

Grammatical and Syntactic Errors in L2 English Writing: The Impact of Language Interference

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Abstract

This research examines grammatical and syntactic errors in second language (L2) writing, with a focus on the role of mother tongue interference and developmental processes in second language acquisition. In L2 writing, errors are viewed not merely as mistakes to be corrected, but as reflections of the learner's interlanguage—a transitional linguistic system that represents the learner's current level of grammatical and syntactic understanding. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study relies on a literature review to analyze data from various experts in the field of second language acquisition. The common challenges identified include grammatical interference in the use of articles, prepositions, word order, and subject-descriptor agreement, along with syntactic errors such as inappropriate pronoun use and incorrect word order. The research distinguishes between errors caused by first language (L1) interference and those resulting from developmental processes in L2 learning, offering valuable insights into the learners' evolving interlanguage systems. The study highlights the importance of targeted pedagogical interventions, such as comparative syntax lessons, focused feedback, and practical exercises, to address these errors and improve L2 writing proficiency. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how L2 learners develop grammar and syntax skills, providing guidance for more effective teaching practices in language instruction.

Keywords: Grammatical competences; Syntactic errors; Interference; Writing skills

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INTRODUCTION

For a considerable time, linguistics and education have placed great importance on the study of second language (L2) acquisition, especially in relation to the process by which learners acquire grammatical and syntactic competence in a language other than their mother tongue (L1). Another example of an interlanguage feature that may, at first glance, be taken as an instance of L1 transfer appeared in the acquisition of English question formation. Lightbown and Spada (1999) found that French learners of English made a distinction between subject-verb inversion with pronominal and referential subjects (containing a noun). The examination of learners' grammatical and syntactic mistakes is one of the main topics of interest in L2 acquisition research since these mistakes frequently offer insightful information about the mechanisms underpinning language learning (Ellis, 2019).

In L2 writing, errors are viewed as windows into the learner's interlanguage, a transitional linguistic system that represents the learner's present level of grammatical and syntactic understanding, rather than just mistakes that need to be fixed (Schmidt & Frota, 2020). Interlanguage systems are a complex and dynamic concept in second language acquisition, reflecting cognitive processes rather than a transitional stage. They are

influenced by factors like context, task, and communication style, highlighting the adaptability and influence of interactional factors. Study abroad experiences accelerate pragmatic understanding and cultural competence, fostering more sophisticated interlanguage. Socio phonetic analysis of interlanguage reveals that factors like age, exposure, motivation, and social identity impact L2 phonetic acquisition and accent. Interlanguage variation and second language acquisition are heavily influenced by learners' social interactions and cultural backgrounds, highlighting the importance of cultural context in SLA. Overall, interlanguage systems are influenced by various factors, highlighting the dynamic nature of language processing (Bialystok & Smith, 2019; Tarone, 2019). Researchers can learn more about the methods L2 learners employ to learn English and how their L1 affects their L2 learning processes by looking into these mistakes (Lightbown & Spada, 2021).

In L2 writing, grammatical and syntactic mistakes frequently represent the challenges that language learners encounter when attempting to assimilate the norms and structures of the target language. Numerous factors, including L1 transfer, the overgeneralization of L2 rules, the improper application of rules, and communication methods, might result in these errors (Ionin et al., 2022). The impact of a learner's native language on their usage of the L2, known as L1 transfer, is particularly important in forming the writing of L2 learners. This can result in errors when the structures of the L1 and L2 are not congruent (Odlin, 2020). Research has demonstrated that variables including language distance, competency level, and learning context affect how much of an L1 influence there is (Cook, 2013). Comprehending these variables is essential for formulating efficacious instructional approaches that target certain domains of challenge for second language learners (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2022).

Furthermore, L2 learners, particularly those from linguistically distant L1 backgrounds, face particular difficulties with syntax, which deals with the organization of words and phrases to generate well-formed sentences (Gass & Selinker, 2019). Word order, sentence structure, and subject-verb agreement are examples of syntactic errors that are common in L2 writing and are frequently caused by a combination of L1 transfer and the intricate structure of English syntax (Mitchell et al., 2023). Producing syntactically correct sentences in a second language (L2) requires a significant cognitive burden, particularly when learners also need to focus on coherence, grammar, and vocabulary (VanPatten, 2021). This intricacy highlights how crucial syntactic analysis is to comprehending L2 writing proficiency and how it changes over time (Ellis & Shintani, 2022).

A variety of strategies, including error analysis frameworks and corpus-based approaches, have been used in recent research to examine syntactic and grammatical faults in L2 writing (Ferris, 2020). Error analysis is a methodical approach to examining learner language and the most frequent error kinds by identifying, classifying, and explaining faults (Brown, 2023). However, corpus-based studies allow researchers to examine sizable learner writing datasets, offering a more thorough understanding of mistake patterns and their prevalence among various learner populations (Granger & Meunier, 2019). These approaches have been crucial in illuminating the fundamental processes of second language learning and guiding language instruction (Polio & Friedman, 2022).

Examining syntactic and grammatical mistakes in writing English as a second language provides important insights into the processes involved in language learning and acquisition. According to Selinker (2023), learners' mistakes are not arbitrary; rather, they are a reflection of the underlying interlanguage systems that they acquire as they advance toward L2 proficiency. Researchers and educators can gain a better understanding of learners' challenges and coping mechanisms by looking at these mistakes. This

understanding can help develop more focused and successful teaching interventions (Sheen & Ellis, 2024). From this the author have the research question: What are the most common grammatical and syntactic challenges faced by L2 English learners especially in secondary school? and how does language interference affect the acquisition of English writing skills English learners especially in secondary school? And from this research question the author give the research objective: To identify the most frequent grammatical and syntactic difficulties encountered by L2 English learners in secondary school, and to assess the role of L1 interference in impeding or shaping their ability to write accurately in English.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate error patterns and transfer phenomena in second language (L2) English writing, specifically focusing on grammatical interference and syntax. The research follows Creswell's (2018) framework for qualitative inquiry, which emphasizes rigor and relevance in selecting sources. By utilizing a thematic analysis approach, the study systematically identifies and codes patterns related to interlanguage theory and cross-linguistic interference in L2 learners' writing.

Research Object

The research object of this study consists of peer-reviewed literature on second language acquisition (SLA), particularly studies related to grammatical interference, syntax, and interlanguage theory. Emphasis is placed on studies published in the last ten years, ensuring that the research is up-to-date and reflects current trends in SLA and L2 writing. The studies selected are those that contribute substantively to understanding error patterns and transfer phenomena in L2 English writing.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection in this study is primarily based on note-taking during the in-depth review of relevant literature. This technique involves recording detailed observations from selected research articles, including common error types, theoretical perspectives, and examples of cross-linguistic interference in L2 learners' English writing. Notes are systematically organized and categorized for further analysis, ensuring a structured approach to identifying recurring themes and patterns.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis. After notes are collected, the research applies coding to identify key themes related to interlanguage theory and grammatical transfer in L2 writing. This process involves sorting and interpreting the data to identify recurring patterns and themes, which are then linked back to the research objectives. Thematic analysis allows for a rigorous and organized examination of the literature, ensuring that the findings are aligned with the study's research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The author addresses two important topics in light of the results: interference in grammatical writing and error analysis in writing. In elaborating on these two occurrences, this section draws connections with syntactic issues and provides pertinent examples drawn from language theory and research. The conversation combines these ideas and investigates how interference and mistake analysis appear in L2 English learners' writing to give a thorough grasp of their consequences for teaching and language learning.

Interference in grammatical writing

Grammatical interference occurs when an L2 learner's native language influences their use of grammar in English, leading to recurring deviations. This phenomenon is documented by Odlin (2020), who describes how elements like articles, prepositions, and tense are particularly prone to L1 interference. For instance, languages that lack articles, such as Chinese, can lead learners to omit articles in English sentences from article delivered by Odlin (2020):

(e.g., "She bought book" instead of "She bought a book").

Selinker's (1972) interlanguage theory explains these patterns, noting that learners create a unique language system influenced by both their L1 and their developing L2 skills. Similarly, Spanish speakers may omit possessive articles, resulting in phrases like

"He left house" instead of "He left the house,"

Underscoring the need for explicit instruction on article usage in English (Ellis, 1994; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Targeted teaching that addresses English-specific grammar structures is essential for mitigating the effects of grammatical interference, as highlighted in recent studies on language acquisition and transfer (Ionin et al., 2022; Ferris, 2011).

Syntax in L2 Writing

Syntactic interference is another common issue in L2 writing, stemming from structural differences between the learner's L1 and English. When L1 and L2 syntactic rules clash, this interference leads to word order errors, pronoun misuse, and tense inaccuracies (Ellis & Shintani, 2014).

For example, the Spanish expression "Tengo 30 años" translates directly to "I have 30 years" in English, instead of the correct "I am 30 years old."

Gass and Selinker (2008) emphasize the role of comparative syntax instruction in helping learners internalize English-specific rules. To address these challenges, Mitchell et al. (2023) recommend a contrastive approach, where educators highlight syntactic contrasts between English and learners' native languages. German L1 speakers, for example, might write

"She only went to the store yesterday,"

Reflecting German SOV syntax (Subject-Object-Verb) instead of English's typical SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) structure (Lado, 1957). Instruction that underscores these differences and offers ample practice can be effective in promoting correct L2 usage (Ferris, 2011).

Error Analysis in L2 Writing

Error analysis, a process popularized by Corder (1967), provides a systematic way to examine and categorize errors in L2 learners' writing, distinguishing between errors arising from L1 transfer and those that are part of natural language development in L2. Richards (2019) describes errors as a window into learners' interlanguage, revealing the underlying "rules" they apply to L2. A recurring error like the incorrect use of auxiliary's in

"She don't like apples"

It might result from L1 interference or the overgeneralization of a grammar rule. Ellis (1997) and Lightbown & Spada (2013) advocate using error analysis as a means to direct feedback, helping learners refine their understanding of English syntax and grammar. Researchers like Polio and Friedman (2022) suggest that systematic error analysis could improve teaching practices by allowing for more targeted feedback, especially when focusing on specific error types like verb conjugation and preposition use, as observed in sentences like

“He put the book in table”
instead of “He put the book on the table.”

Discussion

Grammatical interference, a term that refers to the influence of a learner's first language (L1) on their second language (L2), is a well-documented phenomenon in second language acquisition (SLA) research. It occurs when the structural norms of L1 are applied to L2, leading to deviations from the grammatical rules of the target language (Mirzayev, 2024; Alfaifi & Saleem, 2024). It is inline also with Odlin (2020), such interference results from language contact and L1 transfer, affecting various language components, including articles, prepositions, and tense. For example, speakers of Chinese, a language that lacks articles, may omit them when speaking English, leading to sentences such as "She bought book" instead of the grammatically correct "She bought a book." This type of interference is often referred to as "grammatical interference," and it plays a crucial role in shaping the L2 learner's linguistic output.

The findings showed that the impact of L1 interference is widely recognized in the field of SLA. Previous studies showed that errors in L2 writing and speech often arise from the transfer of linguistic structures and rules from the learner's L1 (Darwis, 2023; Munandar, 2023). One notable contribution to understanding this phenomenon is Selinker's (1972) introduction of the concept of "interlanguage." According to Selinker, the interlanguage is a transitional linguistic system that L2 learners develop as they move from their L1 towards full proficiency in L2. This interlanguage is not simply a set of errors but a distinct language system that is influenced by both the learner's L1 and L2 knowledge. In the case of English language learners, systematic omissions of articles, such as "She bought book," reflect the influence of the L1 on the L2 and highlight the need for explicit instruction on English-specific grammatical structures, particularly those that are absent in the learner's first language (Ellis, 1994; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Montle, 2022). This observation suggests that addressing L1 interference through targeted teaching methods can help learners internalize the correct L2 rules and enhance their proficiency.

In addition to grammatical interference, another important aspect of language transfer in this study is syntactic interference. Syntactic interference occurs when the structural rules of a learner's L1 affect the construction of sentences in L2. It is in line with the study done by Ellis and Shintani (2014) who sheds light on how L1 syntactic patterns influence L2 syntax, often leading to errors in word order, pronoun usage, and verb conjugation. For instance, Spanish speakers might directly translate the Spanish sentence "Tengo 30 años" into English as "I have 30 years," rather than the correct English expression "I am 30 years old." This type of error, which arises from a mismatch between the syntactic rules of the learner's L1 and L2, illustrates how interlanguage systems can be influenced by the learner's prior language knowledge. Gass and Selinker (2008) argue that comparative syntax instruction, which focuses on highlighting the differences between the syntactic structures of L1 and L2, can help learners develop awareness of L2-specific syntactic norms. By providing explicit instruction on these structural differences, educators

can guide learners to avoid such errors and improve their understanding of L2 syntax. This approach is supported by studies by Ferris (2011) and Lado (1957), who emphasize the importance of teaching L2 syntax through a comparative approach that contrasts the learner's L1 and the target language.

One of the most important tools for understanding and addressing errors in L2 acquisition is error analysis, a method introduced by Corder (1967). Error analysis involves identifying and classifying errors made by learners to gain insights into their interlanguage development. Richards (1974) highlights that errors, unlike random mistakes, reveal systematic patterns that reflect the learner's internalized rules for constructing L2 sentences. An example of this is the incorrect use of the auxiliary verb in sentences like "She don't like apples," where the error may stem from either L1 influence or an overgeneralization of L2 rules. According to Ellis (1997) and Lightbown and Spada (2013), error analysis allows educators to differentiate between errors that result from L1 transfer and those that arise from developmental processes within L2 learning. This distinction is crucial for providing appropriate and targeted feedback to learners, as it enables educators to address specific error patterns in a way that helps learners refine their interlanguage.

The findings of the present study show the errors in targeted interventions help learners to guide them in fluency. It is in line with Polio and Friedman (2022) who informed the value of error analysis in designing targeted interventions that promote language accuracy and fluency. Through error analysis, educators can identify recurrent error patterns and tailor their teaching strategies to focus on areas where learners consistently struggle (Guo et al., 2024; Zhang, 2023). This personalized approach ensures that instructional interventions are both relevant and effective in addressing the learners' specific linguistic challenges (Zolotaya, 2023; Tazaki, 2023). For example, if a learner consistently omits articles due to L1 interference, a teacher might provide explicit lessons on article usage and offer focused feedback on this particular error. Likewise, if a learner consistently misuses word order due to syntactic interference from their L1, the teacher can target instruction on word order differences between the L1 and L2 to help the learner overcome this barrier.

The findings of this research have significant implications for L2 teaching practices. One of the key recommendations is the importance of error-focused feedback and targeted instruction that addresses learners' specific grammatical and syntactic needs. By recognizing that L1 interference plays a central role in shaping L2 errors, educators can develop instructional strategies that help learners navigate the challenges of L2 learning more effectively. Selinker's (1972) theory of interlanguage underscores the value of understanding L1-L2 interference as a foundational element of language learning, suggesting that instructional strategies should be designed with an awareness of this interlingual influence. This approach emphasizes that learners' errors are not random, but rather, they reflect systematic patterns in their developing interlanguage systems.

Studies on corrective feedback, such as those by Ferris (2004) and Corder (1973), highlight the necessity of addressing common error types, thereby guiding learners toward greater accuracy in their language production. Corrective feedback is essential for helping learners recognize and correct their errors, especially when these errors are the result of L1 interference or developmental overgeneralizations of L2 rules. By providing corrective feedback in a systematic and consistent manner, educators can help learners refine their interlanguage and improve their overall language proficiency.

Another valuable instructional approach is Long's (1996) "focus on form" instruction, which emphasizes the explicit teaching of challenging language structures within the context of meaningful communication. This approach helps learners pay

attention to form while also engaging in communicative activities that make the target language relevant to real-world contexts. By focusing on commonly challenging language structures, such as article usage, word order, and tense, teachers can provide learners with the tools they need to apply these structures accurately in their writing and speaking. The integration of "focus on form" instruction into the classroom helps bridge the gap between learners' developing interlanguage and the target language norms, ultimately improving their proficiency in L2 writing.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive exploration of both grammatical and syntactic interference in L2 writing, drawing on a broad range of theoretical perspectives to offer a nuanced understanding of how L1 influences L2 learners' writing. By examining both grammatical and syntactic errors and distinguishing between errors caused by L1 transfer and those arising from developmental processes, this research contributes new insights into the complexities of L2 acquisition. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of error-focused feedback and comparative instruction in addressing these errors, providing a clear framework for improving L2 writing skills.

In addition, the study's contribution to the field of L2 writing lies in its practical implications for language teaching. The findings suggest that targeted pedagogical interventions, such as comparative syntax lessons and focused feedback on error types, can help L2 learners overcome the challenges posed by grammatical and syntactic interference. By applying the insights gained from this research, educators can develop more effective teaching strategies that address the specific needs of their learners, improving both the accuracy and fluency of L2 writing.

In conclusion, this research highlights the significant role of grammatical and syntactic interference in L2 writing, demonstrating how errors related to L1 transfer and developmental processes reflect learners' interlanguage development. By recognizing these error patterns and providing targeted instruction, educators can help learners improve their L2 writing proficiency. The study also underscores the importance of error analysis and corrective feedback in L2 teaching, offering practical recommendations for instructional strategies that enhance learners' understanding of L2 grammar and syntax. Ultimately, the research contributes to the ongoing development of effective teaching practices in L2 writing, offering valuable insights into how learners' interlanguage systems evolve as they acquire proficiency in a second language.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how syntactic errors, grammatical interference, and systematic error patterns collectively influence L2 English learners' writing. Rather than being mere accidents, these errors offer insights into the linguistic and cognitive strategies used by learners in the interlanguage stage. By examining grammatical interference, syntactic challenges, and error patterns, this study elucidates the nuanced ways L1 influences shape L2 writing. The examples, including misused prepositions and omitted articles, illustrate how language transfer and English's complex grammatical structures present unique difficulties for learners. Addressing these issues requires a teaching approach that integrates theoretical insights and practical strategies, ensuring instructional methods align with learners' specific needs.

A few limitations should be noted. First, this study's examples are limited to certain L1 backgrounds, which may affect the generalizability of findings to other linguistic contexts. Additionally, while this study focuses on written language errors, future research could explore whether similar patterns are evident in spoken L2 production. Expanding research to other linguistic groups and modes of language could further validate these

findings and enhance our understanding of L2 error patterns. By acknowledging these limitations, this study aims to refine and extend existing literature on L2 learning, emphasizing the need for a holistic teaching framework. With targeted instruction, teachers can better address L2 learners' challenges, guiding them toward more advanced English writing skills.

RECOMMENDATION

Instructors are advised to implement a focused teaching strategy that concentrates on the particular areas of difficulty found in this study in light of the findings. Lessons that compare and contrast learners' L1 and English grammar and syntax, for example, can be quite helpful. With the use of this method, students would be better able to recognize typical traps and acquire the skills necessary to refrain from using L1 structures in L2 writing. Furthermore, practice exercises and clear instruction in English grammar rules can aid students in internalizing and accurately applying the rules.

Moreover, including error analysis on regularly in language training might help learners by giving them insightful feedback and directing customized interventions. Error analysis is a useful tool for teachers to study the developmental phases of their students' interlanguage systems in addition to correcting errors. By doing this, they can offer feedback that is more insightful, context-specific, and targets the underlying causes of mistakes. Through comprehensive approach, students will be able to get a deeper comprehension of English syntax and grammar, which will ultimately result in more correct and fluid writing.

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