

GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCE IN ENGLISH WRITING ERRORS: AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF MULTILINGUAL PAKISTANI LEARNERS

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Abstract

This paper explores gender-based divergence in grammatical error patterns in academic English writing by multilingual Pakistani university learners. Though gender, as a characteristic variable, is much discussed in the discipline of Second Language Acquisition, no specific attention has been paid to its impact in Pakistan context on systematic quantitative analysis. This study has analyzed a corpus of 410 argumentative essays by university students. Errors were coded in 16 grammatical categories, and frequencies were normalized based on 100 words to ensure comparability. Categories were selected on the basis of International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE). Results indicate that male students produced an error rate that is significantly higher than that of their female counterparts in most cases. This trend was maintained in most of the error categories, such as Noun, Pronoun, Lexical Verb, Auxiliary verb, Adverb Errors, Adjective, Article, Conjunction, Preposition Punctuation, Form, Miscellaneous, Existential There, Numeral, Particle Proform. However, no significant difference was found for lexical choice, whereas female students made significantly more errors in adverb placement, indicating a more refined error profile. These findings denote that the context of male learners needs to be specifically targeted in foundational interventions.

Keywords: Error analysis, Gender differences, L2 writing, Second Language Acquisition, Pakistani learners, Grammatical errors

1. Introduction

Error Analysis (EA), a foundational framework in applied linguistics, offers a systematic method for identifying, classifying, and interpreting the errors made by second language (L2) learners (Corder, 1967). By treating errors as evidence of the learner's developing linguistic system, or "interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972), EA provides crucial insights into the process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). However, traditional EA has been criticized for often overlooking individual learner variables such as socio-economic background, age, and prior educational experiences (Ellis, 2015). Among these factors, gender stands out as a particularly significant yet

comparatively under-researched variable, especially concerning its impact on L2 learning within non-Western, multilingual contexts like Pakistan.

A prevailing narrative in SLA literature, largely emanating from Western settings, suggests that female learners tend to demonstrate greater linguistic accuracy than their male counterparts, particularly in grammar (e.g., Burstall, 1975; Larson-Hall, 2008). The generalizability of such findings is questionable, as they often fail to account for the unique sociolinguistic and cultural dynamics that shape learning in a nation like Pakistan, where education is deeply interwoven with gender roles and systemic inequities (Rahman, 2002). The assumption that female learners are inherently more attentive to linguistic form requires critical reexamination with empirical data from diverse contexts. This creates a pressing need to investigate whether significant gender-based disparities in L2 writing performance exist within the Pakistani educational landscape.

This study directly addresses that gap through a quantitative analysis of grammatical errors found in the academic writing of 410 Pakistani university students (244 females and 166 males). By comparing error types, frequencies, and normalized rates between genders, the research seeks to determine if perceived performance differences are supported by empirical evidence. The findings are expected to make a vital contribution to both SLA theory and language pedagogy. Theoretically, this research will enhance the understanding of gender as a key learner variable (cf. Ellis, 2015).

Practically, it will challenge the ineffective "one-size-fits-all" approach to grammar instruction (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and advocate for a more differentiated, gender-aware pedagogy (Tomlinson, 2014). Ultimately, this study aims to promote more equitable and effective language education, thereby strengthening learners' grammatical competence and academic confidence in Pakistan.

Research Question:

Is there a statistically significant difference in the frequency of occurrence of grammatical errors (normalized per 100 words) on academic English writing by male versus female multilingual Pakistani university students?

Research Objective:

1. To quantitatively compare the overall mean error rates in the written English of male and female student groups to examine whether gender is a significant variable related to grammatical accuracy in this given learning context.
2. To, therefore, identify and explore specific types of grammatical errors that appear to be significantly more prevalent in one gender group in comparison to the other in an attempt to provide empirical justification to create gender-sensitive pedagogical interventions.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Within this review, three important areas of inquiry are merged: The diagnostic nature of Error Analysis (EA) in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA), learner variable gender and Pakistani sociolinguistic situation of English teaching. All these provide the rationale of the current research.

2.1 ESL Writing error analysis:

The introduction of A Error Analysis during the 1960s still occupies the center stage of the SLA research and pedagogy (Al-khresheh, 2016). It also identifies student problems, with mother tongue interference, interlanguage development and teaching gaps being among the problems referred to by the tool (Khansir, 2012; Shi, 2004).

The current research confirmed the usefulness of EA in the curriculum planning and feedback to learners, indicating that explicit corrective feedback enhances

performance in writing (Mahdiyah et al., 2023; Parameswari et al., 2024). The studies conducted in other settings (Farisi & Malihah, 2024; Mohideen, 2023) revealed common errors in L2 writing specifically the articles misuse and verb tenses.

Therefore, EA does not only establish weaknesses of learners but also shapes policy and teaching (McDowell, 2020; Ishak & Ismail, 2002).

2.2 Second Language Acquisition by Gender

Gender has been promoted as an important mediating factor in SLA and it is an important persisting factor that plays a role in motivation, access, identity and social roles in language learning. Research demonstrates both positive and negative outcomes as in some cases, women excel over men (Van der Slik et al., 2015), whereas in other situations, no greater differences could be defined or socially charged. The new scholarly literature has moved away to essentialist assertions (women as more favorable learners), and to the presentation of gender as a modular social construction connected to impression, hardships, and culture (Ehrlich, 1997; Feery, 2008; Menard-Warwick, 2004; FerrerOs PagEs & Abdellaoui, 2023). This school of thought focuses on the side of gender interaction with motivation and opportunity through which SLA can be produced in various situations.

2.3 English in Pakistan:

Language teaching and error tendencies in Pakistan, English has a very high status as the language of instruction and also as a symbol of socioeconomic mobility.

Nevertheless, students make grammatical, syntactic and pronunciation mistakes all too often, which could be explained by the L1 transfer, lack of proper teaching and exposure (Ijaz et al., 2014; Ghyas & Sakhawat, 2024). These are their most common problems of verb tense, using articles, sentence fragments, and subject-verb mationa (Shahid & Farhat, 2023; Khoso et al., 2018). Pronunciation difficulties, mostly on vowel sounds, are still constant (Khalid et al., 2023). Such data indicate systemwide issues in pedagogy and instruction.

2.4 The Research Gap:

Although EA is used extensively in SLA, the complementarity of this discipline and gender as an analytical tool is yet to be explored in Pakistan. Whereas the gendered aspects of SLA have been at the global research agenda, few studies have been done on how specifically gender affects English writing accuracy in this respect. The proposed study can fill this gap, as it implies a quantitative EA of multilingual Pakistani university learners, where a systematic comparison of the error frequency patterns is carried out across male and female students to determine the extent to which gender can make a difference in grammatical performance in L2 writing.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study will employ a quantitative, comparative research design to study the frequency and types of grammatical errors present in the written English of male and female students from different universities in Pakistan.

3.2 Participants and Corpus

Data for this study come from one such major data-set, which comprised around 3,000 argumentative essays gathered from 12 public-sector universities located in the Punjab area of Pakistan. From this corpus of argumentative essays, a stratified sample of 500 essays was selected to make sure representation across disciplines as well as an achievable scope for in-depth analysis. Participants were from different academic disciplines, i.e. arts, social sciences, and natural sciences who reported diverse L1 backgrounds: predominantly Punjabi, Urdu, and Saraiki and Pashto.

3.3 Data collection procedure

The argumentative essays had been supplied by students who had written them and were discussing twelve preselected topics. Further, their outcomes were documented. The reasons behind selection of such topics were to help inculcate a more structured and academic writing. So as to ensure that samples are large enough for further analysis, at least 200 words or more were ascertained for each and every piece, mainly composed in English. These essays were de-identified on completion of the process of collecting them whereby any incomplete or rather shorter ones were dropped.

3.4 Techniques for Data Analysis.

The investigation covered the aggregate error compositions of the two genders respectively in all the error types namely nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions, prepositions, and punctuation. This process all begins with the selection of the students at one of the Pakistani universities. The students were then divided based on gender and two subgroups were established namely male and female students. A sample that captured a population intermingling all students in different years of the course and from the various departments that was inviting to all was chosen. The major method of collecting data was through written data collection; this

was on a selected number of the students. The writing samples were collected from them when they were doing their usual work in a class or taking any assignments that required them to write in English. As a result, students were given topics on essays other than the subjects they are studying. The written pieces of essays were used to help ceiling the subrange of the errors. The writing samples that were provided were written and the samples were collected and reading the samples of writing, the essays written were skilled from almost all the grammatical problems. These errors were classified into groups such as; verb errors, punctuation errors, prepositional errors, noun errors, pronoun errors, nominal errors, form errors, connector errors, adverb errors, and lexis errors. Different categories of errors were traced by the students and classified even graphically within the writing samples. The classifications of writing errors in the written samples enabled the calculation of error rates by errors of the same type. The frequency of the error within the sample was estimated by adding up all instances of the errors in individual written sample. The number of errors made by each participant in the study was tallied and the average error rate of each category of errors per sex was finally calculated. It is very easy to cater for the quantitative method as it delineates the aspects of errors in different categories of grammar of two students in this case, a male and female. The analysis of the data then encompassed the issue of how errors distribute with gender. The frequency of error for each category, along with the sub-categories, assessed here was, order to clarify the errors in males and in females. This method of analysis would especially allow for the determination the specific type of errors that one sex was more affected by and if there were any significant differences in the mistakes made by the boys and the girl's throughout their coursework or not.

4. Results

This aspect of the research cites gender as the major component of affecting the behavior of errors that Pakistani university students commit in writing English.

Table

Sr. No	Error Category	Total Errors	Error per Person
1	Noun	909	5.4
2	Pronoun	214	1.2
3	Lexical Verb	269	1.6

5	Adverb Errors	183	1.1
6	Adjective	253	1.5
7	Article	769	4.6
8	Conjunction	203	1.2
9	Preposition	558	3.3
10	Punctuation	752	4.5
11	Form	1012	6.0
12	Miscellaneous	27	0.1
13	Existential There	30	0.1
14	Numeral	141	0.8
15	Particle	58	0.3
16	Proform	74	0.4

Males

As witnessed in the table, Form errors are the most dominant error group among male students ($M = 6.0$), germane to the main difficulty with selecting the proper word class for a relevant grammatical setting. This is followed by Noun errors ($M = 5.4$) and then Article errors ($M = 4.6$), and the fourth category are Punctuation errors ($M = 4.5$). There have also been some errors that have appeared less frequently, namely those found in Existential There ($M = 0.1$), Miscellaneous ($M = 0.1$), and Particle ($M = 0.3$) categories.

Table 2.

Sr. No	Error Category	Total Errors	Error per Person
1	Noun	1987	5.9
2	Pronoun	579	1.7
3	Lexical Verb	537	1.6
4	Auxiliary verb	731	2.1
5	Adverb Errors	400	1.1
6	Adjective	568	1.7

7	Article	1617	4.8
8	Conjunction	461	1.3
9	Preposition	1175	3.5
10	Punctuation	1770	5.2
11	Form	2272	6.8
12	Miscellaneous	126	0.3
13	Existential There	57	0.1
14	Numeral	217	0.6
15	Particle	148	0.4
16	Proform	118	0.3

Females

As demonstrated in the table, Form errors are the most prevalent issue for female students ($M = 6.8$), indicating a primary difficulty in selecting the correct word type for a given grammatical context. The next most significant challenges are Noun errors ($M = 5.9$), Punctuation errors ($M = 5.2$), and Article errors ($M = 4.8$). In contrast, the least frequent errors were found in categories such as Existential There ($M = 0.1$), Miscellaneous ($M = 0.3$), Proform ($M = 0.3$), and Particle ($M = 0.4$).

5:Discussions

The present study addresses gender variability in frequency and types of grammatical errors in academic English writing by multilingual Pakistani university students.

Findings suggest that while both genders encounter challenges, there exist statistically significant patterns across genders in their error profiles. This section purposes to explain such findings, connect them to existing literature, and discuss their pedagogical implications.

The central finding of this study is that male students committed a significantly greater rate of overall grammatical errors than their female counterparts. This finding is congruent with an extensive amount of research in SLA that typeset a "female advantage" in grammatical accuracy (cf. Ellis, 2015; Oxford, 2017). However, what really constitutes the worth of this study is the study of this general trend across specific categories of error in the context of Pakistan. The most significant differences presented in grammar from new learning were observed. Male students were much more likely to make errors in Punctuation, Verbs, Noun Phrases, Prepositions, Connectors, and Word Form. These categories embody core mechanics and structure of English in writing. Superior error rates in these domains for males indicate their deteriorated control of accuracy at the sentence level. This observation finds support in previous considerations in the Pakistani context by Anjum et al. (2022) but offers a more robust quantitative basis for assertion. This might be a reflection of gendered socialization whereby female students are trained to pay more attention to detail (Papi et al., 2019), which is an important aspect of mastering grammatical agreement, an ability male may tend to disregard in favor of perhaps a more profound consideration of a risk and meaning that pre-specializes on the pattern of errors.

Interestingly, the difference concerning Lexical Choice error was not statistically significant. This suggests that both male and female students in this sample do have

comparable vocabulary size and ability to choose appropriate words at least on the basic level; the contrast between the parity of lexical resources and concentrations on the differences with respect to grammatical application indicates that what male learners are primarily struggling with is not what words to use but how to structure them grammatically.

The most surprising finding was the significant excess of Adverb Errors (placement) made by female students. Although both groups had a low overall error rate for this category, it is remarkable to see this reversal of the usual trend. It might be an instance of hypercorrection: female students, being more careful in their writing, might be trying to work with more complex structures involving adverbs but doing so incorrectly. This suggests a much more complicated story than simply stating 'female advantage,' suggesting that the different learner groups may have different hurdles in advanced grammar.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

These findings directly challenge the efficacy of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to grammar instruction and have significant implications for English language teaching in Pakistan and similar contexts.

1. Targeted support for males:

The findings would seem to suggest that male learners are particularly in need of intensive, explicit instruction and focused practice on the basic elements of grammar: verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, article usage, and punctuation. Drills, targeted feedback on drafts, and peer-editing focused on these areas could be very effective for improving their accuracy.

2. Gender-sensitive pedagogy:

Teachers must take note of these trends not to stereotype but rather as a means to offer differentiated support. Like encouraging an attention to detail and the significance of editing for the male students, the female students need instruction in the more advanced structure while discouraging hypercorrection and encouraging them to creatively use the language.

3. Curriculum Content:

Errors with connectors and prepositions were prevalent across both groups, but there were more male errors than female ones, showing that these errors are systemic. Therefore, the curriculum needs to widen its focus to cover the functional and idiomatic use of such cohesive devices to enhance textual coherence.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the issue, there are several limitations attached to it. First, data were collected from only universities in Punjab; thus, the findings may not be generalizable to the understanding of the entire Pakistan. Second, existing differences presented in this quantitative study but not the actual explanations behind them. The cognitive processes and attitudes (for example, towards risk-taking, motivation, and editing habits) that might lead to these error patterns need to be investigated through qualitative studies, such as student interviews or think-aloud protocols during writing.

Future studies should also look into the interaction of gender and other variables, such as students' specific L1 backgrounds (e.g., do Punjabi-speaking males make different errors than Pashto-speaking males?) and the kind of schooling they received. Finally, a longitudinal study tracking students' error patterns over time would show whether these gender-based differences that have been found will continue or diminish with additional instruction.

6. Conclusion

The present study undertook a quantitative error study to highlight gender-based differences in the grammatical accuracy of written English in multilingual Pakistani university students. The results indicated a significant trend in which male students had a higher rate of errors overall per 100 words than their female counterparts. This disparity was found to be most significant with respect to foundational grammatical areas of study, including punctuation, verb usage, and noun phrase construction. Such findings indicate that male learners are far worse than their female counterparts when it comes to mastering the very foundation of mechanics in written English. This suggests that, in contrast, Mr. Error for lexical choices was similar for boys and girls, while female students seem to have slightly higher error rates in adverb placement, which hints at a picture that may not be so straightforward in terms of deficit model. With the implications that call for gender-sensitive pedagogy, instruction for male students should include some reinforcement on sentence-level grammar, while given control at the foundational level, female students can be advanced in structures and stylistic choices. Therefore, this study provides ample ground for asserting with empirical evidence that gender is indeed a significant variable affecting error patterns in L2 writing in Pakistan. This suggests that any kind of 'one-size-fits-all' instruction should be avoided with an aim of devising more personalized and thus more effective teaching strategies aimed at addressing the peculiar needs of different groups of learners. Further qualitative studies are required to gain insight into the cognitive and social factors underpinning these differences.

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Appendix A

Error Coding Manual 1. Punctuation and Capitalization Errors

Definition: Mechanical errors including incorrect use/omission of periods, commas (e.g., comma splices, run-on sentences), and colons, as well as errors in capitalization.

Error Example: "first of all i want to say something"

Non-Error Example: "First of all, I want to say something."

2. Verb-Related Errors

Definition: Errors related to verb tense, subject-verb agreement, or morphological verb form.

Error Example: "The people thinks it is good."

Non-Error Example: "The people think it is good."

3. Noun Phrase Errors

Definition: Errors involving articles (a/an/the) or noun countability/number.

Error Example: "He gave me an important informations."

Non-Error Example: "He gave me some important information."

4. Prepositional Errors

Definition: Selection of an incorrect preposition, or unnecessary omission/addition of a preposition.

Error Example: "I am looking forward to see you."

Non-Error Example: "I am looking forward to seeing you."

5. Connector Errors

Definition: Misuse, omission, or overuse of coordinating/subordinating conjunctions and transition words.

Error Example: "Although he was tired, but he finished the work."

Non-Error Example: "Although he was tired, he finished the work."

6. Word Form Errors

Definition: Use of a word from the wrong grammatical class (e.g., noun instead of adjective).

Error Example: "It was a beauty day."

Non-Error Example: "It was a beautiful day."

7. Lexical Choice Errors

Definition: Use of an inappropriate word where the intended meaning is clear but the word choice is incorrect for the context.

Error Example: "He did a big mistake."

Non-Error Example: "He made a big mistake."

8. Pronoun Errors

Definition: Errors in pronoun case, reference, or agreement.

Error Example: "Me and my brother went to the store."

Non-Error Example: "My brother and I went to the store."

9. Adverb Errors

Definition: Errors in the placement of adverbs within a clause.

Error Example: "She speaks always English."

Non-Error Example: "She always speaks English."