

## **Errors in the Usage of Verb in English Composition: A Study of Pakistani College Level Learners**

By

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### **Abstract:**

*The proper use of verb is important in producing a composition. This study is aimed at finding and analyzing errors in verb and also describing the major causes of errors in EFL college students' writing. This study is descriptive both in mode and nature. The population for this study was 72 second year, college students (both boys and girls) enrolled at various degree colleges located in Pishin, Balochistan in the academic year 2018/2019. The researcher employed quantitative research method; however, purposeful/purposive sampling was used for data collection. The findings revealed misformation error as one of the most challenging error type while misordering error as the least occurring error in students' writing. The study also found that the influence of students' first language was the main factor in occurrence of errors in verb in learners' composition.*

**Keywords:** The Process of Writing Verb, its types; error analysis; the use of verb

### **Introduction:**

Language is the only tool for human beings to communicate (Dewey, 2007). We can express our feelings, thoughts or opinions through the medium of language. The ability to communicate and express one's feelings, thoughts or ideas without an error is called language performance (Booth & Colomb, 2003). Language competence like language performance also has a vital role in any language. It is the ability to do something efficiently or successfully. Due to its scope, it is mandatory to

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acquire language competence for the proper use of a language. Language competence comprised four basic language skill/components, namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Sarfaraz, 2011). Khansir (2012) has classified these skills into two major categories namely receptive skill and productive skill. Receptive skill deals with listening and reading, while productive skill represents speaking and writing. In productive skill, writing is the most important and equally challenging skill of a language (Sarfaraz, 2011). It is believed that writing is an art and unlike speaking, requires ample grammatical knowledge and continuous practice (Keshavarz, 1999).

Khansir (2012) defines writing as an indirect expression of feelings, ideas or thoughts in a structured way. The graphic convention of language suggests that the main purpose of writing is not only to convey a message but also express the message in a polished and well-shaped written form which requires the use of a sophisticated vocabulary and refined sentence structure (Byren, 1996). Hence, writing can be rendered as an organized activity of words to convey or record a message.

English language has got certain symbols or set of letters that represent words and their related meanings (Khan, 2011). These signs, in a broader sense, are classified into some major language components which roughly contain phonological, lexical, pragmatic, syntactic, semantic, grammar and other components. It is important to have ample knowledge of these components to convey a written or verbal message. Due to its key role, the importance of Grammar cannot be denied in the catalogue of language components. Grammar studies the classes of words, their inflections and their function and relation in the sentence (Karim et al, 2015). The domain of grammar is vast but it roughly covers certain aspects of language such as verbs and tenses, nouns and adverbs etc (Word level grammar) and also covers phrases and clauses etc (sentence level grammar) (Bilal et al, 2013). Since, every aspect studied in grammar has vital role in English language but some aspects always require a proper attention, such as the structure, function and use of verb. Due to its importance and tricky use, verb has always been a major problem for foreign language learners (EFL) (Bilal et al, 2013). They often commit errors in the use of verb which results in an unproductive performance in writing.

Verb is defined as a word that describes an action, state or occurrence (Seaton & Mew, 2007). Miriam Webster dictionary (1999) defines verb more precisely as “A word that characteristically is the grammatical center of a predicate and expresses an act, occurrence or mode of being.”

Almost every small or large sentence by one or the other way contains a verb. The basic form of verb is called infinitive. The forms *bring*, *wash* and *eat* are infinitives (Ellis, 2008). Apart from this, verb contains two other forms called participles which are also forms that shape verb tenses, adjectives or nouns (Bilal et al, 2013). Verb has got numerous types such as finite verbs, none finite verbs, action verbs, linking verbs, auxiliary verbs and modal verbs. (Sudhakaran, 2015). Every type of verb has got its own use and meaning.

The foreign language learners often use verb incorrectly. They get confused in understanding the exact meaning and function of verb. That is why EFL learners fail to convey the desired message. They either use the incorrect form of verb, use verb in a wrong order or misspell it. Apart from this, the English language experts have roughly pointed seven most common verb tense errors in English language, such as; the usage of inconsistent verb forms, confusing the present tense, confusing the past tense, switching in and out of present and past tense, misusing the past continuous tense and altering the future tense (Sarfraz, 2011).

Most of the time, it is found that errors in the use of verb are caused by first language interference (Keshavarz, 1999). It is therefore mandatory for EFL learners not to depend on knowledge of their mother tongue. If EFL learners assume semantic sameness between learners' mother tongue and the target language, consequently affect writing in the target language. Since, English as a foreign language has got too many differences and dissimilarities with learners' mother tongue/first language, it therefore becomes difficult for EFL learners to use verb correctly. Hence, it is mandatory for EFL learners to avoid finding similarities between the two different languages and acquire ample grammatical knowledge and make it practice to avoid error in the use of verb.

### **Research Questions:**

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequent errors in verb in EFL learners' English composition?
2. What are the major causes of errors in the use of verb in EFL learners' composition?

## **Literature Review:**

### **Concept of Error:**

Error, in linguistics, is a term used for an unacceptable deviation from the linguistic roles in English language (Fisiak, 1981). The linguistics of English language commonly encompasses the roles of British and standard American varieties of English language (Sudhakaran, 2015). However, due to its importance in the modern world, English language has begot many other varieties which too have linguistic roles and regulations (James, 2001). Error making, for EFL learners, is inevitable. It is this process of error making that enables the EFL learners to improve their language skills (Khansir, 2012). Error, unlike mistake, has a different role and nature. Most of the time EFL students get confused in understanding the difference between the term error and mistake. Therefore, it is important here to simplify the main difference between error and mistake.

### **Error and Mistake:**

Corder (1981), in the case of error and mistakes, opines that error and mistake are two distinguished linguistic terms and concepts. According to Corder (1981) error is a regular pattern of learner's production contradicting the real model of target language. The underpinned learners' competence is exposed in their regular pattern. Corder (1981) asserts that the primary difference that lays in-between error and mistake, is that, mistake is an unintentional slip of tongue or memory lapses and can be altered once it is discovered while error is a linguistic deviation based on lack of related knowledge remains constant part of learners' production in target language. Hence, EFL/ESL learner may reform his mistake as he/she becomes conscious of the mistake being committed. But error, unlike mistake, is a different case. In the case of error making, the learner is completely unaware of the error he/she has made, believing that he/she has used the right form.

### **Error Types:**

Error has got numerous types and different linguists have given it different categories. Corder (1981) has divided errors into two main categories namely; Interlingua and interlingual errors. Interlingual errors are those errors which occur as a result of variance between the learner's first language and the target language while interlingual errors are those errors that are made by learner in the target language such as simplification, overgeneralization or the incorrect use of analogies and expressions.

Likewise, Dulay and Burt (1982) categorized errors into three main error types: Interference errors, developmental errors and unique/particular errors. Interference errors are errors that are made in the structure of target language; developmental errors are those errors that occur in target language as a result of the clash between L1 and ETL (English as a target language), while unique/particular errors are those errors which are neither developmental errors nor interference errors.

### **Error Analysis:**

Error analysis is defined as a method to study, explore and analyze unacceptable patterns used by language learners in the target language (Crystal, 2003). In other words, error analysis is a tool to determine the nature of occurrences, causes and effects of ineffective language in the light of linguistic rules and regulations (James, 2001). Keshavarz (1999) has defined error analysis as a way to collect learners' language samples, examine, discover and evaluate accordingly. However, Ellis (2008) classifies error analysis into a process that is guided by a four-stepped procedure as errors identification, description, explanation, and evaluation of errors. Hence, error analysis aims at identifying and rectifying errors in the target language.

### **Research Methodology:**

In this study the researcher employed quantitative research method. Quantitative research is a type of research strategy that deals with quantification of the analysis of the data (Dornyei, 2007). In other words it focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data. This method is used to acquire relatively conclusive answer to the research questions. According to quantitative research method roles, while using purposive data sampling, the data was collected from 72 EFL learners who were enrolled in different boys and girls colleges located in Pishin, Balochistan. In the process of data collection, the learners were asked to write an essay on a descriptive topic, of about 250 to 300 words.

The data was analyzed using 'descriptive statistics' followed by frequencies and percentages. The whole process of data analysis roughly contained three steps: checking learners' essays: coding the errors and finally producing the data in frequencies and percentages. The method used for error analysis in this study is grounded by Corder coined data analysis method which is comprised data collection, identification and description of errors.

### Findings:

The findings suggest that the incorrect use of verb remained as the most frequent error. Errors in the use of verb are classified into several categories such as errors in the subject-verb agreement, incorrect use of verb-tense, misformation of the related verb, error in the verb order and sometimes not even using a verb. These errors are examined through the lens of four main error kinds namely; misformation errors, addition errors omission errors and misordering errors. EFL learners often find the right use of verb challenging and make such errors in their writing.

The data in table 1.1 indicates that misformation errors in verb occurred 477(78%%) times, addition errors occurred 54(08.94%) times, omission errors occurred 72(11.92%), while misordering error occurred only 01(0.16%) time. The number of overall errors found in the use of verb was 604.

*Table 1.1*

No	MF	Frequencies		
			Percentages	
1.	MF	477	78%	1
2.	OM	72	11.92%	
3.	Ad	54	08.94%	
4.	MO	01	0.16%	
<b>Total</b>		<b>604</b>		

The findings of the study revealed that misformation of verb appeared as one of the most problematic error type in participants' writing. Omission error in verb remained the second most frequent error with 72(11.92%) occurrences, addition error as the third most frequent error with 54(08.94%) occurrences while misordering error as the least frequent error with 01(0.16%) occurrences. The detailed description of the errors that have occurred in participants' writing is given below:

#### Misformation Error:

Verb is a grammatical center that shows an act, occurrence or state. Like most of other words, verb is also comprised two or more words. It is mandatory for a learner to memorize the exact spellings and forms of the

verbs being used while writing. Due to lack of writing practice or weak memory issues, EFL learners often misspell and misform verbs in their composition. Most of the time, learners do not give proper attention to the importance of /e/ in morphology and the difference in between the sounds of /f/ and /p/ in morphology and phonetics. The learners either omits add or put a letter in wrong order resulting misformation errors in verb which produce incorrect meanings. For instance, learners put unnecessary /e/ in the verb like: “I have read many books but this book has *changed* my life.” which resultantly gives an incorrect meaning. Similarly, learners sometimes, replace the verb “*think*” with the noun “thing” in the example like “Modern people *thing* that friends are not important in life.” which definitely gives incorrect meaning. In some cases EFL learners cannot differentiate between the verb and its noun form. As a result, learners make errors like “Her father *guidance* her in everything” which technically is a wrong form with an incorrect meaning. Apart from this, As Huang (1999) suggests there are almost seventeen most common misformation errors that are frequent found in EFL learners’ composition, such as the errors of no agreement between subject and verb, misusing in forming the passive voice, misusing verb tense and unwanted infinitive after auxiliary verb and the like. .

#### **Addition Errors in Verb:**

Verb has a key role in the formation of a grammatical sentence. Though its importance cannot be denied but it’s over usage can also create problems in understanding the message. EFL learners beside misformation of verb often include verbs which are irrelevant and have no relevancy to the sentence. Mostly, action and state verbs are used in addition by the learners in their writing Based on findings, the participants’ essays reflected a number of addition errors in the use of verb. For instance, the learner in the sentence, “She is *belong* from district killa Abdullah” has used the verb ‘*belong*’ in addition, because the sentence already gives a complete sense without using the main verb. Similarly, in the sentence “We also share books and other things *send*” the participant has used an additional verb “send” to give the same meaning that has already been given by another verb ‘share’ in the start of the sentence. Hence, addition of unnecessary verbs always creates problems which not only make the sentence incorrect but also make the reader unable to pick the purported meaning.

### **Omission Errors in Verb:**

Verb is used to show an action, state or mode of being. Due to its key role in sentence formation, verb has got the utmost importance among all other parts of speech. A sentence without a verb is reckoned as incorrect. English grammar maintains that a sentence must have a verb. Most of the time EFL learners omit verb when it is necessary to use. The omission of any word (here verb) in a sentence, not only changes the structure of the sentence but also gives the wrong message. According to linguistics, the omission of verb is an unacceptable deviation and resultantly called omission error in verb. The example below clearly shows omission error in verb, “There many scholarly lessons in this book.” In this example the learner has omitted helping verb which makes the whole sentence incorrect.

### **Misordering Errors in Verb:**

In every sentence structure, all linguistic unites have got their own places. Putting a word in wrong place spoils the order of the sentence. Misordering errors in verb are those errors where the learner has used verb in wrong place. EFL learners, specifically the beginners, often find the right use of verb challenging. Therefore, they fail to use verb in proper order. Based on findings, the learners used verb in wrong order in their composition. The example taken from learner’s essay, “Imranullah the Holy Quran recites every morning” clearly shows the incorrect verb order in the sentence.

### **Discussion:**

Based on findings, the study discovered that the participants committed lots of errors in the usage of verb in writing. Since, error-free writing is a challenging task for EFL learners; they can and should practice writing and try to focus the weaknesses that are highlighted by their mentors or language teachers. In this respect, EFL teachers also own the responsibility to enable their students to focus their writing skill. In fact, writing skill for foreign language learners often remains difficult, especially for the early beginners and adult language learners. They find it estranged and difficult. As a result, they make a number of grammatical errors, particularly errors in verb. Although, error making for EFL learners is inevitable in writing but if they don’t succeed to overcome error-making in the initial stages, it will not be removed ahead.



The misformation error in verb came up as one of the most common error in the study. It occurred for 477(78%) times. Misformation error in verb with such a large frequency suggests that verb is the only grammatical unite that is mostly used incorrectly by EFL learners in the concern area. The findings also revealed that participant errors showed that they did not give proper attention to the spellings, similarities and dissimilarities of the spelling and they misspell due to homophonousness of verbs. For instance, in the example, “We **haw** a long standing friendship” the learner has misformed the verb “have” which has turned the sentence wrong. Similarly, in another example, “Couldn’t **brake** her habit of late rising” the learner has misformed the verb “break” due to its homophonous nature with the word “brake”. There are some other cases where verbs are misformed due to their spelling resemblance with nouns.

Based on findings, the study found that addition error in verb appeared as second most common error. It occurred 54(08.94%) times in participants’ essays. Though, it is mandatory to use verb in a sentences but it also important to know that the unnecessary use of verb falsify the structure of the sentence. Same here, the EFL learners put unnecessary verbs in a number of cases. It is often the over use of state verb and action verb that make problems in understanding the desired meaning. For instance, the learner in the sentence, “*She is **belong** from district killa Abdullah*” has used the verb ‘**belong**’ in addition which has technically made the sentence incorrect. Hence, the overuse of unnecessary verbs often becomes a challenge for EFL learners. It is due to lack of grammatical knowledge and writing practice.

In the course of study, the researcher found that omission errors in verb and misordering errors in verb have the least occurrences. Omission errors in verb occurred 72(11.92%) times, while misordering error in verb appeared only once. It was because the participants have known the importance of verb in sentence formation and have also worked on the order of the sentence.

The findings of the study show that the incorrect use of verb in writing is influenced by learners’ mother tongue/first language. It is obvious that Pashtu (EFL learners’ mother tongue) unlike English, has different language structure and grammatical unites. Due to its different nature, the right use of verb for foreign language learners become challenging. The past studies have also proved that the way verb is formed and used in English is hardly done in most learners’ first languages. Therefore, it

becomes hard for EFL learners to produce writing without committing error in the use of verb.

Karim, Fathema and Hakim (2015) in their study found that misformation errors are the most common error type among Bangladeshi EFL learners at International Islamic University, Chittagong. The findings also revealed that the misformation error in verb agreement was committed more than any other error in verb. The main factor of their erroneous writing was mother tongue interference. Karim et al (2015) findings are, to a large extent, similar to the findings of this study, especially the occurrence of misformation error in verb as the major error type and L1 interference in the use of verb.

In this study, the data analysis also highlighted that there are some other characteristics that influence learners writing to commit errors in the use of verb, such as interlingual interference, overgeneralization, lack of grammatical knowledge and the lack writing practice. As a result, not only learners but EFL teachers should also know the major role of these factors in influencing errors in verb made by EFL learners. The current study also focused the improvement of grammatical roles in English and also emphasized designing a concise EFL course and teaching methods. Last but not the least, this study can also be helpful in learning English as a foreign language and can provide appropriate feedback in writing.

### **Conclusion:**

The present study has been conducted to find out the most frequent errors in the use of verb and also highlight the negative influence of learners' first language/mother tongue in error making. In this respect, the researcher classified error into four error types; addition error, misformation error, omission error and misordering error. Based on findings, misformation error appeared as one of the most challenging error, while misordering error as the least occurring error in learners' writing. The study also found numerous factors responsible for errors in verb but mother tongue influence was the major factor that caused errors in EFL learners' writing. Though this study can be helpful for EFL learners but it is a limited attempt to analyze error in verb in learners writing and cannot cover all error types and categories. Therefore, other scholars are suggested to conduct a study in a wider range and population, and take interviews, or tests to collect data and analyze it to get better findings.

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