are of vital significance in writing and studies must be conducted to determine the extent to which learners have mastered punctuation rules so that required remedial action can be taken. Also, col-locational errors must be addressed by future studies particularly with reference to prepositions that go with various verbs and stylistic restrictions on the use of synonyms in given contexts.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to determine the syntactic errors prevalent in undergraduate students' written English. It also aimed to analyze the causes of these errors. Since good English writing skills are extremely significant for a successful academic and professional career, it is crucial to scientifically investigate the learners' written English. The study will inform the various stakeholders about the effectiveness of current materials and teaching methodologies. To accomplish the research objectives, the study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach by modeling it on Corder's error analysis methodology. The thus implemented research procedure constituted sampling English language teachers teaching the course titled English Language to BS first year students at the computer science department at a renowned private university. Convenient sampling was used to select two teachers for the study. The teachers were requested to allow their English Language students to participate in the study. Through purposive sampling, only those students' writings were analyzed who had obtained their intermediate certificate from Karachi Board. The students were instructed to write a body paragraph on any of the three topic sentences provided to them. They were also instructed to follow the writing process. The corpus was then initially studied to identify the syntactic errors and their frequency. The errors were then assigned grammatical descriptions and their possible causes were discussed. The data analysis yielded that the most problematic area for subject verb agreement, run-on sentences, wrong diction, and syntactically and semantically ill-formed clauses owing to literal translations from Urdu. It is inferred that the current Karachi Board intermediate curriculum and textbooks are in dire need of revision. Also, it is suggested that the difference between speech and writing be explicitly taught with special reference to vocabulary and syntax, and the teachers must also be trained in this regard. For future research, it is important to study the qualitative dimension of students' written English, and the same study must be conducted to find the errors prevalent in learners belonging to other educational backgrounds in

Pakistan.

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