

English Writing Errors of Kurdish EFL Undergraduates: An Error Analysis

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to identify, characterize, and evaluate writing errors made by Kurdish EFL students at Cihan University in Duhok, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In the study, 37 third-year students from the English language department participated. The primary data collection instrument was the students' response sheets for the poetry midterm exam. The errors were first diagnosed and classified into several categories. According to the findings of this study, eight types of writing errors were committed by the participants which were spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, prepositions, verb misuse, and pronoun misuse. The findings of this study also revealed that the most common errors committed by the Kurdish learners were punctuation and capitalization. Such results are important for EFL teachers because they encourage them to pay careful attention to their students' writing errors and utilize them as pedagogical guidelines while designing activities.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Sources of Writing Errors, English Writing Errors, EFL, Writing Skills

1. Introduction

When it comes to learning a language, the writing skill, which is one of the four language skills, is frequently regarded as the most difficult, especially in a country like the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in which English is taught as a foreign language in schools across the region. Although English is taught at all levels of education, from crèche to university, writing skill is still hard for the learners. Learners develop both receptive and productive abilities throughout their studies, such as listening and reading, as well as writing and speaking. To learn the language, learners must take into consideration all four of these language abilities, since they are inextricably linked. It is widely recognized that English writing is one of the most difficult skills for non-native English speakers and much more difficult for EFL instructors to teach (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Kurdish EFL teachers must concentrate on all language skills without prioritizing any of them, but they must give particular attention to their students' writing (Amnuai, 2020). In terms of writing abilities, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is unique since the Arabic alphabet is utilized in

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classrooms rather than the Latin alphabet. As a result, it takes more time, effort, and experience for learners to improve their writing abilities. Numerous studies have been undertaken on the writing errors of Kurdish learners (Ahmed, 2017; Omar, 2019; Abdullah & Muhammad, 2020; Aljaf, et al., 2021).

The studies examine written corrective feedback, error correction, and the writing issues encountered by Kurdish EFL learners. Additionally, the studies that Kurdish learners' English writing proficiency is quite low, despite years of study. More intriguingly, it is surprising to find undergraduate students majoring in the English language have the same difficulties with English writing abilities as their peers from other departments. Kurdish EFL learners' poor writing abilities are partially attributed to technology since the majority of the learners write messages, emails, assignments, and projects using electronic devices like smartphones, tablets, and computers. Furthermore, teachers should feel awful about their learners' poor writing performance since they can at the very least recognize the learners' mistakes and concentrate on them for correction. Even though a little amount of research has been conducted on this topic in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, none of these studies have been able to accurately identify Kurdish learners' English writing errors, and the sample used in these studies was not comprised of English language department students. As such, this study aims to shed light on the writing abilities of Kurdish EFL learners from the English Language department at Cihan University in Duhok, as well as to identify and categorize their most frequent writing errors. More precisely, the current study seeks to address the following questions:

1. What type of writing errors do Kurdish EFL students often make?
2. How frequently such writing errors occur in Kurdish EFL students' writings?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Error Analysis

Error analysis is a technique used to assess the speaking and writing abilities of foreign or second language learners. According to Crystal (2008), error analysis is a “technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics” (p.165). Many scholars have presented arguments from a variety of perspectives. For instance, Corder (1967) and Brown (2000) underline the importance of analysing learners' mistakes since they may help identify EFL learners' strengths and weaknesses in English writing abilities. Similarly, Al-Saudi (2013) believes that errors might assist language teachers in determining their students' progress. The concept of error analysis in the context of teaching and learning FL or SL dates all the way back to the 1970s. Over the last several decades, error analysis has attracted a large number of researchers to collect and explain language learners' errors made in writing and speaking. Many have misinterpreted the concept of error analysis in relation to learners' writing performance, although errors are seen as an integral element of the process of teaching and learning a language (Khansir, 2012); some even argue that they are an essential part of the language learning process (Corder, 1974). However, writing errors cannot be eliminated, they may assist language teachers in placing a greater emphasis on the learners' writing abilities, analysing their errors, identifying the causes for their errors, and proposing an applicable remedy. Therefore, writing errors must be taken into account and should not be overlooked as they help learners develop their writing abilities. According to Ellis

(2008), the analysis of errors may aid language teachers in identifying their students' writing errors and dealing with them in a reasonable manner, and they also assist them in paying more attention to the construction of resources for learners in the future. Aljaf, Ahmed, and Salim (2021), on the other hand, believe that learners' writing errors are seen as a stumbling block in the process of language acquisition and that they must be addressed quickly.

2.2 Sources of Errors

According to Lado (1957), the most common causes of mistakes are due to the learners' first language interfering with the target language learning process during the target language learning process. Typically, EFL learners discover that certain components of the target language are simple for them to learn, while other elements are difficult for them to acquire. In the case of these aspects being identical to those in their native language, they will be straightforward for them to understand. However, if the characteristics of the target language vary from those of their native language, it is assumed that they will find it challenging. In addition, this is true for Kurdish EFL students since several aspects of the Kurdish language are distinct from those of the English language. As a result, it takes a significant amount of time and effort for individuals to master the aspects of the language that are distinct from their native tongue. One such cause for making errors is overgeneralization, which occurs when learners believe that a pattern or norm in English functions without taking into account irregularities or exceptions. Another kind of learner's writing error that has been more prevalent in recent years is the use of technology, namely electronic gadgets that hinder the development of the learners' writing skills in English.

2.3 Types of Errors

Brown (2000) states that errors are classified into two broad categories: interlingual errors and intralingual errors. The former refers to errors that are obvious and attributable to first language interference, which is referred to as negative interlingual transfer. The latter refers to errors caused by wrongly applying target language rules. Based on the researcher's observation of Kurdish writing and the findings of studies, Kurdish EFL Learners often make errors with plural nouns, third-person singular (s/es), capitalization, tenses, prepositions, and word order (Aljaf et al., 2021). Despite the problems that Kurdish EFL learners face in the classroom, EFL teachers cannot avoid the reality that they are not paying attention to their students' low performance in English language writing.

2.4 Previous Studies

The problem of writing errors among EFL learners has lately captured the attention of scholars. Numerous studies have been undertaken across the globe to explore and assess learners' English writing errors. In the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, a few studies concentrating on Kurdish EFL learners' writing errors have been conducted, but none have been able to demonstrate the specific types of errors the learners make while writing English. Chen (2004), for example, examined Chinese ESL students' English writing errors. It was revealed in his research that students transmitted grammatical components from the Chinese to the English language. Ridha (2012) performed research to ascertain Iraqi EFL students' essay writing errors. The data indicated that students made a variety of errors, the most common of which were grammatical, word order, and grammatical errors. Additionally, the findings of his investigation indicated that the primary source

of the students' errors was Arabic language interference. Köroglu (2014) evaluated the syntactic errors made by Turkish EFL learners in Turkey using the writings of 23 students at Gazi University. The study showed that students committed both intralingual and interlingual errors, most notably overgeneralization and violation of grammatical norms while employing prepositions. Mahmood (2016) did another research to detect and evaluate the writing errors made by EFL students at two colleges in the Kurdistan Region. He accomplished the study's objective by administering the Cambridge Standard Writing Test (CSWT). The study's results suggested that the participants' major writing challenges were grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Likewise, Abdullah (2020) conducted a study to determine the kind and frequency of errors made by Kurdish EFL students. The researcher collected data for the study by administering a composition exam to participants. The study discovered that the most often made errors by participants were in punctuation and capitalization. Aljaf, Ahmed, and Salim (2021) performed the most current research on writing error analysis in the Kurdistan Region. Their research sought to investigate the types and frequency of errors made by students in their writing. 80 writing examples from their students were randomly selected to identify and determine the most frequent errors. Their study discovered that the majority of students' compositions had spelling, punctuation, grammatical, and lexical problems.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The data for this research was gathered via the use of a mixed-method design, namely a corpus design and qualitative methods. In the words of McCarthy and Sampson (2005), corpus design refers to the study of language that has been produced in a real-world situation, such as students' replies to an exam question. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is a type of scholastic research, and in order to conduct it, researchers must rely on the opinions of participants, ask detailed and long questions, collect data that is primarily composed of texts written by participants, describe and analyze the words used by participants in the texts based on themes, and conduct a formal analysis of the data collected.

4.2 Participants

In the present study, a sample of 37 third-year students (22 females and 15 males) from Cihan University's English department in Duhok, Iraq's Kurdistan Region participated. All participants were of Kurdish origin and were between the ages of 21 and 25.

4.3 Instrument

The midterm examination papers of students enrolled in the poetry course "19th Century Poetry" served as the main instrument for gathering data for this study. The exam consisted of three explanatory questions. Because of this, the students' answers must have been descriptive in nature. More specifically, the questions were as follows: a) Explain the theme of "Death" in the poem "Break, Break, Break" by Tennyson, b) Why does the poet repeat the word "Break" three times? and c) How is the theme of POWER presented in the poem "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning?

4.4 Procedures

In what seemed to be a routine midterm exam, the question papers were distributed to the students without their knowledge that their answers would be collected and analyzed for research reasons. The students had only one hour to complete their answers to the questions. After collecting the students' answer sheets, the researcher went over them and corrected their answers. Following that, the papers were assessed by two additional experienced professors in order to decide their reliability. In the course of verifying and revising the papers, the researcher made a point of noting any errors he came across and recording them in a notebook.

4.5 Data analysis

For the purposes of this study, the researcher used the methodologies employed by Corder (1974) in his study in order to examine the data acquired. First and foremost, every word and phrase written by the students in their replies was thoroughly examined to see what kinds of errors they had made in their writing. Second, the sorts of errors were grouped into distinct parts with the use of coding, which was then translated into a percentage in order to determine the frequency of occurrence. Third, the findings of this study were compared to those of some other previous studies that had been conducted for the same purpose as this one. The results of this research were analyzed using the categorization of writing errors devised by Chanquoy (2001), which was based on the findings of a previous study. The following are examples of these errors:

1. Spelling errors: This category includes errors that are connected to orthography.
2. Grammatical errors are divided into four categories: gender errors, number errors, agreement of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, and subject-verb agreement.
3. Punctuation errors: This category is concerned with issues with punctuation and capitalization.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Types of English Writing Errors Made by the Kurdish EFL Undergraduate Students in Their Answers:

The findings of this study revealed that Kurdish EFL students from the English department at Cihan University in Duhok, Iraq, made a variety of errors in their writings, including errors in spelling, capitalization, grammar, punctuation, incorrect use of pronouns, prepositions, articles, and incorrect use of verbs as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification of error types

No.	Type of errors	Example of error identified	Definition of error type
1	Spelling	freind, ded, spiker, marrege	The students misspelled the words "friend," "death," "speaker," and "marriage."
2	capitalization	<i>the</i> duke's control over his late wife is so extreme. <i>tennyson</i> is trying to stress the harsh way surfs persistently crash on the seashore.	At the start of the sentence, the initial letter of the word <i>the</i> is written in lowercase. <i>Tennyson's</i> proper noun's initial letter is not capitalized.
3	Grammar	After his wife died, he <i>isn't</i> able to smile.	The correct form: After his wife died, he <i>wasn't</i> able to smile.
4	Punctuation	This poem is recounted by the Duke of Ferrara who practices his voice to achieve the power of those around <u>him</u> <u>He</u> even speaks for his deceased <u>wife</u> ; the duke determines who is allowed to see her <u>portrait</u> the speaker uses an unusual trimester because most of the lines consist of three metrical feet such as <u>sea me play bay</u>	Each sentence must end with a period. The proper version is as follows: (This poem is recounted by the Duke of Ferrara who practices his voice to achieve the power of those around <u>him</u> . He even speaks for his deceased <u>wife</u> . The Duke determines who is allowed to see her <u>portrait</u> .) Comma must be used between (sea me play bay) and a period must be used to mark the conclusion of the sentence. Just like this: (The speaker uses an unusual trimester because most of the lines consist of three metrical feet such as <u>sea, me, play, bay.</u>)
5	Misuse of pronouns	"My Last Duchess" is a poem that shows the silence enforced upon a <u>Duchess</u> . <u>He</u> was seen as on <u>his</u> own and isolated at the start of the poem.	The Duchess is a feminine title. As a result, the pronoun used to refer to it should be (she, her) rather than (he, his). The correct form is: "My Last Duchess" is a poem that shows the silence enforced upon a <u>Duchess</u> . <u>She</u> was seen as on <u>her</u>

			own and isolated at the start of the poem.
6	Prepositions	The speaker was calling the waves to hit stones <u>in</u> the shore hard.	In this case, the preposition (in) does not correspond to the word (shore). This is the proper preposition: (on the shore). The speaker was calling the waves to hit the stones <u>on</u> the shore hard.)
7	Articles	The Duke considers everything that he owns and everybody with whom he lives <u>as opportunity</u> to increase his power over the people.	In this sentence, article (an) is omitted from the sentence. The correct sentence is: (The Duke considers everything that he owns and everybody with whom he lives as an opportunity to increase his power over the people.)
8	Misuse of verbs	People ask questions about the Duchess but the Duke <u>tells</u> all the <u>questions</u> .	The word "tells" is improper and does not go with the word "questions." The correct form is: (People ask questions about the Duchess but the Duke <u>answers</u> all the questions.)

Table 1 shows that the Kurdish EFL students at Cihan University-Duhok produced a variety of writing errors. Their text had problems in spelling, capitalization, grammar, punctuation, pronoun usage, preposition misuse, article misuse, and verb usage.

5.2 Frequency of Writing Errors Made by the Kurdish EFL Students

The present study also aimed to investigate the errors committed by the Kurdish EFL students in their writing and to find out which type of writing errors are the most common. The findings of the study found that the students made some same mistakes repeatedly in their writing. See Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of the writing error types

Type of error	Frequency	Percentage %
Spelling	20	10.9
Capitalization	31	17.0
Grammar	18	9.8
Punctuation	37	20.3
Misuse of pronouns	13	7.1
Prepositions	27	14.8
Articles	21	11.5
Misuse of verbs	15	8.2
Total	182	100

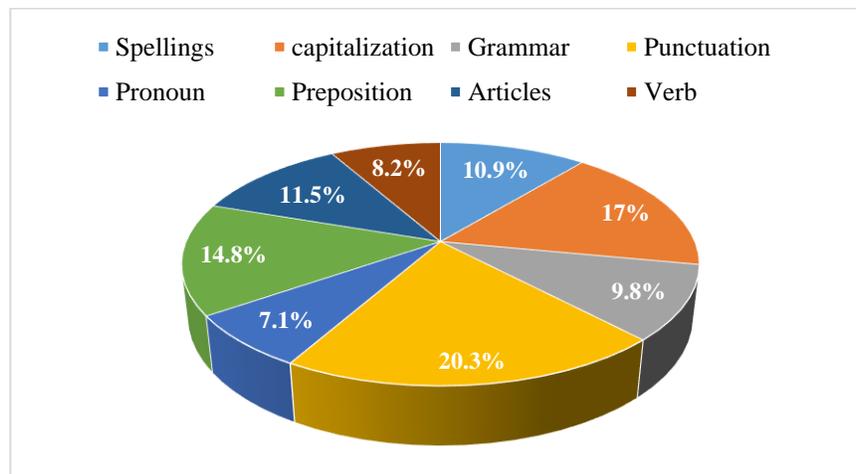


Figure 1: Kurdish EFL students' writing errors

Table 2 shows that punctuation errors (Frequency= 37; Percentage=20.3%) were the most frequent type of writing errors made by the students. The second most frequent type of error was capitalization (Frequency=31; Percentage=17%). The third most frequent error type committed by the students was preposition (Frequency=27; Percentage=14.8%). Some other kinds of errors such as articles (Frequency=21; Percentage=11.5%), spelling (Frequency=20; Percentage=10.9%), and grammar (Frequency=18; Percentage=9.8%) were relatively common errors in the students' writing. Misuse of verbs (Frequency=15; Percentage=8.2%) and Misuse of pronouns (Frequency=13; Percentage=7.1%) were also discovered in the Kurdish students' writing.

5.3 Discussions

This study aimed at examining the writing errors made by Kurdish EFL students at Cihan University-Duhok. To consider the first question of this study, the findings found that the students committed several different types of errors in English writing. One of these types of errors was spelling. The common misspellings that the Cihan University-Duhok students made were: (1) e before i in the word *acheive

instead of achieve, *beleive instead of believe, and *freind instead of friend. (2) one letter n in the word *begining instead of beginning, (3) missing r in the word *suprise instead of surprise, (4) o before w in the word *tow instead of two, (5) missing h in the word *wich instead of which, (6) missing l in the word *realy instead of really, (7) adding the letter c in the word *neccessary instead of necessary, (8) missing e in the word *happend instead of happened.

These results verified Mahmood's (2016) observation that spelling constituted a kind of writing error. Furthermore, this study revealed that Kurdish EFL students often ignored capitalization in their writing. For example, regardless of the kind of function of the word, the majority of participants in this study did not capitalize the initial letter of a word that should have been capitalized.

Moreover, the first letter of the proper nouns was not capitalized by most of the students who participated in this study like *tennyson. The results of the study are in line with Koroğlu (2014). The results of this study revealed that the students made grammatical mistakes in their writing. One example of this type of error is the sentence *The Duke should _ happy with the painting. It is obvious that the student has not used the infinitive be between the modal verb should and the adjective happy. The correct sentence is The Duke should be happy with the painting. In a nutshell, the results of the current study revealed some other types of writing errors committed by Kurdish students including punctuation, misuse of pronouns, prepositions, articles, and misuse of verbs. These results match the findings of several previous studies conducted by Aljaf, Ahmed, and Salim (2021) and Abdullah (2020).

Regarding the second question, this study's results revealed that the most common types of writing errors made by Kurdish students were punctuation, capitalization, and prepositions. These sorts of writing errors are attributed to a variety of variables, including the student's native language and the Arabic alphabet, due to the students' lack of familiarity with the English alphabet. The findings of this research corroborate those of Ridha's (2012) study.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

One of the most important obstacles that EFL students confront in the process of learning English is writing skills, particularly in a place like the Kurdistan Region of Iraq where English is taught as a foreign language. Due to the students' unsatisfactory performance in writing especially in the places in which their alphabets are different from the English letters, language educational experts are always seeking to apply new techniques to discover, categorize, and evaluate the writing errors. Therefore, this study aimed at assessing the sorts and frequency of errors produced by Kurdish EFL students studying at Cihan University-Duhok in their answers to the poetry exam. The results of the study indicated that the students made many kinds of errors including spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, misuse of verbs, articles, misuse of pronouns, and prepositions. Furthermore, the study found that the most common sorts of errors the students made were punctuation, capitalization, and prepositions. The articles, spelling, and grammatical errors were also identified in the students' exam papers. Despite increased attempts to discover and evaluate the writing errors made by students, additional study is necessary to create the most effective technique for enhancing students' writing abilities.

6.2 Recommendations

The following are some suggestions made by the study team:

1. Curriculum designers should give greater emphasis to students' writing abilities while developing their courses.
2. Teachers should provide immediate feedback to their students when they make writing errors.
3. Teachers must provide additional opportunities for their students to practice their writing skills in the classroom by incorporating exercises into their lessons.
4. Teachers should provide writing projects to their students in order to improve their writing skills.
5. When students make grammatical mistakes, teachers should identify the errors and correct them as quickly as feasible.

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