



An Error Analysis of Letter Writing Skill: Pakistani Students' Deviation of Target Language Rules

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: October 14, 2025 Revised: November 22, 2025 Accepted: December 09, 2025 Available Online: December 16, 2025	<i>This study aims to identify one of the most common error types in formal letter writing in the target language grammatical errors produced by Pakistani secondary school students. Letter writing is a skill that requires appropriate syntactic structures and the accurate use of punctuation marks, as each component of a formal letter follows specific linguistic conventions. However, students frequently commit errors in these areas. The present study is limited to exploring grammatical errors in letter writing, as relatively little research has addressed this specific domain in the Pakistani context. Pakistani students were selected as the target population because English is learned as a second/target language, increasing the likelihood of linguistic errors in written communication. The sample consisted of 50 tenth-grade students from Allied School, Multan, who were asked to write a letter to their sister congratulating her on her success. Hubbard's four levels of Error Analysis were employed to analyze the data, including grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors. The findings reveal that grammatical errors were the most frequent, accounting for 35.42% of the total errors, whereas lexical errors were the least frequent, comprising 9.9%. Based on the results, the study offers pedagogical suggestions for teachers and learners, as well as recommendations for future researchers, to address and minimize errors more effectively.</i>
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Introduction

English learning as a target language has always been important for the learners of different levels including pre-school to higher education. In Pakistan it is also very important in the sense that it is adopted in the country as an official language, that's why it is included in the curriculum on all levels. It is realized that curriculum is like a blueprint which helps nations to achieve the desirable goals and objectives. In order to achieve the pre-determined aims and objectives the learners must be able to get the mastery of this module. They must try to get perfection in the structures, patterns and norms of the target language, in the other words they should try to get the perfection of all the four skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, it is very often realized that majority of the students commits various type of errors while dealing with this particular module. The present study is going to be explored only the grammatical errors commitment in the Letter writing, so the focus of the study will be on the Letter writing only.

Letter writing in English language has been one of the difficult skills especially for the students who learn English as a second language. Pakistani students face the same scenario as they learn English as their second language or target language so their writing is not error free. Sometimes it happens that even the native speaker fails to write a grammatically correct and comprehensive letter. Therefore, it has been a very tough task for the L2 learners and it is inevitable to explore these type of errors made by them in order to provide remedial steps for the removal of the errors in the target language. Gibbons states: writing is not limited to speech written down rather it is a communication process requiring the writer to present the content in a very clear and comprehensive way in order to avoid any difficulty for the readers.

Lalande states that in spite the fact that learners have the knowledge about the rules of the grammar, majority of the learners exhibits a remarkable consistency and they commit the same types of errors, which they could be expected in the case of incomplete knowledge of the grammatical rules. Sawalheh (2013:3) states that researchers are always interested in the observation of errors holding the view that errors are beneficial for both the parties: teachers as well as the students. They inform the teachers about the errors made by their students and then teachers tries to trace the causes of those particular errors in order to correct them in the preceding work of the students.

Statement of the problem

Language accuracy is very important for the second language learners. The present study focuses to investigate the grammatical errors made by the 10th grade students who are learning English as a foreign language. Letter writing skill is the neglected skill by the teachers of Pakistan. Students cram the letter material in form of notes and reproduce in tests and papers. Error analysis of letter writing is not focused in research area particularly in Pakistan. Therefore, teachers are unaware of the errors of students. It shows their lack of interest towards creative writing.

Research Objectives

The study aims to

1. Identify the various types of errors made by the students.
2. Explore the certain causes due to which these errors occur.
3. To trace the difficulties, face by the individuals who learn it as a second language.

Research Questions

1. What type of errors do the Pakistani learners in letter writing in L2 commit?
2. Which type of error is the most dominant?
3. How the learners themselves can correct these errors?

Significance of the Study

English is one of the widely used languages throughout the world. Various developing countries are adopting English as an official language and it is included in the curriculum of various nations. Pakistan is among such countries where students learn English as their second or target language. Teachers and curriculum focus on the proficiency and accuracy of the students of the target language. The researcher is hopeful that this study will be helpful for the identification of errors in letter writing as this is one of the most ignored areas of writing skills. The research will not only enhance the researcher's understanding towards the problem but also enable her to give useful solution to overcome these errors by the teachers and the researchers themselves as well.

Literature Review

Dulay, Burnt and Krashen (1982) state that error analysis aim is to trace out the errors committed by L2 learners when they write in second language. This analysis may be helpful not only to reveal the strategies for the removal of errors but also helps the teachers to understand what type of difficulties are faced by the students in the learning process of the second language in order to improve their teaching strategies as well.

According to Brown (2003), there are two major sources of errors like Interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual error can be defined as the errors that occur due to the influence of the learners' native language on the target language to which they are going to be exposed. While on the other side, intralingual error occurs when tries to overgeneralize the rules of target language without taking any influence from the mother tongue.

According to Vahdatinejad (2008), error analysis can be helpful to determine what type of guideline a learner still needed in order to get the perfection in the structures and rules of the target language. He also made distinction between errors and lapses in the sense that lapses are committed by the native speakers of the language and can be expected to correct by themselves while on the other hand errors are due to the insufficient knowledge of the rules of target language.

David Alberto LondonoVasquez (2008) conducted another study on error analysis. The purpose of study was on 'Error Analysis in a Writing Competition'. The conclusion was that according to him by analyzing and realizing the errors of students we come across the fact that errors are the most significant method as it provides evidence for their efforts in order to follow the path of learning.

A study by Bumoongthai (2011) focused on the identification of errors in English paragraphs and at the end of her study; she concluded that the Thai EFL learners made various types of errors in respect of English grammar the paragraph format.

Heydari and Bagheri (2012) in their collaborative study on "Error Analysis: Sources of L2 Learners' Errors", focused on different types of errors and their significance in second language learning. This study deals with the concept of different theorists in explaining error types and its significance. The most dominant type is Grammatical Errors.

Sawalheh (2013) asserts that researchers who show interest to Error Analysis found out that errors are of great important for both: teachers and learners. They provide information about the students'

weak areas of grammar and help teachers in three different ways: teachers tend to correct them, they find out new ways to improve their teaching strategies and lastly, new ways of reinforcement are encouraged so students might show better results in future.

Another study was observed on the topic of error analysis by the researcher named Khansir (2013). In that particular study, the researcher made the comparison between the errors done by the EFL learners and the ESL learners. The findings showed that there were no significant differences between the errors made by the both types of learners. The third study was observed by the researcher named Zafar (2016), it was to use Error Analysis as a treatment. The researcher first analyzed those errors which were made by the British students and found that there were various types of mistakes in verb structure.

Zheng and Park (2013) conducted their study in order to explore the errors in "Essay writing made by the Chinese and Korean students". Their study ended with the conclusion that there were various types of errors made by these two groups of the students mentioned above. The errors were observed in the use of articles, punctuation marks and the word ordering. Both the researchers mentioned that literal translation method was the major source of errors in these writings.

Other study was conducted by Daryanto (2013) on 'Errors in Descriptive Text Written by the Ninth grade students of SMP Negeri' and derived a conclusion that by using the surface strategy taxonomy omission, addition, malformations, misreading and blend-students made many errors while constructing the descriptive text.

Solihah (2017) conducted a study on "Grammatical Errors analysis in the Fourth Semester Student's Essay Writing at the Universitas Muhammaadiyah Sidoarjo and at the end of the study concluded that the teacher plays an important role as it helps the instructors to identify the errors and it was hoped that the students will improve their grammatical ability.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design to examine grammatical errors in formal letter writing produced by Pakistani secondary school students. The participants comprised 50 tenth-grade students selected through convenience sampling from Allied School, Multan. English, being a target language for the participants, served as the medium of written assessment. Data were collected through a controlled writing task in which students were instructed to write a formal letter to their sister congratulating her on her success. The collected scripts were systematically analyzed using Hubbard's (1996) Error Analysis framework, which categorizes errors into four levels: grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors. Each error was identified, classified, and quantified to determine its frequency and percentage. The analysis focused primarily on grammatical errors to identify their dominance in students' letter writing. The results were then interpreted descriptively to draw conclusions and offer pedagogical recommendations.

Data Analysis

The collected data has been analyzed by using Hubbard's model for analysis classification. This model divides error in four categories, which makes the process of checking and analyzing papers easy and smooth. This is one of the effective ways of checking errors in a letter writing as it covers almost all-important aspects of grammar to be checked. These four categories are:

1. Grammatical Errors
2. Syntax Errors

3. Substance Errors

4. Lexical Errors

Grammatical level of error analysis includes errors of prepositions, tenses and articles. Syntax Errors include errors related to Subject-Verb agreement, word order, and capitalization. Substance level includes punctuation and spelling errors. The last level, lexical level is about wrong choices of words that are not according to the context.

All errors are identified and represented in a table form in order to get frequency and percentage. This procedure helps researcher paper readers to find out the most committed errors and the least committed errors in letter writing. Each error is elaborated further in form of frequency and percentage.

Table of Error Analysis

Categories	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage
Grammatical Errors	Prepositions	23	11.98%
	Tenses	31	16.15%
	Articles	14	7.29%
	Total	68	35.42%
Syntactical Errors	S-V Agreement	19	9.90%
	Word Order	17	8.85%
	Capitalization	11	5.73%
	Total	47	24.48%
Substance Errors	Punctuation	26	13.54%
	Spelling	32	16.67%
	Total	58	30.21%
Lexical Errors	Words Choice	19	9.90%
Sub Total		192	100%

Findings & Discussion

Of the 50 students, 192 errors were found in total. The dominant error in the category was the error of Spelling with the frequency of 32 errors. The least dominant was the error of Capitalization with the frequency of 11.

The above table defines that the grammatical errors are the most dominant errors with 35.42%.

The second dominant category of errors is Substance level where we find errors with 30.21%.

Third category in the table is Syntactic level with errors 24.48%. The least dominant category is Lexical that deals with choice of lexical items. This category has errors with 9.9%.

The classification is explained further below with the examples selected from the sample test taken by students.

Grammatical Errors

Errors of Preposition

Gvarishvili (2012) states that prepositions in L1 and L2 perform and function differently. When students use prepositions in L2, they mix up the rules and commit most errors in using an appropriate preposition according to its function.

Common examples of preposition from the sample are given as under.

Prepositional Errors Identification
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- | |
|---|
| a) I have come for know. (to) |
| b) I am very proud at you. (of) |
| c) ...the happy news in your excellent result. (of) |

Errors of Tenses

Errors of tenses are one of the common errors by students in the target language because of their lack of knowledge related to the grammatical rules.

Some common errors of tenses are mentioned below. Examples are from the selected sample of letter writing.

Tenses Errors Identification

- | |
|---|
| 1. You have been hard work on students. |
| 2. You have stand of your class and manidation of your position |
| 3. I hop will worked even compition. |
| 4. May Allah gave you many many success. |

Errors in Articles

Articles is the basic part of English language. Most of the students are unable to use articles. This problem can be seen with advanced English Language learners as well.

Either sometimes students forget to place article in their sentences according to the requirements or they choose wrong article. This error is more common in essay writing. However, these errors can be in letter writing too.

Some examples witness how students commit errors in the proper use of articles.

Articles Errors identification

- | |
|---|
| 1. You have always been...hard working student. (missing article "a") |
| 2. "...to shower upon...utmost of life..." (missing article "the") |

Syntactic Errors

Syntactic errors have several sub-categories in the model selected for the analysis. These include word order, subject-verb agreement and capitalization.

Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

Subject-verb agreement formula focuses on the relationship between subject and verb. If subject is singular or plural, verb should be placed accordingly. In case of singular subject, verb must be of singular form. Same rule is there for plural form of subject. This analysis highlights several examples of wrong subject-verb agreement.

Subject-Verb Agreement Errors Identification	
1.	Father and mother <u>is</u> very happy. (are)
2.	Mother <u>are</u> <u>giving</u> you a lot of prays. (is giving)
3.	You <u>has</u> <u>stand</u> first in your class. (have stood)
4.	Your letter <u>bring</u> the happy news. (brings)

Word Order

A wrong sentence structure spoils the whole writing process. If words are not in a proper order, the sentences will not create a good impression on its readers.

Several errors related to word order are found in the selected samples of letters.

Word Order Errors Identification	
1.	You have stood in the first class. (stood first in the class)
2.	You also have secured marks very good. (secured good marks)

Capitalization

Capitalization rule elaborates that first letter of the first word in each sentence must be capital. The following errors are observed in letter writing.

Capitalization Errors Identification	
1.	Your loving sister,
2.	My dear <u>s</u> ister,
3.	...proud of you. <u>y</u> ou have been good...you are promoted.

Substance Errors

Substance errors are of two types: spelling and punctuation errors.

Spelling errors are quite common and easily observes in Pakistani students' writings as they find it difficult to memorize a variety of spellings of specially those words that are same in pronunciation but different in spellings.

Spelling Errors

Some of the examples of spellings errors are given below.

Spelling Errors Identification		
1.	Brough	(brought)
2.	Hapy	(happy)
3.	Compatition	(competition)
4.	Partiest	(prettiest)
5.	Pround	(proud)
6.	Congralucation	(congratulation)
7.	Frinds	(friends)
8.	Sincerly	(sincerely)

Errors of Punctuation

Punctuation is one of the important parts in letter writing that connects and separates different sentences and clauses. Some errors are traced related to punctuation as under:

Punctuation Errors Identification

- | | | |
|----|---|-------------------|
| 1. | Feb 13 2021 | (Feb 13, 2021.) |
| 2. | A.B.C? | (A.B.C.) |
| 3. | My dear Sister? | (My dear Sister,) |
| 4. | My heartiest congratulations on your success (?)Pay my compliments (?)
(missing full stop at the end of each phrase) | |

Lexical Errors

Lexical means words or diction. Lexical errors occur when words are not appropriate to the context. Such words convey little or no meanings to its readers. The purpose of communication dies if the speaker or the writer does not choose appropriate words. Certain words are observed in the samples of writing letters.

Lexical Errors Identification

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | Yours <u>obediently</u> | (letter was referring to the sister) |
| 2. | Yours <u>sincerely</u> | (Yours loving Sister) |
| 3. | My <u>heartbest</u> congrats | (heartiest) |
| 4. | My harder congratulations. | (heartiest) |
| 5. | Mother gives you prays and many loves. (prayers) | |

Conclusion

Language rules are not easy to grasp of acquire quickly. There is always a room of errors for students while learning and practicing. In Pakistan, scenario is quite complicated as teachers don't bother to pay attention towards mistakes at early stages so they turn into errors and students find it impossible to trace out their mistakes are correct themselves. Rules are so internalized in their minds that they become unaware of their several mistakes while writing. Cramming of grammatical rules discourages writing skills. The whole class crams the same body of letter and produce as it is in the paper. Zero effort towards letter writing skill causes so many identifiable errors.

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