THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

An Error Analysis of English Paragraphs Written by First Year Debre Markos College Teacher Education Students: A Discourse Analysis Perspective, Ethiopia

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Abstract:
The objective of this study was to identify the types of errors in paragraph writing in English made by first year Debre Markos College Teacher Education (DMCTE) students. Eight hundred and forty students was the total population. From the total population, 260 students were selected to write a paragraph about their autobiography for analysis using stratified sampling technique. Ferris's (2005) category of errors was used as a framework for analysis. The common errors found were morphological, syntactic, lexical and mechanical errors which contain many sub-branches in each. The numbers of errors were calculated as percentage. Based on the formats used in the study, 1730 errors were made by the students. From these, 604 (34.9%) morphological, 96 (5.54%) mechanical, 542 (31.3%) syntactic, and 488(28.2%) lexical errors were identified. The highest error students commit from the above lists was morphological error like verb error, noun error, and article or determiner errors. This shows that most errors committed by DMCTE students are laid on morphological errors and the least errors are on mechanical errors. This indicates that most of the students couldn't identify the major components of morphological structures of sentence in English language. Finally, teachers should be more aware of the most common types of errors that students regularly commit and provide the necessary follow up work to check the problem areas which is useful to give feedback to improve students writing skills. .

Keywords: *Error analysis, paragraph writing, students*

1. Introduction

Discourse analysis, which refers to a broad area of inquiry that involves several dimensions and spans in a variety of disciplines. As Chomsky (1965) stated, there is no limit to the number of possible sentences that can be generated from the grammar and lexicon of a language. To be specified broadly, discourse analysis is the study of language which is used for communication. In also includes the references about the conceptual part of language. Here language includes all kinds of like above or beyond the sentence, meaning in interaction, situational meaning and usage in cultural context. Hence it can be summarized that identification, recognition, explanation of languages in both cultural and social context are the main logic behind discourse analysis. According to Carter, 1993, finding patterns as well as finding the correlation among situation where the language is occurring, especially which are not explainable from grammatical level is the main domain for discourse analysis. British and American scholars have discussed many things about the evaluation of discourse analysis. Social functions of languages have been get priority in Britain. University of Birmingham had analyzed about various contexts like debates, interviews, communication between patient and doctor, talking among groups for performing discourse analysis. Communication products on the grounds of structural-linguistic criteria are one of the well accepted areas of research for British scholars. On the other hand, Americans are highlighting on small communities of people along with their communication authentic situation. According to McCarthy (1991), social limitations of politeness and thorough description of face saving acts in speech is the most popular area for research among American scholars. Moreover, itis a general term for many approaches to analyzing written and spoken language use. Brown and Yule [1996] state that "discourse analysis" has come to be used with a wide range of meanings which cover a wide range of activities. McCarthy, M. [1991] says that Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationships between language and the context in which it is used. I take the view of Brown and Yule [1996] that the term *Discourse analysis* is the study of how language used in linguistic products with reference to the social and psychological factors influence communication.
Of the inclusiveness of discourse, all linguistic aspects and practice of using the language, analyzing the errors in writing with discourse perspective is very important. Since English language has become a necessity all over the world, it is used as an international language among all nations in the world; therefore, the means of communication through this language will be oral and written forms. As result, we should make our writing smart as much as possible in order to foster

our communication. Needless to say, English needs listening, speaking, reading and writing- these four skills altogether. Thinking and cognitive processes are very important for writing. As per Trembley (1993) writing needs very hard work. Spelling, punctuation, organization are some of the important attributes requited for successful writing. Although it has so much of complexity, but it is utmost important for communication. Both the writer and the reader are getting connected by communication channel. Expertise in one's local language does not ensure expertise in L2 writing (Archibald, 2004). Celce-Murcia (2001), revealed that speakers have problems in writing skills. Klassen (2001), found that a skill had to be properly acquired. According to Chidambaram (2005), writing is a special type of structured activity, regarded as an alternative medium of language.

Bloomfield (1933, p.21) opined that "writing is not language but merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks". Language is a storehouse of knowledge. According to Khansir (2010), writing is a special from. Harmer (2004), called it a 'backup' for teaching grammar. For writing, paragraph is special type of discourse, which is a special type of fundamental unit.

A paragraph is aimed to form idea or point. It develops and explains facts, examples and supporting activities. Hart & Reinking (1990), discussed writers use words to make sentences. Finally, sentences to make paragraphs, and paragraphs to make letters. Rajatanun (1988:95) mentioned paragraph as a unit of writing consisting of a topic sentence and a number of supporting statements as its two components. In the field of second language acquisition research, error analysis is a special type of topic. As per Khansir (2010), learner of English as foreign language has been discussed. Corder (1967) highlighted errors as a confirmation of learner's strategies. To find learner's built-in syllabus and learning strategies, systematic study of errors is essential. Many types and classes of discourse are being possible. Based on genre and function, written texts differ from one another. Writing also can differ from each other based on knowledge, structure, and the speed of perception. Close attention both in the form of cohesion and coherence are also required to feature characteristics of disclosures which teachers can make aware of their students. Proper consideration of concepts is also very important.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Writing plays an essential role in language learning. Writing is defined as an art of a writer. Hyland (2003) mentions the value of writing "the ability to communicate ideas and information affectively through the global digital network is crucially dependent on good writing skills." It implies the fact that the mental representation by means of lexical manipulation is given in the form of script or marks in the process of writing.*Writing is more complex in that it tests a person's ability to use a language and the ability to express ideas. As a result, a person needs to write not only coherently but correctly, which requires more time and effort (Liu and Braine 2005:623-624).*

Now days, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of writing skill in English language at elementary schools, high schools, colleges and universities in Ethiopian curriculum. The writing skill is part of the English syllabus in colleges. Writing an English paragraph is a main activity as a result of the writing lesson in high schools and college education. Major concerns of written discourse analysts are the relative of neighboring sentences. McCarthy (1991), highlighted the features of communicative products. Written language is more integrated when used through some cohesive devices. Sentences used to highlight ideas with importance to the author and enable the reader to process the chosen information at the same time omitting.

Hence, it is very important for students to be taught how to write a paragraph. But DMCTE students have made different errors consciously or unconsciously while writing paragraphs, so making errors have impact on their academic achievement and the work endeavor. As English majoring student, they are expected to develop effective and well organized paragraph, they lack the skills of writing. Therefore, investigating the students' error in paragraph writing with discourse analysis perspective is not questionable to identify the errors they made, and to fill gaps opened due to the absence of related works on the topic under study. Thus, the researchers tried to answer the following research questions.

1.2. Research Questions

- What are commonly found linguistic errors occur in English paragraphs written by DMCTE students?
- What are the characteristics of English paragraphs written by DMCTE students?
- What are some recommendations English paragraph writing,teaching and learning for DMCTE?

For this reason, we choose to do research on the topic "An Error Analysis of English Paragraphs Written by Students at DebreMarkos College of Teacher Education: A Discourse Analysis Perspective". This thesis is carried out with the hope that the research results will provide certain linguistically useful practical knowledge for teachers in charge of the English writing skill at colleges and improving the students' skill in writing an English paragraph.

1.3. Objectives

Identify the common problems faced by the DMCTE students in the process of English paragraph writing. Investigate the discourse features of English paragraphs written by DMCTE students. Provide suggestions for teaching and learning English paragraph writing to DMCTE student

2. Related Works

James (1998:162) concluded that coherence is related primarily to content, to the conceptual relatedness of propositions. Liu and Braine (2005:623) researched the cohesive devices usages in 50 argumentative compositions which are written by undergraduate students having non-English majors. Outcome showed that huge number students have the

capability of using many cohesive devices while writing followed by references and conjunctives.Connell (2000:95-103) analyzed the kinds of errors Japanese students made on tests which required full, written sentences to form a appropriate syllabus. Error refers to the problem in understanding of a sentence. It highlights problems other than grammatical. Research had been conducted by Olsen (1999:191-205) on the basis of Norwegian EFL learners, where problems have been highlighted on various linguistic levels. It also discussed about various types of compensatory strategies. Outcome suggested that higher numbers of grammatical, orthographic and syntactic errors are the most common for less efficient learners.

3. Methods and Procedures

3.1. Research Design

The design of the study was descriptive based on the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Since the nature of the topic was convenient to employ both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative design was utilized to analyze the written paragraphs by the students. Moreover, the quantitative method was employed to identify which the types of errors the students made in their written paragraph.

3.2. Study Population

The study focused on Debre Markos Teachers Education College, Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. Thus, the study population was Debre Markos Teachers Education College students. The study included only regular first year students in 2015 at Debre Markos Teachers Education College.

3.3. Sampling Technique

The total population of the study was 840 first year students who were taking the course Basic English course. From these students, 260 students' were selected by using stratified sampling technique.A sampling frame of all first year students enrolled in the teaching learning process during the data collection period were obtained from DebreMarkos Teachers Education College registrar office. 260 students is the sample size. They were first year students of DebreMarkos Teachers Education College.

3.4. Data Analysis of the Study

Based on the nature of the study, the researchers used document analysis method since the students ordered to write a paragraph about their biography. The written paragraph by the students were analyzed in line with Ferris (2005)category of errors analysis model which are Morphological Error (Verbs: Tense Form, Subject-verb agreement, Nouns: Noun endings (plural/possessive),Articles/determiners),Lexical Errors (Word choice, Word form, Informal usage, Pronoun error), Syntactic Errors (Sentence structure, Run-ons, Fragments), andMechanical (Punctuation, Spelling, Capitalization) errors. Thus, data were grouped into four categories of errors with each respective sub-category and described with percentage.

4. Data Analysis

The study examined errors in the structure of an English paragraph in which learners made while they writing a paragraph. Basedon the frame work of Ferris (2005) category of error analysis model, the collected data were classified into four major types of errors, and there were sub errors in each category. From participant students' paragraph, 1730 errors were identified and these errors categorized into four major errors. Based on the category, it was found that the total number of errors made by the students was stated on the following paragraph:

Categories	Errors in the Topic	
	Error	Rate
Morphological Errors	604	34.9
Mechanical	96	5.54
Syntactic	542	31.3
Lexical Errors	488	28.2
Total	1730	100

Table 1: Categories of Errors in Paragraphs

4.1. Morphological Errors

Morphological errors according to Ferris (2005) are errors which include verb errors, noun errors, and article or determiner errors. Based on the collected data, the morphological errors made by the students were presented quantitatively in the table below:

Morphological Errors	Types of Errors	Errors in The Topic	Rate (In Morphological)	Rate (In All Errors)
	Verb error	312	51.6%	18.03%
	Noun error	174	28.8%	10.05%
	Article or determiner error	118	19.5%	6.8%
Total morphological errors		604	100%	34.9%

Table 2: Morphological Errors

Frist year DebreMarkos Teachers Education College students made different types of errors while they were writing paragraph. As the study indicated that they committed 1730 errors when they were writing paragraph about their biography. As shown in the above table, students frequently made morphological error since they committed 604 (34.9%) morphological error from the total 1730 errors. These morphological errors were grouped into verb, noun, and article (determiner) errors. Under these categories, students made 312 (51.6%) verb errors. This means that students could not maintain the subject verb agreement. As Ferris (2005) states, the verb errors include errors in verb tense, verb form (infinitive, gerund and other forms), and relevant subject-verb agreement. Most students could not consider the subject verb agreement in their writing as they used plural verb for singular subject. From the written paragraph, the following sentence is used as an example: '*My favorite subject are English'*. Here, the subject is singular, but the verb which is bolded is plural. Besides, they made tense shift from past to present and present past. Of the demand of written communication, the intended meaning they want to communicate may be distorted.

Secondly, noun errors were found on the students' paragraph. Among 260 paragraphs, there were 174 (28.8%) noun errors from 604 (34.9%) morphological errors. These errors were 10.05% from the rate of total 1730 errors. From morphological errors, students made 118 (19.5%) article or determiner errors. This was the least from the three morphological errors. This may be happened the students' frequency of usage of article or determiner was the least when we compare with other components of words.

4.2. Lexical Errors

According to Ferris (2005), lexical errors consist of all errors in word choice or word form, preposition errors, pronoun errors and spelling errors only in misspelling resulted of an actual English word. The following table indicates the degree of errors committed by first year Debre Markos Teachers Education College students in their written paragraph:

Lexical Errors	Types of Errors	Errors in the Topic	Rate (In Lexical Errors)	Rate (In All Errors)
	Error in word choice	90	18.4	5.2
	error in word form	34	6.9	1.9
	Preposition error	58	11.8	3.4
	Pronoun error	18	3.6	1.06
	Spelling error	288	59	16.6
Total lexical errors		488	100	28.2

Table 3: Lexical Errors

4.2.1. Error in Word Choice

Since students were not English native speakers, they made word choice errors. This means that they choose inappropriate words. As stated above table, 90(18.4%) were word choice errors from the total 488(28.2) lexical errors. And word choice error was second highest error from lexical errors committed by first year students at DebreMarkos Teachers Education College. This word choice error was 5.2% from the total 1730 errors made by the students. From students' written paragraph, (My brother is very*long)* the word long is not the right word to construct the sample sentence. Thistype of error may be occurred due to students' mother tongue (Amharic language) influence although they have been taking English language since grade one and it is a medium of instruction both in high school and college of Ethiopian education system. Besides, word choice error, the students committed word form errors.

Among lexical errors, 34(6.9%) errors were word form errors. Students frequently made *spelling errors* which were 288(59%) and 16.6% from lexical and total errors respectively. Using wrong spellings will distort the intended meaning of the word on the written paragraph in English. For instance, '*I compiled secondary school in 2005*'. Here, the writer of this sentence wants to say I completed secondary school, but what is written is different from what the writer intended to say. As result of spelling errors, students could not convey their intended message to readers since the spelling error brings meaning change that is totally different from the writers' intention. This spelling error may create confusion on readers mind and readers of written text with spelling errors will understand in different way. This brings communication barrier between the writer of the paragraph and the reader of it. On the other hand, pronoun errorsand preposition errors were not frequently found on students' written paragraph.

4.3. Syntactic Errors

Syntactic errors are referred to as (1) phrase structure errors, (2) clause errors, (3) sentence errors, and (4) inter sentence errors. According to Ferris (2005) syntactic errors can be classified according to word order, omitted words or phrases, unnecessary words or phrases, run-ons, comma splices, fragments, and other unidiomatic sentence constructions.

	Types of Errors	Errors in the Topic	Rate (in Syntactic)	Rate (in all Errors)
Syntactic errors	Word Order	108	19.9	6.2
	Omitted Words or Phrases	120	22.1	6.9
	Unnecessary words or phrases	102	18.8	5.8
	Run-ons	107	19.7	6.1
	Fragments	105	19.3	6.06
Total syntactic errors		542	100	31.06

Table 4: Syntactic Errors

Utilizing the appropriate words in constructing a sentence makes the written paragraph effective, but the participants of the study used words in the wrong order. Study identified 108 (19.9%) word order errors from the participants' paragraph. For instance: *we live in family poor ;*from this sentence the word '*poor*' is not used on its right place. The word 'poor' should modify the noun 'family', but it is placed after the modified word, family. This type of error commonly occurred on noun phrase.

In some parts of the paragraph, participants omitted word or phrases which are necessary for the effectiveness of the written paragraph. As it shown on the above table, 120 (22.1%) of errors were omitted word or phrase errors from 542 syntactic errors. If the necessary words or phrases are omitted, it is so difficult to convey necessary information to the reader of the written paragraph. On the contrary, the participants used unnecessary words or phrases in their paragraph. This may alter the idea of the paragraph. In addition, participants committed basic sentence faults such as run-ons, comma splices and fragment faults.

4.4. Mechanical Errors

Ferris (2005) classifies mechanical errors into punctuation and capitalization errors. It mean that errors in which the students used wrong punctuation and wrong spelling capitalization. From the total errors students made, mechanical errors are the least as stated on the table.

	Types of Errors	Errors in the Topic	Rate (In Mechanical)	Rate (In All Errors)
Mechanical Errors	punctuation	44	45.8	2.5
	capitalization	52	54.1	3
Total Mechanical Errors		96	100	5.5

Table 5: Mechanical Errors

The students made 96 (5.5%) mechanical errors from the total 1720 errors. This study identified two types of punctuation errors which were omission and addition. Some of the errors were omission of punctuation marks. On the other hand, the participants added punctuation marks. *For example: She lives with step, mother.* This sentence indicates that wrongly using comma. Comma is not necessarily for the example sentence. Therefore, omitting (missing) punctuation marks on necessary place and adding punctuation marks on the wrong place were made by students. Besides, participants made capitalization errors. In English language, first letter of specific nouns and the first letter of a sentence must be capitalized, but the participants did not make the first letter of proper nouns as it is stated the example below: Now I live in *debremarkos.* This shows capitalization error because the word *debremarkos*is proper noun, and it is the name of the place, so the first letter should be capitalized. The collected data indicated that the students, moreover, had inadequate knowledge of the capitalization rule in English in that the first letter of specific nouns and the first letter of a sentence must be capitalized.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The study has so far dealt with the common linguistic errors on students' paragraph writing in line with Ferris classification and identified four major errors. Thus, the study revealed the most frequent error types the students made were morphological errors, syntactic errors, lexical errors and mechanical errors. The most serious errors were morphological errors. Under these errors, verb errors, noun ending errors and article or determiner errors found.

Syntactic errors placed as second level of students' errors. All errors in the sentence or clause boundaries are syntactic errors classified according to word order, omitted words or phrases, unnecessary words or phrases, run-ons, comma splices, fragments, and other unidiomatic sentence constructions which were identified from the students' written paragraphs. The finding indicated lexical errors as third level among the four major errors committed by the students. Lastly, mechanical errors were found on students' writings.

Based on the findings it is possible to conclude that many errors in the DMCTE first year students' writing were morphological errors. While the overall error rates help the researcher understand the students' overall performance, the specific errors the participants made frequently make help to clarify what the students' learning difficulties are. Secondly, many syntactic errors had been identified from students writing. Writing was related to the students' first language structures of the: This finding is in line with some research that confirmed the interference from L1 in the process of EFL writing. Thirdly, regarding the errors of paragraph organization, the study shows that the students lack to use the appropriate transitional words to connect ideas.

5.2. Recommendations

This study identified errors in DMCTE students' written work, but did not stipulate reasons why these errors were made. My first recommendation is that this study be extended to investigating the origin of certain error patterns found in EFL written work of specific learners of the same mother tongue. An exploration of the composing process and determining the strategies learners use in EFL learning has not been considered in this study. In order to learn more about EFL writers' usage of language I would recommend that further research be conducted in this area.Moreover, in order to deal with the problem, some solutions are suggested as follows:

- English language teachers should identify the most frequent errors steadfast by their students.
- MOE and education bureau should give special attention for English language writing in the course outlines of English syllabuses for colleges.
- Syllabus designers should include more free and controlled writing exercises that would help improve students writing abilities.
- Teachers should then be more aware of these types of errors and provide the necessary follow up work to check the problem areas as discussed earlier.
- However, EFL teachers and researchers cannot ignore error analysis as an important tool by which they can learn more about the psycholinguistic processes involved in the learning of a foreign language.
- Besides, there should be more practical writing tasks for students in order to reduce errors in their writing.
- error making is a necessary part of learning and language teachers should use the errors with a view of improving teaching
- Teachers, educators and language study material developers should understand about the kind of errors that their target learners make.

Lastly, in order to explore the composing process of EFL writers meaningfully, we need to understand how students compose in both their native languages and in English. I, therefore, recommend that further studies on ethnographic research in EFL writing be conducted that examine the writing process, along with the acquisition of communicative competence.

In conclusion, making errors is inevitable in language learning process. Errors provide feedback about the effectiveness of the teaching techniques and show the teachers what part needs further attention. Studying the learner language in terms of errors is something that teachers have always done for practical reasons. It requires the teacher to have skills of diagnoses and treatment

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