

**MOST COMMON GRAMMAR ERRORS
MADE BY FRESHMEN STUDENTS OF
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRIZREN
“UKSHIN HOTI”**



Linguistics

Keywords: freshmen students of English, grammatical errors, interference from first language.

Mentar Karjagdiu

University of Tetova “Fadil Sulejmani”. North Macedonia.

Abstract

This study aims to find out the multitude of students' grammatical errors made by freshmen students at the University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti”. This study is motivated by the intention to further investigate the common difficulties faced by Albanian students in their use of English as a foreign language. Errors made by Albanian students learning English as a FL have not been studied in-depth up to now, so this study on the types of mistakes/errors and especially its analysis of psychological, social and educational factors of errors and mistakes comes as a necessity of the time for improving English learning. Therefore, the present study is a source of information of the matter in question that is intended to find out the students' grammatical errors in their efforts to master English and methods and materials needed to overcome and to counter this problem. The findings revealed that spelling, capitalization, tenses, punctuation, articles, varied words, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions were the most common types of linguistic errors found in the students' use of English. These errors could be due to overgeneralization in the target language, resulting from ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules and interference resulting from first language (Albanian) negative transfer. The study will serve teachers and students involved in the field of English language teaching and learning, in general, and error correction in writing and speaking English as a FL, in particular. The study emphasizes the necessity for training future teachers with modern methods and techniques of evaluation, self-assessment and error correction. Along with the discussion of findings, limitations of the present study are discussed, and directions for further research are highlighted.

1. Introduction

This study is motivated by the intention to further investigate the common difficulties faced by Albanian students at the University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti” in their use of English as a foreign language. In general, mistakes done by Albanian students learning English as a FL have not been studied systematically up to now, so this study on the types of mistakes/errors and especially its analysis of psychological, social and educational factors of errors and mistakes comes as a necessity of the time for improving English learning. The results of this study will give a clearer opinion on grammatical-morphological and syntactical errors. Namely, the most significant and thorough part of the study is the misuse of articles and word order and structure of the sentences, and words that are often confused, then the use of conjunctions, pronouns, tenses of the verbs, prepositions, spelling, homophones, and homonyms, which are some of the categories where Albanian students face many difficulties. The study will also clarify the mistakes that originate in subject-verb agreement, inversion, noun and defining words agreement, object-verb agreement, etc. The study will also delve into deeper analysis in the broad field of Comparative Language Study that asks for a thorough knowledge of both languages, Albanian and English, because only in this way can we analyze mistakes made by students influenced by the interference of one language into the other. Phonetics and Phonology, intonation, mispronounced words and

body language are the object of investigation, as well. Finally, a lot of attention will be paid to the interpretation of mistakes done while using idioms, colloquial words, slang, and phrasal verbs in oral communication.

Research questions

What are the common errors that the freshmen students of English language and literature at the University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti” most frequently commit?

Does the Albanian language interference have an influence on the mistakes done by the students?

Which are the best methods and ways to avoid mistakes done by freshmen students at the University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti”?

Research Aims

The general aim of this research is to analyze the most common mistakes done by freshmen students of English at the University of Prizren. Also, this study will focus on the efforts of teachers and students to avoid making such mistakes. The research will be done through the assessment and evaluation of questionnaires, interviews, dictations, compositions, essays, diagrams, surveys, students’ written work.

Therefore the study includes many questionnaires, interviews, essays written by students and corrected by teachers, a lot of written work and corrections.

The major objectives of this study are:

To identify the most common errors made by Albanian students learning English as a FL
To investigate the common difficulties faced by Albanian students in their use of English as a FL.
To find out if the teachers/students are aware that self-assessment; evaluation and error correction in written and spoken English are a priority for increasing the quality of teaching and learning.
To find out if teachers/ students are aware of a permanent necessity for training future teachers with modern methods and techniques of evaluation, self-assessment and error correction.

2. Literature Review

Several research studies have been conducted to investigate errors in students’ writing in English worldwide. Lin (2002) examined 26 essays written by Taiwanese EFL students at college level. The results of this study showed that the four highest error frequencies were sentence structures (30.43%), wrong verb forms (21.01%), sentence fragments (15.94%), and wrong use of words (15.94%). In their study, Darus and Subramaniam (2009) examined errors in a corpus of 72 essays written by 72 Malaysian students. The findings of their study showed that the most common errors committed by the participants were closely related to: singular/plural form, verb

tense, word choice, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order. Along in the same lines, Mungungu (2010) conducted an empirical study, using quantitative research methods, to examine common English language errors made by Namibian learners who are L1 speakers of Oshiwambo, Afrikaans and Silozi learning English as a second Language. The study investigated errors and their frequencies in a corpus of 360 essays written by 180 participants. His findings revealed that the students who committed 763 errors in tenses, prepositions, articles and spelling, the four most common in students' writing. Among the four types of errors, spelling errors (419) seem to be the most difficult for the students since it is probably due to the rare use of English vocabulary in everyday language, followed by tense errors (139), preposition errors (117), and article errors (88).

Kambal (1980) and Scott and Tucker (1977) carried out studies in order to analyse the performance of Arabic-speaking students enrolling in an intensive course. They found that Arabic speaking learners have problems in prepositions, articles, tense, verbs and nouns. Recently, most studies in the Arab world (e.g. Mohammed, 2005; Muortaga, 2004) investigated EFL Arab learners' syntactic errors, the results of which revealed that Arab learners were incompetent and weak mainly in verbs and prepositions.

Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) carried out a study to investigate the errors of the Jordanian students' writing and they discovered that tense errors are the most frequent ones committed by the students. They attribute this error to Arabic language interference because it has only three tenses.

In his detailed article on Arabic speakers, Smith (2001) pointed out that Arabic learners of English commit many examples of errors. Among these errors, for instance, were mistakes in consonant clusters, word order, questions and negatives, auxiliaries, pronouns, time, tense and aspect, modal verbs, articles, etc. As for articles, he stated that the indefinite article causes the most obvious problems as it is commonly omitted with singular countable nouns.

Ababneh (2017) conducted a study on the writings of 50 EFL Saudi female college students majoring in English and then categorized their writings errors in terms of Hubbard, Jones, Thornton, and Wheeler's (1996) classification of errors namely grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors. The findings of his study showed that most frequent types of errors made by the students were in the categories of grammar (570), followed by substance (513), syntax (121) and lexical (90). His findings also revealed that the most frequent types of errors made by the students were: spelling, subject-verb agreement, tenses, singular/plural nouns, and articles. He ascribed these errors to the lack of conversation in the target language, rare reading in English, and interference of Arabic language.

Napitupulu (2017) investigated Indonesian students' linguistic errors in English letter writing, adopting Hubbard et al. (1996) taxonomy of errors. His study revealed that students committed 42.4% of grammatical errors, 26.7% of syntactic errors, 17.9% of substance errors, and

13% of lexical errors. Based on the discussion of his findings, he concluded that Indonesian students committed a great number of errors due to first language transfer.

In general, most studies conducted in the field of error analysis done by English students who learn English as a foreign and professional language revealed that approximately the most common types of errors are all similar (prepositions, spelling, tenses, articles and subject-verb agreement). These studies have attributed the aforementioned errors to overgeneralization in the target language, which result from ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules and interference resulting from first language negative transfer.

3. Previous Studies and Research

From the preceding studies and researches, it is evident that errors committed by language learners have been extensively investigated worldwide. However, there seems a paucity of errors analysis research in Albanian context. In fact, those few studies have focused only on investigating cohesion errors in students' writing whose major is English. Hence, this study is an effort to fill this gap by identifying the most common types of errors and their frequency occurrence in the English by Albanian students.

Research Hypothesis

H1. The most common mistakes done by Albanian students of English are the misuse of articles and word order and structure of the sentences, and words that are often confused. Conjunctions, pronouns, tenses of the verbs, prepositions, spelling, homophones, and homonyms are other categories where Albanian students face many difficulties.

H2. Phonetics and Phonology, intonation, mispronounced words and the interpretation of mistakes done while using idioms, colloquial words, slang, and phrasal verbs in oral communication also pose problems in learning English by Albanian freshmen students at the University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti".

H3. Comparative Language Study requires a thorough knowledge of both languages, Albanian and English because only in this way can we analyze mistakes made by students influenced by the interference of one language into the other.

4. Research Design and Methodology

This study will be done following these steps and procedures:

4.1 Participants

The participants of this study are English professors, assistants and students of the University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti". Both students and teachers belong to male and female gender.

4.2 Methods

The research will be qualitative (information obtained from the textbooks, interviews, questionnaires) and quantitative (results given from the instruments and participants).

This research will target most of the freshmen students and assistants and professors of English at the University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti” The research will be focused on the most common errors made by Albanian students learning English as a FL. In general, the research will be done through the assessment and evaluation of questionnaires, interviews, dictations, compositions, essays, diagrams, surveys, students’ written work, etc.

4.3 Procedure

The teachers and the students will be asked to fill in a questionnaire and will also be interviewed orally. Part of the interview will be some of the teachers and students. They will give their opinions related to common mistakes done by the students of English, reasons for committing such mistakes and if teachers/ students are aware for a permanent necessity for training future teachers with modern methods and techniques of evaluation, self-assessment and error correction.

5. Analysis of Results and Discussions

5.1 Analysis of data

In order to obtain data some useful methods will be used. The following four steps will be followed: 1) data collection, 2) identification of errors, 3) classification of errors, and 4) a statement of error frequency. Firstly, a corpus of writing data will be collected, and secondly will be the identification of errors. Next, the errors will be classified according to their categories and subcategories. After categorizing each error, the frequency of occurrence of different types of linguistic errors will be quantified.

5.2 Interpretation of Findings / Results

Interpretation of data collected is of great importance; here lies most of the contribution. The study carefully will provide an original interpretation of data of error analysis. It will illustrate with examples and will give modest suggestions for the reasons of speakers’ errors. It will also give detailed analysis, examples, and reasons why students make various kinds of mistakes, interpreting why this happens – that is interpreting error analysis data. The interpretation will be an analysis of the grammatical- morphological and syntactical mistakes done. In addition, the interpretation will also be done through several comparisons.

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