Errors Made by the Students of Engineering and Technology in Written English

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> '**FIRST I** write one sentence: Then I write another. That's how I write. And so I go on. But I have a feeling writing ought to be like running through a field.' **LYTTON STRACHEY**

INTRODUCTION

The ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments. Writing skill must be gained and learned through experience. Writing also involves composing, which implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description, or to transform information into new texts. It is undoubtedly the act of composing, though, which can create problems for students, especially for those writing in a second language (L2) in academic contexts.

Besides, formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling. By putting together concepts and solving problems, the writer engages in "a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text" (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987, p. 12). Indeed, academic writing requires conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. Compared to students writing in their native languages (L1), however, students writing in their L2 have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills. They might also have to deal with instructors and later, faculty members, who may or may not get beyond their language problems when evaluating their work. Although a certain amount of consciousness-raising on the part of the readers may be warranted, students want to write close to error-free texts and they enter language courses with the expectations of becoming more proficient writers in the L2 (Myles, 2002).

SAMPLES

For the selection of a corpus of language, following the guidelines offered by Ellis (1995, pp.51-52), a sample of written work collected from 408 engineering and technology students who have studying in first year engineering in various branches (EEE, ECE, Bio-med, Bio-Tech, CSE, IT, Auto-mobile & Mechanical) from four engineering colleges and one Deemed University in and around Chennai. However, there is a point that needs to be mentioned here, and it is the fact the informants speak first language at home with their parents and at college with their friends.
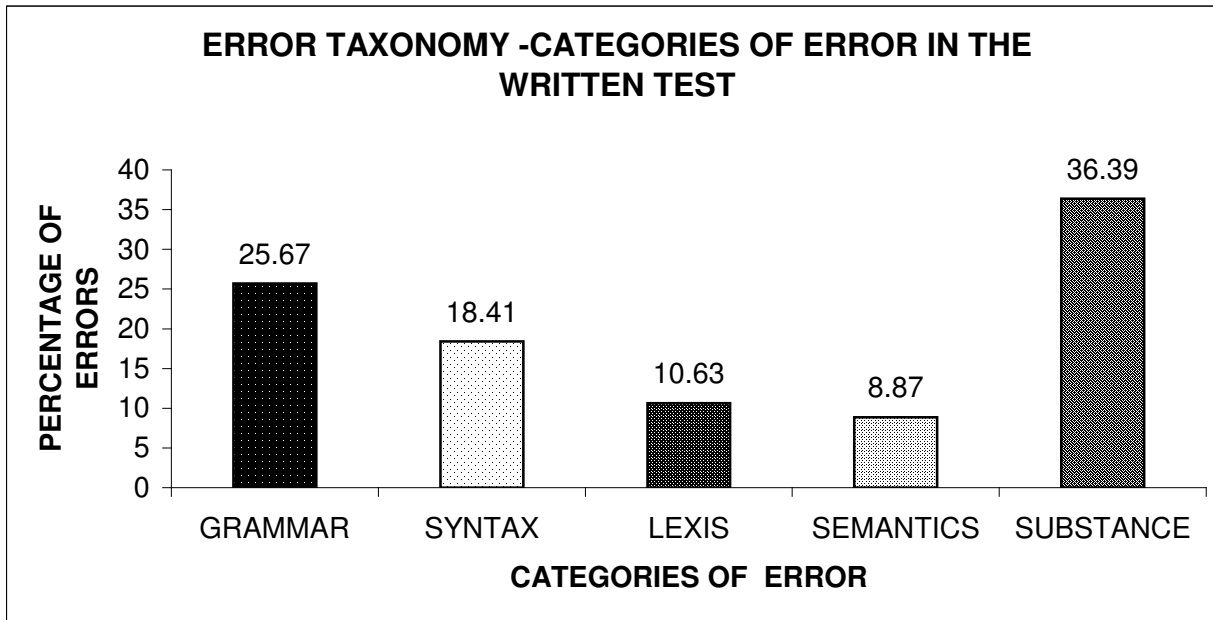
(a) Error identification

As a first step, the researcher developed, based on the literature (Corder, 1974; Richards, 1974; James 1998; Selinker, 1972 in Richards & Sampson,1974), a Taxonomy for Error Analysis including the following categories and sub-categories: **grammatical** (prepositions, articles, singular/plural, adjectives/adverbs, tense and subject-verb agreement), **syntactic** (coordination, sentence structure, nouns and pronouns), **lexical** (word choice), **semantic & substance** (mechanic : punctuation & capitalization , and spelling).

Error sub- category	Number of errors (1363)

1. Grammatical errors
        Prepositions : 53
        Articles :   72
        Subject – verb agreement : 89
        Singular –plural : 34
        Verb forms (Tense) : 102
	350

2. Syntactic errors
        Sentence structure : 174
        Coordination : 46
        Noun & pronouns: 31
	251

3. Lexical errors	**145**
4. Semantic errors	**121**

5. Substance (mechanics + spelling)
        Punctuation : 215
        Capitalization : 102
        Spelling : 179
	496

Table- 1: Error Taxonomy

Table-1 specifies errors in terms of linguistic categories and in terms of where the errors are located in the overall system of the TL. The total numbers of errors that the researcher found in the 408 students on the written tasks are 1363 errors and divided according to the different categories: 350 grammatical errors, 251 syntactic errors, 145 lexical errors, 121 semantic errors and 496 Substance errors. The details are given in the figure-1.

ERROR TAXONOMY -CATEGORIES OF ERROR IN THE WRITTEN TEST

Category	Percentage
GRAMMAR	25.67
SYNTAX	18.41
LEXIS	10.63
SEMANTICS	8.87
SUBSTANCE	36.39

(a) Error patterns with examples in the written test

(i)Grammatical Errors

The findings show that there are 350 grammatical errors in which 53 preposition errors, 72 article errors, 89 subject-verb agreement errors, 34 singular-plural errors, and 102 verb form errors.

(a)   **Preposition**

o **Deletion of prepositions:**

   1. I heard * your uncle that you have finished your examinations.

   2. Because * the police in that area …….

o **Wrong choice of prepositions**

   1. I live **in** Annanagar.

   2. Hope I could go there **of** my winner vacation.

   3. When I came **into** this college, I felt that something was different.

o **Redundant use of prepositions**

1. The old people complain **of loss of hearing** which is very awful.

2. Due to the lack **of in** education ……..

(b) **Articles**

o **Deletion of articles:**

1. I am * student of *first year EEE department.

2. Indian is having * large number of villages.

o **Wrong choice of articles:**

1. Computer is **a** electronic device.

2. I am **an** professional engineer.

3. I witnessed **a** accident which was horrible.

o **Use of article for mass nouns**

1. to possess an air of calmness.

2. It is really **an** truth that after the introduction of computers.

o **Redundant use of the article 'the'**

1. The computer can do the many works

2. The political leaders were used **the** speakers for **the** meetings.

(c) Incorrect subject –verb agreement

1. **The area   are** noisy due to modernization.

2. **The noise pollution are** more in and around Annanagar area.

3. **Each of them are** not getting a job after they finish their UG courses.

4. **The villagers has not** drink well water.

(d) Singular/Plural

1. The **lifes** are really horrible.

2. They developed **themself.**

3. **Childrens** and the public can not have a sleep well.

4. Thambaram **peoples** are very much annoyed by the loudspeakers noise.

(e) Verb forms

1. on at that time we **buyed** a computer system.

2. I **see** a bus * coming to the right side of mine.

3. I * done my 2nd periodical test well.

4. Life of the village is was so wonderful and beautiful.

5. I am like my village

(ii) Syntactic errors

o **Sentence structure**

1. I have learned a lesson in my life, that when I watched an accident on road.

2. With reference of village chief, I beg to say that in village, frequently political meetings held.

3. Since, in this modern age of science and technology, due to advancement and inventions of lots of new gadgets leads as laying and comfortable too.

4. I am quite well and I hope that by grace of god, you will be same to me.

o **Nouns and Pronouns**

1. The loudspeakers are used after a particular time but the <u>loudspeakers</u> are not checked.

2. Their are no of political party houses near by my house.

(iii) Lexical errors

1. It is a life <u>away from pollution</u>, <u>fast moving life</u>.

2. After getting internet connection, hopefully, I will become a professional software engineer; I would have enough money to <u>maintain a good life</u>.

3. Our residents are <u>subjected to</u> such difficulties during these political meetings.

4. <u>Finishing education</u> is a never-ending process.

5. So, <u>teenagers –young achievers</u> are gifted for our world.

6. Nowadays, road accidents are <u>common happenings.</u>

7. Before analyzing or comparing <u>their mode of living</u>, it's noticeable that both of them are dependent.

8. It will improve their concentration power and makes them <u>energetic throughout</u>.

9. Even the dogs on the streets or the cats in the alleys seem to take part in the <u>tension-full</u> city life.

10. Well, they have their own <u>tension-finishing</u> their education, seeking a job and so on.

11. <u>The schooling–educational</u> facilities are improving to be more high and standardized and children get more exposures to out side world.

(iv)   **Semantic errors**

1. They are continuous <u>slogan- shouting</u> and <u>empty promises</u> campaign is already causing negative impacts on society.

2. Especially to small babies this noise is very irritating and they can't <u>rest in peace</u>.

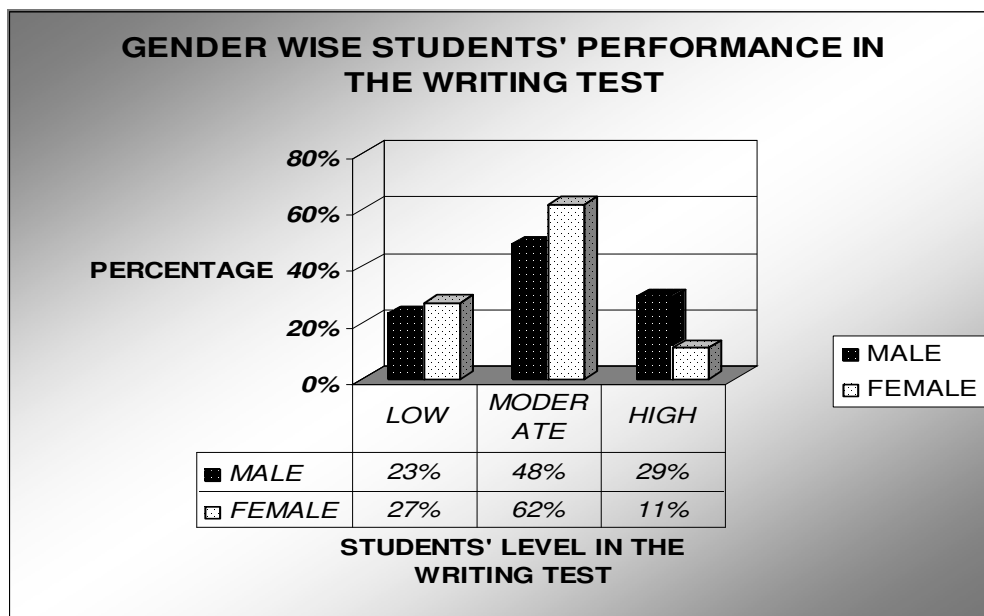### (v) Substance (Mechanics +spelling)

o **Punctuation**

1. How are you *

2. How are your studies going on*

3. Your's sincerely,

4. Due to excessive noise, the children are unable to study during the evenings, which is time, theses meetings are usually held.

5. A countrie's wild life depends on its   location in the globe.

o **Orthographic errors**

1. Political meatings are held very often in our area.

2. In last weak my parents had bought a computer with internet connection.

3. With referance to ………..

4. My habby is to read books.

5. They developed themselves then thet villege

6. for the transport fecility

7. In our village life the atmosphere is always peaceful and cleen.

8. air polution.

o **Capitalization**

1. We the residents of gandhi nagar .

2. dear sir,

3. The main Cause for This noise Pollution is The frequent Public Meetings in Our area.

4. of course , I should get a university rank.

GENDER WISE STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN THE WRITING TEST

	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
MALE	23%	48%	29%
FEMALE	27%	62%	11%

STUDENTS' LEVEL IN THE WRITING TEST

Figure- 2: Percentage of students' performance in the writing test-Gender wise

Figure-2 shows that only 23% male students secured low marks than (27%) female students and 62% female students have scored moderate marks than (48%) male students. However, 29% male students have scored high marks than (11%) female students. Hence, the result of writing test was quite different because male students have performed better than female students in writing test.

Conclusion

This study attempted to identify, describe, categorize, and diagnose the errors in English writings of engineering and technology students. Most of errors are caused by an over application of L2. The English teachers do need to incite their students to speak English at home and with their friends in order to reduce the number of mistakes due to negative L1 transfer, but the teachers also need to try to teach more effectively the rules and conventions of writing.

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