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Analysis of Errors in the Use of English Finite Verbs by Undergraduate Students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract

The present study investigates the types of errors committed by undergraduate students in the use of English finite verb in their English writing. The study used a survey descriptive design for data collection from a sample of hundred students from five institutes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The data was collected through an elicitation test in the form of essay on given topics. The essays were checked for errors in the use of English finite verbs. The data was then analyzed by using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy developed by Dulay et al. (1982). A total of 425 errors related to finite verbs in their written compositions were analyzed. The most prevalent types of errors were the errors of misformations followed by omission errors and addition errors, followed by the least frequent errors in the form of misordering. The findings suggest due consideration of finite verbs while teaching English.

Key Words: *Finite verb, L2 writing, Surface Strategy Taxonomy Omission, Addition, Misformation and Misordering.*

Introduction

Teaching of English has occupied a special place in the education system of Pakistan. English language is taught in Pakistan as a compulsory subject from class 1 to graduate level. Learners should be exposed to four skills to successfully master English language (Brown, 2000). But from an academic point of view, out of these skills, writing is more important for learning a second language (Munasikin, 2025). Writing skill is generally considered more challenging to acquire while learning second language being influenced by first language to a

great extend (Bozdağ, Morris & Mo, 2024) and having some aspects of it such as planning, organizing, involving thinking process and need a good understanding of grammar (Nabil, 2025). Myles (2002) emphasizes that foreign and second language learners are prone to making errors. The errors can sometimes not be distinguished from dialectal features (Nguyen, Taslimipoor & Yuan, 2024). According to Hong et.al (2011), factors contributing to these errors include a lack of understanding and awareness of grammatical rules, inattentiveness, direct translation, language switching, extrapolation, and overgeneralization. Verbs in English are considered as one of the most important grammatical features. English verbs can be classified in several ways; one important classification is between finite and non-finite verbs. Finite verb, which is the central area of the study at hand, is different from non-finite verb (Liu, 2025). The word 'finite' derives from Latin means limited/ bounded i.e. specified for tense or modality. A finite verb is that form of the verb which agrees with its subject in person and number or a verb which changes its form according to the number, person or tense and must have subject is called finite verb. According to Eckersley (1960), the forms of the verb that can form the predicate by themselves are called finite verbs.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to identify, analyze, and categorize the errors made by undergraduate students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in their use of English finite verbs. The study aims to identify the types and frequencies of these errors, providing insights into the challenges faced by students in mastering finite verb usage. Additionally, it seeks to offer recommendations for improving teaching methodologies and learning strategies to enhance students' proficiency in English grammar, particularly, in the correct use of finite verbs.

Literature Review

Language being integral part of human nature is elastic and adaptive for capturing new realities by making it part of our existing experiences (Ehibor, Osimen & Adesiyon, 2025). Learning a foreign language is different from learning one's mother tongue and therefore, learners often make errors. In Pakistan, with the global status of English as a second language (Li, 2025) has become essential for international communication (Gao, 2024). Second language sometimes has different elements as comparative to native language. These differences lead the learners to make errors while using it (Hein, Driemel, Martin, Nie & Alexiadou, 2024). There are two major approaches to the study of learners' errors, namely Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis." Contrastive analysis (CA) was developed by Robert Lado (1957). It is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities between the first language and the target language based on the assumptions that: the similarities facilitate learning while differences cause problems. However, by the early 1970s, It became apparent that differences between the target language and the native language did not always lead to errors through transfer, nor was the native language the sole source of errors. Since CA failed to account for the errors committed by second language learners, Error Analysis (EA) emerged in 1970 as a complementary approach to account for the errors committed by second language learners.

Error Analysis (EA) is a branch of applied linguistics that plays an important part in the study of second language learning. It is the study and analysis of errors made by second and foreign language learners. Error

Analysis first proposed by Corder (1967), aims to analyze errors actually committed by learners in the process of second language acquisition. Unlike CA, EA shows that not all systematic errors made by the learner are due to learner's first language, but suggests that the learners' learning strategies are the main causes of errors, such as transfer, overgeneralization, simplification, avoidance, and overproduction. Corder (1974) argues that error analysis is a valuable tool in second language learning because it reveals the problematic areas for learners to syllabus designers, teachers, and textbook writers. When errors are repeated, especially if shared by most students in a class, it is helpful for teachers to bring these issues to the students' attention. Errors provide valuable feedback to teachers about how far students have progressed towards mastering the target language and what they still need to learn. By analyzing the types of errors students make, teachers can identify the areas that require more focus and practice. This information can guide teachers in designing remedial exercises and devoting more attention to the trouble spots.

Furthermore, Corder (1967) identifies three key reasons why errors are significant in language learning. First, error analysis enables teachers to understand the learning process and the strategies students use to acquire the target language. With this knowledge, teachers can adjust their teaching methods and materials to better support students' language learning. Second, they offer researchers valuable information regarding how language is acquired or learned, revealing the strategies and processes that students employ during their language discovery. Lastly, errors serve as a beneficial tool for learners themselves, as they can be viewed as mechanisms through which students facilitate their own learning. Research has demonstrated that recognizing and addressing learners' errors can effectively enhance grammatical accuracy (Carroll and Swain, 1993). Research studies on error analysis in the English written genre have been carried out globally. A research study carried out by Sarfraz (2011) examined the errors made by 50 Pakistani undergraduate students in written essays. This research found that the primary errors made by Pakistani EFL learners are grammatical, stemming from the interlanguage process. She identified several contributing factors, including insufficient practice and feedback, a lack of vocabulary in the target language, and low motivation among students. Additionally, the study highlighted that the absence of positive feedback and a growing indifference towards grammar instruction and practice further exacerbate these errors.

Researchers like Scott and Tucker (1974) and Sharma (1981), analyzed Saudi students' written composition. The focus of their studies was on the tense, aspect, and verb forms of English. Their findings showed that the predominant errors among students were in the use of finite verbs, auxiliaries, copula, and third person singular. They attributed the causes of these errors to generalization, interlingual interference and simplification of rules. Krairussamee (1982) conducted a study examining the errors in English compositions made by Thai undergraduates. He identified issues related to verbs, particularly concerning tense and subject-verb agreement. He attributed these errors to the complexity of the English verb system (Weng & He, 2025). Since the Thai language lacks a tense system, mastering the English verb system poses a significant challenge for these second-language learners.

A research study was conducted by Kim (1988) and he investigated errors in English verbs with reference to tense, mood, and voice. The results showed that errors in the use of the verb were frequent with reference

to tense, mood and voice. The causes he mentioned for these errors are overgeneralization, mother tongue transfer and simplification of the rules of the English language. Hazaymeh (1996) conducted a research study that aimed at investigating the second secondary students' errors in using English verb tenses. The researcher attributed the errors made by the students to various reasons such as mother tongue interference, overgeneralization, the complexity of the structures of the English verb tenses, a strategy of parallel structure and the ignorance of grammatical rules. Mardijono (2003) analyzed the written work of students in Indonesia. The finding indicated that morphological (21.1%) and syntactic errors (78.8%) were two main categories of errors. Khansir (2008) examined syntactical errors of second language learners at Mysore University in India. The study indicated that the errors have been committed by learners were pertaining to auxiliary verbs and tenses. This study highlighted that mother tongue interference, teaching English and learning strategies, complexity of the English language, lack of knowledge of the proper use of tenses could be responsible for the occurrence of such errors.

Wee (2009) analyzed learners' written verb-form errors and found that errors of misformation were the highest, followed by those of omission, addition and ordering, respectively. The researcher stated that the causes behind these errors were the influence of the learners' mother tongue, the complexities of the English verb system, teaching methods, materials used, and learner strategies. The Chinese researchers like Chiang (1981), Yang (2006), and Sun & Shang (2009) analyzed the errors of verb usage in the writings of Chinese EFL learners. Their findings and discussion revealed that errors regarding verb were of the highest frequency in the written composition of these learners. The verb errors discussed contained auxiliary verb errors, subject-verb agreement errors and mood errors. They revealed that, these errors were caused by overgeneralization, the incomplete application of rules, false concept hypothesized, native language interference, the exposure to the language and the learning environment. Stapa and Izahar (2010) and Zawaherh (2012) in their study investigated the errors of verbs with reference to subject-verb agreement in ESL context. Their finding and discussion revealed that the major grammatical errors that students make were in the use of correct form of verb and the lack of agreement between the subject and the main verb. The results of the study highlighted the causes behind the errors were interlingual errors caused by the interference of the learner's mother tongue and their lack of grammatical knowledge.

Thus, the existing literature reveals that many researchers have tackled error analysis (EA) in many aspects of languages in general and verb errors in particular. However, there appears to be a gap in the research regarding the types and frequency of errors in using English finite verbs made by Pakistani ESL learners at the university level. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring and investigating the types and frequency of errors in the use of English finite verbs in the writing of undergraduate students.

Research Methodology

This study aimed to determine the types and frequencies of finite verb errors in the writing of undergraduate level students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A survey descriptive design was used to collect data about these types and frequencies of errors in the use of English finite verb. The population included in this study were all undergraduate students enrolled in BS English program in the Department of English Hazara

University, Mansehra Khyber Pakhtunkhawa. A sample of hundred students was selected through convenient sampling technique. The data was collected through descriptive essays which were marked for the error in the use of English finite verbs only. The data was analyzed then for the types of error. Errors in each composition were underlined and labeled with a specific code for classification purposes. Subsequently, errors were classified using Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which categorizes errors into Omission, Addition, Misformation, and Misordering. After classifying students' errors, the frequency and percentage of each type of errors were calculated. To find out the percentage of each error type, the following formula $P = f/n \times 100$ was applied in which P= percentage, f= frequency of errors and n= number of total errors. These errors then were classified into different types including omission error, addition Error, misformation error and misordering error. The obtained data was analyzed by using several analysis steps like identifying the error, classifying the errors, quantification of errors and discussion of errors. A pilot study was carried out on ten students who were not part of the present study. The students produced essay on the same topic with different intervals. The responses of students showed consistency in answers. This established the reliability of the instrument. The topic selected for data collection was evaluated by a team of three expert language teachers and researchers who confirmed that the essay topic was adequate for the research purpose and making the research findings valid.

Results

After collecting the essays, all the hundred essays were read carefully and checked for identification of relevant error only i.e. finite verb errors, while ignoring all other errors. Then, only finite verb errors were categorized with respect to their types and subtypes using Surface Strategy Taxonomy that categorizes errors into four major types: omission, addition, misformation and misordering. The frequency and percentage of each type of errors related to finite verbs has been tabulated in table 1 below.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Error Types Based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy

S/No	Error Types	Sub-categories of Errors	Frequency of Error	Percentage
1	Omission		160	37 %
2	Addition	Simple addition	15	3 %
		Regularization	42	8 %
		Double marking	21	4 %
3	Misformation	Regularization	70	17 %
		Archi-forms	110	25 %
		Alternating Forms	0	0 %
4	Misordering		14	3 %
Total Errors			425	98 %

The table above illustrates the frequencies and percentages of different error types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. It is clear from the data that students made a total of 425 errors in their written compositions, each with different frequencies and percentages. Notably, misformation errors are the most prevalent errors, occurring 180 times and accounting for 42% of the total errors. The next most frequent errors

are those of omission with 160 times making up 37% of the total errors. Addition errors occurring 74 times and making up 17% of the total errors, while misordering errors are the least frequent, occurring only 14 times, constituting 3% of the total errors related to the use of finite verbs. Moreover, the detail explanation of each error types, including their examples taken from the written compositions of the students, is given below:

Error of Omission

According to the data analysis, omission errors are the second most prevalent type of error, both in terms of frequency and percentage. The researchers observed 160 instances of omission errors, accounting for 37% of the total errors. Omission is the type of error which is characterized by the absence of an item that must be present in well-formed structure. That may involve the omission of function words like (prepositions and articles), morphemes like (third-person singular-*s/-es*, past and past participle-*d,-ed*), and auxiliaries (primary and modal auxiliaries), without which the sentence is ungrammatical. Regarding omission errors observed in the study, students frequently omitted third person singular verb markers (*-s, -es, -ies*), past tense markers (*-d, -ed*) in their writings. Moreover, they also omitted the necessary verb to be. In this case, the omission of '*was*' occurred most frequently at 6%, followed by '*were*' at 5%, '*is*' at 4%, '*are*' at 3%, and '*am*' at 1%, as shown in table 2.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of verb 'to be'

Errors	Frequency	Percentage
a) Omission of <i>was</i>	10	6%
b) Omission of <i>were</i>	8	5%
c) Omission of <i>is</i>	7	4%
d) Omission of <i>are</i>	6	3%
e) Omission of <i>am</i>	3	1%
Total Errors	34	19%

Error of Addition

Base on the data analysis, addition errors are the third most frequent type of error in the students' written compositions, occurring 74 times or 17.54% of total finite verb errors. Addition is a type of errors which is characterized by the inclusion of an element/item which must not be present in a well-formed structure. In the present study, addition errors occurred when students incorrectly added verb markers to the verbs. These errors were observed in two instances:

1. Students added the markers (-s, -es, -ies) to verbs following plural nouns or pronouns in the simple present tense. For example, 'They walks...' or 'Students likes...' instead of 'They walk...' or 'Students like...'
2. Students added the past tense markers (-d, -ed) to verbs where it was inappropriate to do so. For example, 'He putted...' or 'I feeled...' instead of 'He put...' or 'I felt...'

Additionally, double marking errors were noted, where students used two finite verbs (*to be/ to do* and *verb*) in the same clause, rendering the sentences ungrammatical. For instance, they wrote, "she is likes the university life. She does not likes..... The students did not went....."

There are three types of addition errors: simple addition, regularization, double marking.

- I. Simple Addition Error: It refers to the use of an element which should not be present in a well-formed structure. For example, *the students doesn't live in hostel. Many students complains because...*
- II. Regularization Error: It refers to the incorrect use of regular markers in place of irregular ones, such as, *we eated lunch in the cafeteria. He teached us prose. She buyed some books etc.*
- III. Double Marking Error: It refers to the use of two finite verbs in the same clause e.g., "she does not knows my name. We did not went to university on Friday."

All these sub-categories of addition errors were noted in the data. Findings revealed that the students frequently made errors by adding markers (-s, -es, -ies) to verbs following plural nouns or pronouns. Additionally, many students struggled with converting finite verbs into their past forms for both regular and irregular verbs. They were often confused about the appropriate use of (-d, -ed) with verbs, especially with irregular verbs where these morphemes are not needed. Furthermore, students also made errors involving double marking by using both the auxiliary verb and the lexical verb in finite forms. According to grammatical rules, each clause should contain only one finite verb, but the students were unable to adhere to this rule. Consequently, these examples indicate that the students did not grasp the basic grammatical rules of English regarding the use of finite verbs, leading to errors in their compositions.

Regarding the frequency of these errors, regularization errors were the most frequent type of addition error, occurring 42 times and accounting for 8% of the total addition errors. Double marking errors were the second most frequent, occurring 21 times and making up 4% of the total errors. Simple addition errors were the least common, occurring 15 times and accounting for 3% of the total errors.

Error of Misformation (Mis-selection)

Misformation errors constituted the highest frequency of errors among the total errors made by the students in their writings, occurring 180 (42%) times out of the total number of errors. This error is characterized by the use of the wrong form of the verb in place of correct verb form. According to Dulay et al. (1982:158), there are three kinds of misformation error they are: regularization error, archi-form and alternating error. Based on data analysis, the researcher found two kinds of misformation errors: regularization and archi-form.

- I. Regularization Error: It is an error in which a regular marker is used in place of an irregular one. In regularization error, the students regularize the irregular verbs. For example: *eated* for *ate*, *runed* for *run*, *maked* for *made*.

- II. Archi-form Error: According to Duly et al., (1982) archi-form errors are the selection of one member of a class of forms to represent others in the class. For example, “...most of talented students which is...” instead of “...most of talented students which are...”

Findings revealed that the majority of students cannot correctly identify the past forms of verbs, whether they should be regular or irregular. As they added the suffix (-d, -ed) to irregular verbs to change the verb into past form which resulted errors in the category of regularization, a sub category of misformation. Moreover, they also used the verb to be in the wrong positions and made numerous errors, such as they used *was* instead of *were*, *is* for *are* and vice versa in in majority of sentences in their compositions. For example, they came up with errors like *students was/is...*, *the teacher were/are....*, *there is ten teachers....* and so on. In the same fashion, the students came up with errors like, “*student have.... university have.... and they has.... She don’t..., I does not.....*”

Moreover, they also made numerous errors in subject-verb number agreement, which is a fundamental aspect of English grammar. According to English grammar, it is essential for the verb to agree with the subject. A singular subject always takes a singular verb, while a plural subject takes a plural verb. For example, third-person pronouns such as "he, she, and it" use a singular verb with the -s inflection, as in "The boy//He/She/It runs." Conversely, plural subjects and pronouns like "I, we, you, and they" take the base form of the verbs without inflection. Thus, the students under study were unable to correctly use the forms of subject-verb agreement (SVA) for finite verbs, leading to numerous errors in this basic aspect of English grammar.

Regarding the frequency of these errors, ‘archi-form’ errors were the most frequent errors, accounting for 25% of the total misformation errors. Regularization errors were the second most common errors, making up 17% of the total misformation errors.

Error of Misordering (misplacement)

These errors involve incorrect placement of elements within a sentence. For instance, *what your father is doing? Teacher asked me, what your name is? Where you are from?* etc. The study revealed that students made only 14 misordering errors, accounting for 3% of the total errors. This indicates that they have generally gained proficiency in word order but still struggle with proper placement of finite verbs.

Conclusion

The present study set out to identify, analyze, and classify the errors made by undergraduate students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in their use of English finite verbs. The findings reveal that despite studying English as a compulsory subject from the early grades up to the university level, students frequently facing significant challenges in mastering the correct use of finite verbs, an essential component of English syntax. A total of 425 errors were identified, categorized using Dulay et al.’s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy. Among the four major error types, misformation errors emerged as the most frequent (42%), indicating that students often use incorrect or inappropriate verb forms, particularly in terms of subject–verb agreement and regular–irregular verb distinctions. Omission errors (37%) were the second most common, showing that learners frequently leave out essential finite verb markers such as -d, -ed, -s, -es and sometimes omitted the verb 'to be'. Addition errors (17%), including simple addition, regularization, and double marking, reflected students’ tendency to over-apply

grammatical rules, while misordering errors (3%) were found to be the least frequent, suggesting a comparatively better understanding of English word order.

These findings corroborate earlier research (Corder, 1974; Sarfraz, 2011; Chiang, 1981; Kim, 1988) which shows that second-language learners' difficulties in verb usage commonly stem from factors such as overgeneralization, mother-tongue interference, incomplete understanding of grammatical rules, and ineffective learning strategies. In the context of Pakistan, where English is used as a second language, the L1–L2 structural differences appear to significantly contribute to these verb-related errors. Furthermore, the high number of misformation and omission errors indicates insufficient mastery of fundamental grammatical concepts, particularly tense, agreement, and the correct selection of finite verb forms.

The study highlights important pedagogical implications. First, English language instructors must place greater emphasis on explicit teaching of finite verbs, subject-verb agreement, and irregular verb forms. Second, students need increased opportunities for guided writing practice accompanied by timely, constructive feedback. Third, curriculum designers and textbook developers should integrate targeted exercises that address common error patterns revealed in this study. Additionally, awareness of learners' typical error tendencies can help teachers adopt remedial strategies such as consciousness-raising tasks, contrastive grammar activities, and process-oriented writing instruction. Enhanced practice and feedback on these errors can help students gain a better grasp of English grammar and improve their writing skills.

Summing up, the study fills an important research gap by analyzing the types and frequencies of finite verb errors among Pakistani ESL learners at the university level. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of learners' grammatical challenges and provide direction for improving teaching methodologies aimed at enhancing grammatical accuracy in written English. Future research may extend this investigation by examining error patterns across different institutions, proficiency levels, and genres of writing to gain a broader perspective on finite verb acquisition in the Pakistani ESL context.

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