

Errors in Essays of Technical University Students: A Case Study at Sunyani Technical University

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Abstract: *Making grammatical errors is a common part of learning a second language. This study examines grammatical errors committed by English as second language (ESL) learners of Sunyani Technical University in Ghana. The population used is year-one students from the Faculty of Built Environment and Applied Art. 46 written essays between 150 to 200-word long were included in the analysis. As a qualitative study with descriptive method, it adopted Corder's (1967) and Ellis (1997) steps of error analysis, which include identifying, classifying, describing, and explaining errors in the essays to ascertain (1) the types of grammatical errors made, (2) the frequency of these errors. The results include 866 grammatical errors in the following order of frequencies: punctuation errors (24.48%), capitalization problem (20.21%), inappropriate word choice (19.75%), incorrect spelling (11.89%), incorrect verb form (6.70%), wrong preposition (4.39%), subject-verb disagreement (3.93%), article errors (3.93%), number disagreement (3.00%), and incorrect verb tense (1.73%). The study has implications for the teaching of English writing with reference to grammatical competence. It informs the areas of grammar that require more attention and the need to adapt teaching strategies to improve students' grammatical competence.*

Keywords: Error Analysis, Grammatical Competence, Grammatical Errors, Second Language

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

English language, with a second language (SL/L2) status in Ghana, plays vital roles in the Ghanaian society. As the Ghana's lingua franca, English serves a number of uses in all aspects of Ghanaian life – social, economic, political, academic, and technological. Ghana has about 50 indigenous languages (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008) in addition to non-indigenous languages such as Hausa, which is spoken largely in Islamic settings. English, then, serves as a common medium of communication between people of these varying linguistic backgrounds and between Ghanaians and foreigners visiting or doing business in Ghana. Economically, English is the language of commerce. It is used in doing business in terms of writing contracts, and every business document in the country. Politically, English is the language of government and all formal business of state including parliament and law. State assemblies are conducted in English language. Academically, English is the language of education. It is used as a medium of instruction in schools in Ghana from Primary 4 through university. Technologically, it is the major tool used to search for new knowledge and technology. Consequently, English is a compulsory subject from the first year of primary school through high school. It is one of the major entry requirements into tertiary institutions in the country, and it is taught generally under the course title 'Communication (or Communicative) Skills.

Canale and Swain (1980) postulate that the goal of teaching a language is to develop learners' communicative competences including grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Sociolinguistic competence is known how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the interlocutors. Discourse competence is how to read and interpret larger texts and how to construct longer stretches of

discourse so that the parts make up a coherent whole. Strategic competence is how to recognize and repair communication breakdowns, how to work around gaps in one's knowledge of the language, and how to learn more about the language and in the context. Very fundamental to the other competences is the grammatical competence, which is the ability to use the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of the language (Nonkukhetkhong, 2013). Grammatical competence, thus, becomes the most important element in the teaching of a target language (such as English in our case).

Consequently, language teachers, particularly second language teachers, have had to focus attention on pedagogies that focus on raising learners' awareness of the grammatical elements required to communicate their intended meanings successfully. Error analysis constitutes one of the several strategies employed to focus learners' attention on the appropriate linguistic forms. On the basis of the results, this study would have some pedagogical implications for some key stakeholders in language education – teachers, curriculum developers, textbook writers, and text developers. Based on the significance of error analysis in the second language learning, the researchers, assistant lecturers of English Language and Communication Skills at Sunyani Technical University, wanted to investigate the grammatical errors made by first-year students in their first semester in the university as part of their approach to teaching English as a second language. The study would afford the researcher the opportunity to determine which linguistic features require more attention, and which strategies as well as resources to employ in his lesson delivery.

1.2. Grammatical Competence

Fisenko et al (2021) identify grammatical competence as an integral part of a foreign (and by extension, a second) language communicative competence. That is to say grammatical competence is key to language learners' ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish the three communication goals – accuracy, proficiency and fluency. This places grammatical competence at the centre of language teaching particularly in the non-native context.

Chomsky (1965 and 1966) explains grammatical competence (also known as linguistic competence) as an idealization that speakers know the rules of the correct grammar of their language. He had introduced the term “competence” into scientific studies to denote one's ability to perform any activity based on knowledge and skills acquired from a learning process and experience. In the context of language learning, Cherepanova (2006) explains competence to include a set of knowledge, abilities, skills, and methods of activities formed in the learner in the learning process. Grammatical competence can, thus, be explained as the totality of the knowledge of the grammar of a language, and the abilities of the learner to engage in productive language use. This includes unconscious knowledge that allows a speaker to use a language (Nordquist, 2020).

Research has shown that students who focus on linguistic form during communicative interactions can use the language more effectively than those who never focus on form or only do in decontextualized lessons (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). As a result, grammatical pedagogies have been trying to shift learners' focus to linguistic form or raise their awareness about grammatical features needed in order to articulate their meanings (Ellis, 2002; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

1.3. Grammatical Errors in L2 Learning

1.3.1. Meaning of grammatical errors

Making errors, especially grammatical errors, is a common part of learning a second language. Grammatical errors could be found in both spoken and written forms and constitute deviant language systems that stray from a pre-determined standard of adult language performance. (Kuiken & Vedder, 2013). Nordquist (2020) explains grammatical errors as instances of faulty or unconventional usage of elements of a language, including the failure of second language learners to follow grammar rules of the

language. Corder (1967 and 1974) explains that the systematic incorrect utterances occurring in the process of acquiring the language reflect the underlying knowledge of the language. Learners' errors therefore indicate the state of their linguistic development at a particular point in time.

1.3.2. Types and sources of grammatical errors in L2 learning

Grammatical errors are classified by Richards (1971) depending on the sources of the errors into interlingual errors and intralingual errors. However, James (2013) introduces two additional types of errors – communication strategy-based errors, and induced errors, bringing the number to four. Interlingual errors arise as interference of the L1 in the L2 learner's target language. The learner tends to impose their knowledge of their L1 on some linguistic features of the target language resulting in errors. Intralingual errors, on the other hand, are errors that take place due to misuse of particular elements of the target language. James (2013) explains communication strategy-based errors as the errors that are made by the learners based on false analogy, misanalysis, partial rule application, exploiting redundancy, and overgeneralization as some of the learning strategies. All these converge into Richards' intralingual errors since they are elements within the target language which account for the errors.

A study by Fontiveros-Malana (2018) indicates that most interlanguage errors are orally-inclined and less in written discourse. In the study of the L1 interference in the L2 performance conducted on students from the College of Education and the College of Business Entrepreneurship, and Accountancy at Cagayan State University the respondents did not do well in the oral test, specifically on intonation and pronunciation. "They had several errors in their performance and that their first language, to a great extent, interfered with their English language learning." (Fontiveros-Malana, 2018: 32). Arguably, most written errors are intralingual. Richards (1971) outlines overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized as major causes of such intralingual errors. Lightbown and Spada (2010) explain overgeneralization as a situation in which L2 learners overly apply L2 structure rules while producing the language. For instance, learners apply the *-s* ending verb or *-ed* ending the verb as in **I writes* and **I writed* respectively. In our view, overgeneralization could at best be considered as form of error. We wish to at this point add simplification as another form of linguistic errors. We explain simplification as the situation where L2 learners omit some language features such as number, tense morphemes of nouns and/or verb, or prepositions.

Selinker (1972) identifies sources of linguistic errors into language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of language learning, strategies of second language communication, and overgeneralization of the target language's linguistic materials. Meanwhile, Richards and Sampson (1974) identify additional sources of errors such as: the effects of sociolinguistic situation, the modality of exposure to the target language and the modality of production, the age of the learner, the instability of the learner's linguistic system, and the effects of the inherent universal hierarchy of difficulty of the particular item being learned as factors influencing SL learners' errors. These errors appear when L2 learners are developing L2 structure knowledge.

1.3.3. The need for error analysis in L2 learning

Usually, L2 and foreign language learners without proficiency in the language will make errors in their sentences (Rana et al, 2019), and these errors may disclose learners' insufficient competence in producing sentences with correct grammar (Berthelsen et al., 2021). Nonetheless, SL learners' errors could be decreased significantly by conducting systematic error analysis periodically to identify types and characteristics of the errors from learner production of speaking or writing. By this, the teacher will be better positioned to provide them with appropriate feedback and correction. Richards and Sampson (1974) argue that error analysis is an important tool for teachers to evaluate learners' learning ability in order to set the priority to solve learners' problems from the most frequent errors made by them. Therefore, error analysis is regarded as a diagnosis and prediction of the problems and difficulties of learners. Errors

provide significant evidence for teachers to give their students proper corrections and materials to support their learning.

1.3.4. Error analysis procedure

Corder's (1967) model of Error Analysis suggests three steps including data collection, description, and explanation. However, Ellis (1997) proposes a more detailed model of error analysis including selection of corpus of language, identification of errors, classification of errors, and explanation. Putting the two proposals together is very useful to cover some gaps eminent in the choice of either of the two. For instance, error description is a very key step conspicuously missing in Ellis's proposal just as error identification and classification are not included in Corder's.

1.4. Some Studies in Grammatical Errors

Literature shows continuous studies in the area of error analysis in SL learning settings in Ghana and other parts of the world. Elsewhere, Abushihap, El-Omari and Tobat (2011) investigated the grammatical errors in the writings of students of the Department of English Literature and Translation at Alzaytoonah Private University of Jordan. It was observed that the category that included the largest number of errors was the errors of prepositions, which comprised 26% of the total errors.

Also, Nonkukhetkhong (2013) investigated types and characteristics of grammatical errors made by the first year English major students of Udon Thani Rajabhat University. Data were collected from 49 first-year English major students' 200-250word length essays. The errors identified were general grammatical errors such as verbs, nouns, possessive case, articles, prepositions, adjectives, and adverbs; syntactic errors including sentence structure, ordering, and coordination/subordination; substance errors: capitalization, spelling, and punctuations; lexical errors: word selection and word formation; and semantic errors: ambiguous communication and miscommunication. The nature of grammatical errors found in that study were omission, malformation, misordering and overgeneralization.

Iqbal et al (2021) studied the errors in the essays of 30 secondary level students from Multan, Pakistan. Employing Corder's (1967) model of Error Analysis, it is established that the students have problem with tense and subject-verb agreement among other grammar elements. The students seem to have no perception of essential grammar elements, especially in the tenses while making sentences. The students have no concepts of singular and plural nouns or subjects. They are unable to use the additional form of the verb in present indefinite tense.

Mencias and De Vera (2018) however examined only the verb tense errors in the sentences of ESL Japanese students. Adopting Corder's taxonomy of error analysis including selection, omission, and addition, the study sought to examine (1) the forms and frequency of verb tense errors committed by learners in their written discourse, (2) the correlation between the forms of errors and some social variables such as age, sex, and social media usage. The result indicated that the most frequently committed errors are those in the category of selection, followed by omission and addition errors. The learners' exposure to internet as an English-infused mass media type was found to significantly relate to their omission errors.

Within the Ghanaian context, a number of studies including Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017), Amoakohene (2017), and Adjei (2015) have been carried out in attempts to understand students' language errors and their characteristics. For instance, Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) identified grammatical errors including tense errors, agreement errors, singular-plural (number) errors, article errors and prepositional errors in the writings of 150 second-year senior high school students in Central Region, Ghana. They reported tense errors (32.0%), as the most frequently committed errors in the students' essay writings. They also identified L1 interference and homophones as key sources of the majority of the errors.

On his part, Amoakohene (2017) studied the writings of 50 first-year students of University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS), Ghana. His findings showed that students commit more punctuation errors (29.6%) followed closely by concord errors (28.8%). Similarly, Adjei (2015) analyzed subordination errors in students writing in colleges of education in Ghana. The data for this study consisted of written scripts and texts written by 150 students of selected colleges of education. The results revealed that students of these colleges of education have challenges in the use of subordination in sentences. Thus, students were not able to appropriately use subordinators to conjunct their ideas in their essays.

Based on the significance of error analysis to the teaching of second language, it is paramount to replicate such studies in varying settings; every SL teacher needs to analyse periodically the errors in their students' language use to inform the pedagogical choices to be made in their lessons, hence this study. The findings could provide useful evidence of the learners' language abilities and difficulties which could be used to improve their linguistic competence, which is an important aspect of communicative competence.

1.5. Purpose of the Study

This study is inspired by the overall purpose of finding empirical evidence of the level of grammatical competence of first-year students of Sunyani Technical University particularly those reading Higher National Diploma (HND) in Fashion Design Technology. It is however hinged on the following specific objectives:

- To identify the grammatical errors made by technical university students in their essay writings.
- To find the frequency of these errors in the technical university students' essay writings.

1.6. Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What grammatical errors are made by technical university students in their essays?
- What are the frequencies of the errors made by technical university students in their essays?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The design of this study was qualitative with descriptive method. A qualitative descriptive design is used when uncomplicated description is desired to focus on the details of what, how, why, when, and where of an experience or event (Creswell, 2003). According to Gay and Airasian (2000), a qualitative analysis helps to gain insight into such experiences and events as the descriptive methods are used to determine and report phenomena as they are.

2.2. Population and Sample Population

The population for this research consisted of 92 first-year HND Industrial Art Technology (Fashion Design Technology, Textile Technology), and HND Ceramic Art students from the Faculty of Built Environment and Applied Art studying Communication Skills in English Language in the first semester of 2021/22 academic year.

The sample of this research was 46 essays which met the 150 to 200word length threshold. The students were to describe their expectations for reading their programme of study.

2.3. Data Collection

Data were collected from the sample essays. The students had an entire weekend (Friday after lectures till Monday morning) within which they were to write the essay. It was estimated that they would have enough time to proofread and edit their essays so that the final work submitted would reflect their true grammatical competence devoid of the usual pressure-induced errors usually associated with examinations and other class exercises. In all, 85 students submitted their essays which were passed through initial assessment in terms of the length of the essay. 46 essays passed the first test and were included in the study.

2.4. Data Analysis

Adopting a combination of Corder's (1967) and Ellis (1997) steps of error analysis, grammatical errors were analyzed at four levels: identification, classification, description and explanation. At the identification step, all sentences containing errors were identified and the specific errors in the sentences were recorded. At the classification stage, error were classified into syntactic errors (subject-verb agreement, punctuation), lexical (spelling, word choice, article, capitalization, preposition), and morphological (verb tense, verb form, plural-singular). The third stage was where the errors were described with examples. This includes description of their frequencies using statistical tool such as the MS Excel. The last stage was the explanation of the sources of the errors based on the available literature.

3. Results

The analysis of the data of the findings was thematically presented in accordance with the research objectives underpinning the study. First, the analysis was done by broadly categorizing the errors into lexical, syntactic, and morphological errors. The lexical errors included word choice errors, article errors, spelling errors, and capitalization errors. The syntactic errors were subcategorized into subject-verb agreement errors, preposition errors, and punctuation errors. The morphological errors were subdivided into verb tense errors, verb form errors, and plural-singular errors. The frequency of every error was converted into percentage and then presented on a frequency table.

3.1. Grammatical Errors Made by Students in Their Essays

In prescriptive grammar, grammatical errors (usage errors) are explained to include instances of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a misplaced modifier, an inappropriate verb tense, incorrect verbal forms, and syntax problems (Garner, 2012; Hernandez, 2011). In this study, the following were identified as grammatical errors: inappropriate word choice, wrong article omission of same, incorrect spelling, capitalization problem, subject-verb disagreement, wrong preposition usage, punctuation errors, incorrect verb tense, incorrect verb form, and number (singular-plural) disagreement.

3.1.1. Word Choice Errors

Word choice in any discourse is expected to make use of words and phrases that collocate satisfactorily with other words to sufficiently construct the intended meaning. This includes the use of proper register or jargons. In a number of cases, wrong words were chosen by the writers. In some instances, adjectives substituted for nouns or vice versa. The following examples are extracts from the data. The incorrect words or groups of words are in **bold** and their suggested correct forms are provided in parenthesis placed immediately after the incorrect forms.

1. **They** (There) are a lot of expectations one would **encounter** (have) for reading fashion and design technology ...
2. ... some expectations one would **expert[expect]** (have) for reading fashion design technology as a **course area** (course of study)
3. There are a lot of programmes that are **treated** (pursued) in the **tertiary** (tertiary education) level.

4. ... Business **who** (which) will employ me as an **employer** (employee) to build a **high** (renowned) company
5. ...when my mother bought **domy** (a dull) for me, I [tried] to join pieces of fabric to form a dress ...
6. ... to **set up** (develop) business oriented mindset ...
7. Some people dream of becoming leaders, doctors, engineers, or writers while **most of the people** (others) generally have dreamt of becoming scientists.
8. ... to be a successful **fashion** (fashion designer), I need **to** (to have) a bachelor's degree
9. ... to be taken seriously by my fellow industry **mates** (colleagues)
10. ... to travel abroad to further my education and **explore** (exhibit) my knowledge to people there also
11. This will help keep me **up** (up to date) with the trends ...
12. ... by the end they can get some **small** (income) to paid ...
13. I will also apply for **teacher** (a teaching job)
14. The sky is the **end** (limit) for your creativity in this field.
15. ... there is no **seeing** (looking) back

3.1.2. Article Errors

In English, a singular common count noun must have an article and the form of the article is influenced by the context. For example, the article *an* precedes a vowel sound as in *an elephant* while *a* precedes a consonant sound as in *a basket*. In addition, a plural common noun can be used with or without an article. Also, the definite article *the* is mandatory with superlative adjectives, while a proper noun does not normally take an article. Overlooking these basic rules governing the use of articles constitute article errors in this study. They include the use of wrong articles, missing articles, or redundant articles. In the following examples extracted from the data, the incorrect articles have been **bold** and missing ones have been marked with superscript [^], and their suggested correct forms are provided in parenthesis placed immediately after the incorrect forms.

1. ... I want to ... become [^] expert in all this ... (... I want to ... become an expert in all this ...)
2. At [^] same time ... (At the same time ...)
3. ... to adapt designs to suit a client's needs (... to adapt designs to suit a client's needs)
4. [^] Expectation clear to everyone involves making their vision [^] reality. (An expectation clear to everyone involves making their vision a reality.)
5. ... a successful fashion designer is [^] one who ... (... a successful fashion designer is the one who ...)
6. ... and to produce **a** unique styles and trends ... (... and to produce unique styles and trends ...)
7. ... that anytime they are to choose [^] course ... (... that anytime they are to choose a course ...)
8. ... clothing construction, **a** natural beauty ... (... clothing construction, natural beauty ...)
9. ... an ideal career choice for students with **a** creative mind[s] ... (... an ideal career choice for students with creative mind[s] ...)

10. To add to, ^ wide range of opportunities ... (To add to, a wide range of opportunities ...)
11. Let all ... support ^ industry. (Let all ... support the industry.)
12. ... a way to express ^ unique side of your creativity ... (... a way to express the unique side of your creativity ...)

3.1.3. Spelling Errors

These errors are incorrect spelling of word due to confusion caused by homophones or complete lack of knowledge of the correct form of the word. The following examples are a few incorrectly-spelt words from the data:

Incorrect spelling

1. ast
2. clints
3. ... **saw** nice clothes ...
4. fashiong
5. ocational
6. outsid
7. creat
8. design
9. morden
10. inculde
11. tourching
12. ... our ancestors used at[in] the **passed**
13. carer
14. ... **it's** glitz
15. ... **sow** nice outfits
16. fouth
17. couse
18. jewelries
19. soo
20. achive
21. busines
22. knoledge

Correct spelling

- ask
- clients
- sew
- fashion
- occasional
- outside
- create
- design
- modern
- include
- touching
- past
- career
- its
- sew
- fourth
- course
- jewelries
- so
- achieve
- business
- knowledge

3.1.4. Capitalization Errors

These types of errors include using a small letter at the beginning of a sentence or a proper noun, and beginning a common noun with a capital letter. The following examples are extracts from the data. The incorrect words are in **bold** and their suggested correct forms are provided in parenthesis.

1. **p**ursuing fashion **d**esign equips ... (Pursuing Fashion Design equips ...)
2. ... for mass production, **T**esting ... (... for mass production, testing ...)
3. In life **i** want to ... (In life I want to ...)
4. **a** successful fashion designer needs ... (A successful fashion designer needs ...)
5. **d**esigners need to constantly come up with ... (Designer need to constantly come up with ...)
6. ... mostly in the **T**echnical university. (... mostly in the technical university.)
7. **t**his is why it is important ...

8. ... to understand the working of the fashion industry ... fashion design events, **H**istory of fashion, ... (...to understand the working of the fashion industry ... fashion design events, history of fashion, ...)
9. ... I need to have a **b**achelor's[bachelor] degree (... I need to have a Bachelor's[Bachelor] degree
10. **by** the end they can also get some ... (By the end they can also get some ...)

3.1.5 Subject-verb Agreement Errors

Subject-verb agreement is the correspondence of a verb with its subject in person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural), and this applies to the finite verbs in the present tense and, in a limited way, to the past forms of the verb *to be* (*was* and *were*). In the sentences below, the subject-verb agreement principles are violated. The suggested correct forms of each of these sentences are provided in parenthesis. The following are a few examples of the errors from the data:

1. ... **fashion** these days **have** become something ... (... fashion these days has become ...)
2. ... almost **everybody want** to learn. (... almost everybody wants to learn)
3. **This include** dresses, suits ... (This includes dresses, suits, ...)
4. [An] **expectation** clear to everyone **involve** ... ([An] expectation clear to everyone involves)
5. **Designers needs** to ... (Designers need to ...)
6. ... future fashion **ideas** which **helps** you ... (... future fashion ideas which help you ...)
7. **It provide** many opportunities (It provides many opportunities)
8. **Fashion designing play** a major role ... (Fashion designing plays a major role ...)
9. ... **it represent** our history (... it represents our history)
10. **It ... change** our life with time. (It ... changes our life with time)

3.1.6. Preposition Errors

This error type simply means that a wrong preposition is used, the required preposition is missing or the preposition is redundant in the sentence. In the sentences below, the principles underlying acceptable collocation of prepositions with other lexical items in the sentences are violated. The following are selected examples from the data, with their suggested correct forms of each of these sentences provided in parenthesis.

1. ... a shirt that is sew[n] **from** me. (... a shirt that is sew[n] by me ...)
2. ... me[e]t their demand[s] and supply **for** them (... me[e]t their demand[s] and supply to them)
3. ... scientific techniques are utilized for manufacturing and development **in** all types of yarns ... (... scientific techniques are utilized for manufacturing and development of all types of yarns ...)
4. ... they are made **from** ... famous fashion designers (... they are made by ... famous fashion designers)
5. ... income comes from different destinations[sources] **in** respect **of** the work you find ... (... income comes from different destinations[sources] with respect to the work you find ...)
6. ... ancestors used **at** the passed[past] (ancestors used in the passed[past])
7. **To** my point ^ view ... (In my point of view ...)

8. ... draw the attention **on** both educated ... (...draw the attention of both educated ...)
9. ... this programme equips ^ readily transferrable skills. (... this programme equips with readily transferrable skills.)
10. ... I will want ^ obtain ... (... I will want to obtain ...)
11. There are numerous educational [programmes] run **at** the institution (There are numerous educational [programmes] run in the institution)

3.1.7. Punctuation Errors

The errors taken into account here are omission and placing of incorrect punctuation marks, typical among which are the full stop, comma, apostrophe, and quotation marks. Below are extracts of such errors from the data. The suggested correct forms of each of these extracts are provided in parenthesis.

1. ... shapes, lines, colour, forms, textures^ etc^ in ... (... shapes, lines, colour, forms, textures, etc. in ...)
2. In other words^ I make ... (I other words, I make ...)
3. Sometimes^ I give ... (Sometimes, I give ...)
4. For example; what we ... (For example, what we ...)
5. ... well^started programme ... (... well-started programme ...)
6. So^ a certification[certificate] course ... (So, a certification[certificate] course ...)
7. To start with; I want to do ... (To start with, I want to do ...)
8. In life^ I want to become ... (In life, I want to become ...)
9. ... other people^ income ... (... other people's income ...)
10. ... we have warm. Clothes in the Swedish fashion and we have thin clothes in the African fashion, fashion is ... (... we have warm clothes in the Swedish fashion and we have thin clothes in the African fashion. Fashion is ...)
11. I love fashion design^ it given[gives] ... (I love fashion design. It given[gives] ...)
12. ... **ones** creativity ... (... one's creativity ...)
13. Because of the love I have for the work^ I decided ... (Because of the love I have for the work, I decided ...)
14. ... for **students** development (... for students' development)

3.1.8. Verb Tense Errors

In English, the verb tense is either present or past indicating the time reflection in the clause or sentence. The tense is typically contextual. There must be semantic consistency between when the actions or states of being occurred and the type of verb used. It was realized from the study that few students violated the fundamental tense rules in English. In the sentences below, the verb tense principles are violated. The suggested correct forms of each of these extracts are provided in parenthesis. The following are extracts of such errors from the data:

1. I ... **go** ahead and **ask** my sister ... and she told me all ... she **have** experienced in her journey ... (I ... went ahead and asked my sister ... and she told me all ... she had experienced in her journey)

2. There **are** ... beliefs I **have** during my basic educational process ... (There were beliefs I have during my basic educational process ...)
3. ... has **varies** over time ... (... has varied over time ...)
4. ... with the knowledge that I **would** acquire, I wish to... (... with the knowledge that I will acquire, I wish to ...)
5. I know with focus, determination and perseverance, I **would** be able to ... (I know with focus, determination and perseverance, I will be able to ...)
6. I **will** like ... (I would like ...)

3.1.9. Verb Form Errors

In English grammar, the verb can assume a number of forms determined by the preceding item (auxiliaries, infinitive 'to', or zero item) and the voice (active or passive) of the sentence. The verb in the context of, for instance, a **be** will be *v-ing* in an active sentence and *v-ed/en* in a passive sentence. Errors occur when such rules within the verb phrase are violated. In the extracts below, the verb forms are violated. The suggested correct forms are provided in parenthesis.

1. It's **play** ... (It's played ... or It's playing ...)
2. ... the youth can be **employ** (... the youth can be employed)
3. ... consumers will be more attracted to **collaborated** with the design team (... consumers will be more attracted to collaborate with the design team)
4. ... to be **make** ... (to be made ...)
5. ... skills and knowledge **acquire** in school. (... skills and knowledge acquired in school)
6. ... to everyone **involve** in making their vision ... (... to everyone involved in making their vision ...)
7. ... new products **base** on research data (... new products based on research)
8. ... the above **mention** points ... (... the above mentioned points ...)
9. To start with, **gain** knowledge about ... fashion is an adorable art (To start with, gained knowledge about ... fashion is adorable art)
10. ... **to will earn** ... (... to earn ...)
11. Designing ... starts with sketching ... and then **build** (Designing ... starts with sketching ... and then building ...)
12. ... does not **involves** ... (does not involve ...)
13. ... I influenced myself to **wanting** to ... (... I influenced myself to want to ...)
14. ... I believe I **can be achieved**. (... I believe I can achieve.)

3.1.10. Number Errors

The number errors include using plural in place of a singular form and vice versa. In the extracts below, the singular-plural forms are violated. The suggested correct forms are provided in parenthesis.

1. Thirdly;[,] one of the **thing** I will want is strong visualization. (Thirdly;[,] one of the things I will want is strong visualization.)

2. ... fashion and design really need[s] people with the requisite skills to employment[employ] at[into] the **industries**. (... fashion and design really need[s] people with the requisite skills to employment[employ] at[into] the industry.)
3. Looking for white colour[collar] **job** ... has been difficult for graduates from various **institution** ... (Looking for white colour[collar] jobs ... has been difficult for graduates from various institutions ...)
4. All these programmes have their future **expectation** for students. (All these programmes have their future expectations for students.)
5. A fashion **designers** always create[creates] a new mode ... (A fashion designer always create[creates] a new mode ...)

3.2. Frequency of Error Types

From the 46 essays used in this study, a total of 866 errors were recorded. They include 483 (55.77%) lexical errors, 284 (32.79%) syntactic errors, and 99 (11.43%) morphological errors. Table 1 below provides the frequency of specific error types in the data.

Table 1: Frequency of errors in students' essays

Error Type		Freq.	%	Average errors
Lexical Errors		483	55.77	
1. Word choice	WC	171	19.75	4
2. Articles	A	34	3.93	1
3. Spelling	S	103	11.89	2
4. Capitalization	C	175	20.21	4
Syntactic Errors		284	32.79	
5. Subject-Verb Agreement	SVA	34	3.93	1
6. Preposition	Pr	38	4.39	1
7. Punctuation	Pu	212	24.48	5
Morphological Errors		99	11.43	
8. Verb Tense	VT	15	1.73	0
9. Verb Form	VF	58	6.70	1
10. Plural-Singular (Number)	PI	26	3.00	1
TOTAL		866	100.00	

These figures imply that there were average 18.83 errors per essay of 150-200 words showing a significant ratio of errors to number of words at 1:8-11 approximately. On the surface value, punctuation errors were most frequently committed error type representing 24.48%, followed by capitalization errors (20.21%). The least committed error type was verb-tense (1.73%). Cumulatively, students committed more lexical errors (55.77%) and less morpheme-related errors (11.43%). Of the most frequently committed errors in punctuation, the average errors per essay are 5.

4. Discussion

The study has revealed that students have significant challenge internalizing some grammar rules of the usage of the English Language despite the fact that they had studied English from basic school. Per the level of the students as first-year university students, who have read English Language at the basic and second cycle education, one expects them to demonstrate good command of the usage of the full stop, for example. However, there were instances in the data where students wrote complete sentences without a full stop.

These errors really impeded easy comprehension of ideas that were advanced by students in their essays. Particularly, punctuation errors, preposition errors, word choice errors, and article errors accounted largely for ambiguity and in some few cases complete absurdity. Writing an entire paragraph of many sentences without a single punctuation mark makes the paragraph difficult to comprehend without reconstruction by the reader. Students were not able to indicate pauses in their writing with the comma and the period.

The major sources of these errors are basically intralingual. There may be confusion of the grammar of the target language, limited or incomplete knowledge of the target language, or simply, carelessness. Most of these errors are as a result of students' confusion of the grammar rules of the English language including homophone-induced errors such as misspelling resulting in another word in English such as 'as' in place of 'us'. Even though, the two words natural homophones of English, it has such status to some non-English-major students. Again, students' knowledge of the target language is incomplete and their limited knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the target language is the key contributing factor of such errors as punctuation errors, verb tense and form errors, subject-verb disagreements and capitalization errors. Also, some errors could simply be as a result of carelessness on the part of students. Some of these errors are influenced by social media language like 'soo' in place of 'so'. A little due diligence on the part of the learner could prevent some errors such as the failure to capitalize initial letters in sentences.

5. Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the kind of grammatical errors first-year students of Sunyani Technical University committed in their essay writings and their frequencies. This was to assist the researcher, an assistant lecturer of Communication Skills to ascertain the problem areas students might require urgent attention. The findings showed that the respondents made such errors as lexical errors (including wrong word choice, articles errors, spelling errors and capitalization errors), syntactic errors (such as subject-verb disagreement, preposition errors, punctuation errors), and morphological errors (verb tense errors, verb form errors, plural-singular (number) errors). In terms of frequencies, punctuation errors were the most frequently committed error type representing 24.48% of the total errors (866) committed, and the least committed error type was the verb tense (1.73%). Many of these errors resulted in miscommunication of ideas which have been responsible for low performance of students mostly in pre-tertiary national examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Board for Professional and Technical Examination (NABPTEX).

6. Recommendations

The findings of the study have implications for the teaching of English writing with reference to grammatical errors. The following are some recommendations:

English teachers should be trained to have adequate knowledge of how to identify students' writing errors as a diagnostic tool to inform the use of effective teaching strategies to treat them. Error analysis needs to be mandatory periodic practice for teachers to undertake on their students for proper evaluation of their progress. Error analysis can provide information on the progress of students in learning a target language, which is then used to improve the teaching process so that they could still properly use the language. (Agustinasari et al, 2022). Students need to be openly, frankly, and individually engaged on their shortcomings to raise some level of awareness of their personal flaws.

Also, English language teachers should serve as models by using appropriate English in their speech and writing for students to emulate. It would help their students to raise their awareness of how to organize English writing and how units of sentences and paragraphs are connected with one another to form meaningful text.

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