

ERROR ANALYSIS OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' WRITING IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. Writing might be challenging for second language (L2) learners, who can make both interlingual and intralingual errors in their written production. The current study aims to analyse the use of English in L2 writing of undergraduate students and identify common errors caused by the influence of their native language and other determining factors. The short-written paragraphs of 176 undergraduate students from three national universities of Uzbekistan were analysed in terms of grammar, vocabulary use and style of writing. The findings revealed that the most common errors made by Uzbekistani students are related to the writing style, providing singular and plural word forms simultaneously, using 'false friends', having sentence-related issues, and adding prepositions where they are not required. Considering the obtained results, the article provides possible activities that can be used to improve students' writing in similar learning contexts.

Key words: undergraduate students, second language writing, interlingual and intralingual errors, suggested activities

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Writing is one of the most important language skills that students should develop at the tertiary level institutions. This productive skill is considered challenging by the learners as it requires the development of other language knowledge and skills. Writing becomes even more difficult when it should be developed and enhanced by second language (L2) learners. Matsuda and Silva (2020) believe as the term *second language writer* may include both second, third, fourth, and foreign language learner, the students may be diverse due to their different backgrounds, characteristics, needs and goals.

When writing in the second language, learners might make errors as these 'errors are an inevitable part of the process of language acquisition' (Khalil, 1985: 336). Lightbown and Spada (2004) have referred to several studies that identified that L2 writers can make errors if they try to transfer their native language (L1) patterns and when they make attempts to realise the target language structure. According to Richard and Schmidt (2010), language errors can be classified into two main categories, i.e., interlingual and intralingual errors. The first

type is usually described as interlingual because the students use the system of their native language in acquiring the foreign language (Khalil, 1985: 346). They may include grammatical aspects, word choice, mechanics and even pragmatics. The second type is referred to as intralingual because these errors 'reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply' (Richards, 1967 cited in Khalil, 1985: 206). Intralingual errors can be connected to communication strategies, learning context, and the target language (Brown, 2000). Both categories of errors might influence the quality of students' written production depending on their level of English language knowledge, background, learning environments, their native language, as well as some other factors.

A number of investigations have been conducted to identify what types of errors are more frequent among the L2 writers in different learning contexts. The majority of research studies have found that L1 interference might be a dominant source of errors (Ridha, 2012; Zheng and Park, 2013; Kaweera, 2013; Mehmood, Farukh and Ahmad, 2017; Othman, 2017; Long and Hatcho, 2018; Halitoglu, 2020; Duygun and Karabacak, 2022). For instance, it has been identified that sentence structures, subject-verb agreement, use of articles, word order, use of plural and singular forms, and verb tenses tend to be the most frequent errors among the L2 learners. The tendency has been explained by the differences among the native and second languages that usually belong to different language families. Duygun and Karabacak (2022) have exemplified the wrong use of verb forms among Turkish students, since they do not use auxiliary verbs in their L1 and therefore cannot make proper use of them in English. Another example of the negative transfer of the native language was observed among Arabic, Chinese and Korean speaking students who, despite using plural quantifiers such as 'many' and 'all', had a tendency to erroneously omit the plural morpheme 's' (Ridha, 2012; Zheng and Park, 2013). The use of articles in the English language has also been found one of the most frequent interlingual error among L2 writers (Mehmood, Farukh and Ahmad, 2017; Long and Hatcho, 2018). Several studies have identified syntactic errors, including the subject-verb agreement and incorrect sentence structure, to be prevalent among other L1 transfer errors, as well (Al-Khasawneh, 2014; Phetdannuea and Ngongkum, 2016; Agbay and Reyes, 2019).

Although interlingual errors may have a greater influence on the quality of L2 written production, a number of investigations have recognized that intralingual errors can also play a crucial role in writing in the target language (Falhasiri et al., 2011; Othman, 2017; Abdelmohsen, 2022). The researchers have found that such errors as word formation, spelling, and punctuation do not take root from the interference of students' native language. Phetdannuea and Ngongkum (2016) explain that, despite learning the English language grammar, L2 writers

have not mastered all the linguistic aspects, which lead to incomplete application thereof, and ignorance of rule restrictions. Hellystia (2019) also highlights that the intralingual errors might be caused by lack of proper training among English language teachers and their approaches in teaching L2 writing. Sari et al. (2021) in their study have found that both interlingual and intralingual errors influenced the quality of L2 learners writing in North Bali, and therefore recommended English instructors to focus more on enhancing students' grammar knowledge through different sources including movies, songs, conversations with native speakers, reading novels and journals in English.

Similar to other learning contexts, Uzbekistan is one of the countries where English is taught in the higher education (HE) establishments. Students speak their native languages such as Uzbek (the main language), Tajik, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Tatar, Korean, Russian, and learn English, German, French, Turkish, Arabic, Chinese and others. English is a widely spoken and taught language, as many universities provide programmes for teaching English as a foreign language. The focus is the development of knowledge (grammar and vocabulary) and skills (speaking, reading, writing, listening). A growing number of language programmes are introduced in higher education institutions across the country, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Science-Technology-Engineering-Math (STEM), and/or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

Although all four language skills are taught at universities, compared to other language skills in the English language, written communication has always been the most challenging aspect. Some of the main reasons for these difficulties might be lack of exposure to the writing activities or practising this skill in an appropriate way in the secondary education institutions. Matsuda and Silva (2020: 284) also explain that 'aside from the acquisition of the second language grammar, the difference between L1 [native language] and L2 writing is largely a matter of degree, for all writers continue to develop their language proficiency and genre knowledge'. Most language programmes at the Uzbek universities require students to produce writing of different genres, such as formal letters/emails, essays, reflections, summaries, short reports, and later dissertations. Hence, L2 writers should be aware of the organization and rhetoric patterns, language specific for the genre, including sentence structures and vocabulary, as well as the length of the written tasks. For example, De Chazal (2014) highlights that the complexity of the academic English language is expressed in its density of information, dense use of noun phrases, and grammar structures. Thus, university students should be aware of these aspects when producing their written tasks.

Nevertheless, when being enrolled in the tertiary level of education, some learners might struggle to produce a good piece of writing. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to analyse the errors (e.g., grammatical, lexical, and stylistic) the undergraduate students in the Uzbek higher education (HE)

institutions make in their written production and provide possible suggestions and activities for improving quality of their L2 writing.

METHODOLOGY

This research relies on the qualitative descriptive method. The study was conducted in three national universities of the Republic of Uzbekistan. 176 undergraduate students of different faculties participated in the study. Among them were the first- and second-year students of such disciplines as foreign language and literature, tour guides, and interpreters' practice. In all three higher education establishments, both male and female students from 18 to 21 years of age took part in the study.

All the participants are multilingual, speaking Uzbek, Tajik, Karakalpak, Kazakh, and Russian as their first languages and in addition to English studying other foreign languages – Turkish, Korean, German, French, Arabic, and others. For all of them, English is a foreign language that they have studied at the secondary education institution (school, academic lyceum, or vocational college) before entering the HE establishment. In accordance with the State Educational Standards of the Republic of Uzbekistan, all the school graduates should possess B1/B1+ level of English language knowledge. The students have obtained either 5.5 band in IELTS (International English Language Testing System), or passed university entrance examination containing multiple-choice questions in order to be accepted for the tertiary studies.

For the purpose of the current study, the participants were asked to write a paragraph of 150-200 words about their experience in online education within 20-30 minutes during one of the English language lessons. They were also provided with some guiding questions to complete the task, such as:

- What platforms did you use (e.g., Moodle, Zoom)?
- How many hours did you spend studying online?
- Who helped you to explore the online platform?
- How useful were the online tasks?
- What did you like about studying online?
- What did you dislike about studying online?
- What kind of changes would you suggest in improving online education?

All the study participants were informed about the purpose of the research and were guaranteed confidentiality. The opportunity to withdraw from the study was also provided.

The handwritten production of the participants was collected and analysed to identify interlingual and intralingual errors. Based on the findings, the errors were categorized into the most common grammatical, lexical, and stylistic ones.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of participants' writing has revealed that undergraduate students in the three Uzbek HE establishments under study made both interlingual and intralingual errors. The results have shown that the most common among them were, as follows:

- incorrect writing style (e.g., using excessively informal phrases and personal pronouns *our/you*);
- choosing an inappropriate verb form (e.g., having no subject-verb agreement, using wrong verb forms);
- having sentence-related issues (omitting commas after introductory phrases, using incomplete sentences and ideas);
- using singular and plural forms simultaneously (pronouns, numerals and nouns);
- adding prepositions where it is not required;
- using 'false friends' (i.e., words that sound similar in their native language but have a different meaning in the English language);
- having spelling errors.

The findings of the current study have identified that one of the most common lexical errors made by the undergraduate students in Uzbekistan is using 'false friends' (see Table 1). As defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary*, a false friend is 'a word that is often confused with a word in another language with a different meaning because the two words look or sound similar' (2024). This error usually results from the students' L1 negative transfer, as they often use university-related vocabulary in their learning environment. For instance, the word *course* is used in the meaning of *year of study*, and the word *pairs* means *lessons/classes* in the learners' native language.

Table 1. Vocabulary-related errors

No	Types of errors	Common errors (examples)
1.	using 'false friends'	a student in the third <i>course</i> we had two <i>pairs</i> <i>sitting at</i> the computer screen
2.	adding unnecessary prepositions	attending <i>to</i> lessons saving <i>for</i> time affected <i>to</i> your study I watched <i>from</i> YouTube enjoy <i>with</i> time helped <i>to</i> me

Another most common vocabulary-related error is adding unnecessary prepositions to the verbs used in English, which is also considered to be an interlingual phenomenon, as in the students' L1 (e.g., Uzbek, Kazakh and Russian) such verbs

are followed by prepositions. These findings are in line with the ones by Khalil (1985), who observed that Arab students tend to substitute the Arabic preposition for the relevant English equivalent. Similarly, Phuket and Othman (2015) also found that narrative essays composed by Thai university students frequently contained prepositions. Thus, preposition errors are quite frequent among L2 writers of different origin.

The analysis of the Uzbek students' written production has also identified a number of common grammar and mechanics-related errors (see Table 2). Such grammatical errors as using fragments (i.e., incomplete sentences) and combining plural and singular forms of nouns and pronouns appear to be caused by the native language transfer. The use of fragments can be explained by the fact that in L1, the Uzbek students can use them both in oral and written communication. As for the misuse of plural and singular forms, it should be noted that some pronouns can be translated into the native language as words in the plural or singular forms. For example, such a pronoun as *everyone* usually has a plural form, but *other* can be both plural and singular in the students' L1. These findings are compatible with those of Phetdannuea and Ngonkum (2016), who identified determiner-noun agreement as the second most frequent interlingual error among Thai university students. Based on investigation, Ridha (2012) explains that learners misuse many pronouns due to the negative transfer of the native language as L2 writers translate directly from L1 to express their ideas in English.

Table 2. Grammar and mechanics-related errors

No	Types of errors	Common errors (examples)
1.	a mixture of singular and plural forms	another useful themes one of my friend other pupil one online classes this lessons
2.	omitting commas	Moreover_ For example_ Apart from that_ However_ In my opinion_ Second_
3.	having no subject-verb agreement	everyone prefer online materials is all the subject were materials was given online lessons has studying do not take

Continue Table 2

No	Types of errors	Common errors (examples)
4.	having incorrect verb forms	I <u>hadn't</u> to wake up they will <u>distracted</u> I began <u>enjoy</u> when you <u>alone</u> we <u>spended</u> if I could <u>gave</u>
5.	using fragments (sentences or ideas)	Especially for doing tasks. As we study in house. Both in positive and negative ways. Because it depends on us. Such as Zoom.
6.	having spelling errors	studing; wich; usufull; borring; limeted; borry; denied; can not; tipe; wheather; reraly; offline; studed; channell; confrence

All other frequent grammar and mechanics-related errors (e.g., omitting commas, incorrect spelling, etc.) can be considered intralingual, as they resulted from 'faulty or partial learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer' (Richard and Schmidt, 2010: 294). Most of the errors made by the Uzbek university students are developmental, because grammar is taught both at the secondary education institution and during the preparatory stage before entering the HE institution, which means that learners are aware of them, but they need time to master these linguistic aspects. Such intralingual errors as wrong spelling and punctuation as well as tense-related errors were also identified among Philippine students by Agbay and Reyes (2019). Similarly, Duygun and Karabacak's (2022) findings revealed that spelling errors constituted a large percentage of total errors among Turkish students. Hence, some intralingual errors might also be observed among students in different contexts.

The results of the current study have also shown two major style-related errors (see Table 3). An excessive use of personal pronouns is considered to be interlingual, as Uzbek students tend to use them in their L1 both in spoken and written interaction. As for the use of informal phrases and words, this type of an error should be related to intralingual aspect and can be an example of simplification when errors result from 'learners producing simpler linguistic rules than those found in the target language' (Richard and Schmidt, 2010: 201). Academical writing might be challenging for the students, especially in the first year of studies; therefore, students have a tendency to use the most common phrases rather than more academic and complicated ones.

Table 3. **Style-related errors**

No	Types of errors	Common errors (examples)
1.	excessive use of informal phrases	I really miss was kind of hard for me Actually To tell the truth like Telegram or Zoom To be honest
2.	excessive use of personal pronouns	<i>our</i> education <i>you</i> will be with <i>your</i> family <i>our</i> university <i>you</i> wouldn't have <i>your</i> tutor <i>our</i> lessons <i>you</i> don't have to spend

The paper analysis has also revealed that, despite making interlingual and intralingual errors, Uzbek university students can produce structured paragraphs, which have clear meaning (see Sample A). Depending on the level of English language proficiency and students' experience in learning, the quality of writing might differ both content, structure and lengthwise. For instance, *Sample A* was produced by a first-year student who had studied English for several years and entered the faculty of foreign languages and literature. The major errors can be related to vocabulary and do not interfere with the meaning of the written production.

Sample A

Distance learning changed the life of many people a lot. Both in positive and negative way [*fragment*]. For many people it was challenging.

As for me [*missing comma*] it was a good idea to study online, as I during that period I had a part time job [*sentence structure issue*]. I found it useful that we had lessons on zoom [*capitalization error*] and Moodle platform [*wrong word form*]. We could use Moodle platform and gain knowledge anytime we wand [*spelling*]. But sometimes the internet connection was an issue for many people who lived in the countrysides [*wrong word form*].

However [*missing comma*] some people found e-learning difficult and faced a lot [*missing 'of'*] problems because of their laziness. They didn't enter [*wrong word*] the platform and just wasted their time during the learning process.

Is the e-learning good or bad depends on the tipe [*spelling*] of [*missing 'a'*] learner [*missing question mark*].

As for the student who produced *Sample B*, s/he had studied English at school and took additional preparatory classes before entering the university and

enrolled in the faculty of tourism. The types and number of errors slightly differ, as they are connected not only to lexis, but also syntax of the English language.

Sample B

While we were studying online, we often used such kind of apps [style issue] like [wrong word] Zoom and Google meet [capitalization error]. Everyday [spelling] we had at least one online classes [wrong word form] which lasted for hour [missing 'an']. With the help of our teacher [missing comma] we knew about online platforms and how to use them. The online tasks were not useful. Because I could easily be disturbed by notifications in my telephone or with bad internet [sentence structure and word choice issues].

The thing that I liked about studying online was that we did not spend time for [preposition error] getting to university.

The bad side of online studying was that we were not in touch with our groupmates and teachers in real [wrong word]. Because it is better to speak face to face rather than through [preposition error] telephone [sentence structure issue].

Overall, the research findings have shown that, although undergraduate students in Uzbek HE institutions under study are capable to produce written tasks in English, they might make grammatical, lexical, and stylistic errors, which do not significantly impede understanding the meaning of the written production.

TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

Identification of the errors in the students' writing can be very helpful for teachers in their teaching practice. Khansir (2012) highlights that in case teachers are informed of the most problematic areas in their students' written production, they can devote special care to rectifying these errors. As the analysis of the Uzbek students' L2 writing has revealed a number of interlingual errors, the teachers in the similar learning contexts can be recommended to introduce activities that focus on the improvement of vocabulary and grammar knowledge and decreasing the number of such errors. For instance, the following activities for improving written language production can be recommended (all the examples are based on the analysis of the participants' errors in writing):

Activity A

Students should identify whether the noun forms are used correctly in the sentences. If there is an error in the use of a noun form, they

are required to write the correct version. Some suggested examples are, as follows:

- We could not find any *informations* about the art museum.
- Selin saw the works of Picasso in the newly opened gallery.
- It was not easy to say how many papers my grandmother could read a day.
- The students did not know how many *musics* this composer wrote.

Activity B

Students should cross out the words, which are redundant or unnecessary in the sentences. They might also be asked to explain their choice. For instance, the following statements can be provided:

- Kamilla decided to *return back* all the books she borrowed from the school library.
- They *discussed about* opportunities of the new learning management platform for one hour.
- Online education is not *considered as* good by some teachers and students.
- *In case if* this problem is solved, they will be able to work on the project next month.

Activity C

Students should find the words, which are not used correctly in the sentences. Subsequently, they should write the relevant/correct versions of these words/phrases. For example, the most common 'false friends' can be introduced:

- The freshmen could hardly find the *cabinet* of a geography teacher.
- The novice teacher did not know how many *lists* of paper he would need for the task.
- They decided to have one more *repetition* before delivering their presentation next week.
- The new lecturer did not seem to like the *auditorium* who came to listen to her talk.

Activity D

Students should read the sentences and identify whether they are complete statements or fragments. If there is an error in the sentence structure, they are required to re-write the sentence. Some suggestions are, as follows:

- There were several teacher's comments in my writing assignment which I could not understand.

- Because he wanted to go to the concert with his family members (*incomplete sentence*).
- There was a snowstorm on the day when Selena started her new project at the university.
- They were not able to find a shop they could buy a book by Jack London (*missing 'where'*).

Introducing these types of activities can help English language learners to identify and correct the errors, which might influence the quality of their writing and help them enhance their written production in the foreign language. Phuket and Othman (2015) explain – when the writing instructors realise the negative influence of L1, they will be able to tailor their teaching to the needs of L2 students and assist them in overcoming their writing-related issues. Thus, designing activities that are based on the errors identified in students' writing tasks and introducing them in the classroom is beneficial both for the enhancement of material design for teachers and development of learners' language knowledge and skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Writing has been recognized as an important and difficult skill to master by the students in different learning contexts due to a variety of reasons. The current study aimed to identify the interlingual and intralingual errors that prevent students from producing quality writing. The analysis of the results has shown that both types of errors are made by Uzbek undergraduate students, including lexical, grammatical, and stylistic errors. The findings have revealed that the most common vocabulary-related errors are frequent use of 'false friends' that might have similar pronunciation in L1 and inappropriate prepositions, which are not required in L2. The analysis of students' writing has also identified such grammatical errors as subject-verb agreement, inappropriate use of singular and plural word forms as well as incorrect sentence structures. The mechanics errors found in the learners' written production are related to missing of commas in the sentences and wrong spelling. The study outcomes have demonstrated that students tend to make stylistic errors, which comprise excessive use of personal pronouns and informal phrases.

Despite the obtained results, the research has several limitations that should be recognized. First, the scope of the study was limited to the national HE establishments located in three different regions of the country. As the Republic of Uzbekistan has twelve regions and includes an autonomous republic, further research can also comprise investigation of common linguistic errors in students' writing in the remained areas. Second, the analysis focused on identification of interlingual and intralingual errors, which contained lexical, grammatical,

and stylistic errors only in the L2 written production. Future research might explore spoken production of Uzbek students to categorize their errors so that language teachers can design additional activities to improve learners' speaking skills. Nevertheless, the revealed limitations do not underestimate the findings of the current study that reflect the quality of students' L2 writing in the three Uzbek HE institutions.

As interlingual errors have been found to be more frequent in comparison to intralingual ones, several activities addressing these types of errors have been recommended for the use in the similar learning contexts. The tasks include identification of incorrect singular/plural forms of nouns, eliminating redundancy, correcting sentence structures, and substitution of 'false friends' by appropriate words/phrases in the target language. The proposed activities serve as a suggestion for those language teachers who consider introducing tasks based on similar errors in students' L2 writing.

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DICTIONARY

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