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A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF COMMON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN UNDERGRADUATE EFL WRITING

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Abstract: The research examines common grammatical error patterns in the written work of undergraduate Uzbek English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Writing samples were collected from 20 essays produced in response to IELTS Task 1 prompts. The main purpose of the study was to identify, classify, and quantitatively analyze frequent grammatical errors and to provide pedagogical insights for improving academic writing accuracy. A corpus-based Error Analysis (EA) approach was applied, using a synthesized 13-category tagging system adapted from Divsar and Heydari (2017) and Kutlimuratova (2021). Descriptive statistical analysis was used to calculate frequency distributions and compare error categories across the learner corpus. The participants included 12 female and 8 male undergraduate students, and all texts were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The results indicated that verb-related errors represented the most dominant category, followed by article and preposition errors. These difficulties were mainly associated with tense usage, subject–verb agreement, article omission, and inappropriate preposition selection. Additional errors were observed in noun number agreement, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation, though at lower frequencies. The findings highlight persistent challenges in morphosyntactic accuracy among EFL learners and suggest the need for more focused grammar instruction, meaningful writing practice, and effective corrective feedback strategies in academic writing classrooms.

Keywords: EFL writing, grammatical error analysis, corpus-based study, academic writing

Introduction

English is a primary medium of global communication and is widely taught in schools and higher education institutions worldwide. For undergraduate students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), the development of comprehensive language competence largely depends on writing skills, as effective scientific, academic, and social communication requires clear, grammatically accurate expression of ideas. In practice, however, many learners produce written work containing grammatical errors, which can adversely affect their academic performance,

communicative effectiveness, and motivation to learn the language. Analysis of EFL learners' writing indicates that the most common errors involve article usage, verb tense selection, preposition application, subject–verb agreement, and spelling conventions. These errors primarily stem from structural differences between the learners' first language and English, such as the absence of articles in their mother tongue, the complexity of English tense structures, and the direct transfer of native language rules into English. In some instances, incorrect verb forms, improper word order, or punctuation errors can obscure the intended meaning of a text. Addressing these errors is crucial, as understanding their patterns and underlying causes enables educators to design targeted interventions that enhance learners' grammatical accuracy, academic performance, and overall communicative competence.

Although numerous studies have explored grammatical errors among EFL learners, research specifically focusing on the written work of undergraduate students in higher education remains limited. Accordingly, this study aims to systematically identify and analyze the common grammatical errors made by undergraduate EFL learners, investigate their causes, and propose practical strategies for improving grammatical accuracy in academic writing. Previous research has begun to examine Uzbek EFL learners' writing through corpus-based error analysis. For example, Kutlimuratova (2021) demonstrated that systematic identification, coding, and quantification of errors, combined with descriptive statistics, can effectively reveal frequent error types and link them to plausible sources, such as limited grammatical knowledge, lexical gaps, or task-driven constraints. Her study utilized a 13-category tagging system aligned with the framework of Divsar and Heydari (2017), providing a comprehensive classification of grammatical errors. The present study follows this methodological approach, applying it to a new dataset: a corpus of 20 essays written by Uzbek undergraduate EFL learners in response to IELTS Task 1 prompts, using a synthesized tagging system inspired by Kutlimuratova (2021) and Divsar and Heydari (2017) to ensure comparability and pedagogical relevance.

Methods

The dataset comprises 20 essays written by undergraduate Uzbek EFL students as part of their regular academic writing coursework. The participants included 12 female and 8 male students. The texts represent short argumentative and descriptive compositions and were treated as a small learner corpus for grammatical error profiling. Because the present study focuses on the distribution of common grammatical errors rather than individual learner development, all essays were anonymized in the results tables.

The study adopts a corpus-based Error Analysis (EA) methodology in line with Kutlimuratova (2021), which conceptualizes EA as the systematic identification, classification, and quantitative examination of learner errors within a corpus of written texts. At the level of coding philosophy, the approach aligns with Dagneaux et al.'s (1998) Computer-aided Error Analysis (CEA) orientation, which emphasizes consistent tagging procedures to enable reliable frequency counting. It is also compatible with Chuang and Nesi's (2006) Structured error classification model where broad grammatical categories may be subdivided into more specific types where necessary. Furthermore, Rustamova's (2025) classification of frequent morphosyntactic errors informed the identification and interpretation of the most salient grammatical categories in the present dataset. In addition, Aminjonov (2026), in a corpus-based analysis of essays written by Uzbek English learners,

demonstrates the effectiveness of systematic tagging and frequency-based profiling in identifying recurring grammatical error patterns, which further supports the methodological orientation adopted in the present study.

Errors were coded using a synthesized set of 13 tags adapted from Divsar and Heydari (2017) and consistent with the framework described in Kutlimuratova (2021). The tags applied in this study include: A (Article), N (Noun: singular/plural), V (Verb: tense/inflection), P (Preposition), WF (Word Form), SS (Sentence Structure), WC (Word Choice), S (Spelling), Pun (Punctuation), I (Insertion), D (Deletion), CU (Confusing/Unclear), and O (Linking/Connecting). Operational definitions were based on the surface manifestation of each grammatical error in context.

Each essay was systematically examined for deviations from target-like grammatical usage. Identified errors were categorized according to the 13-tag scheme, and frequency counts were calculated per essay and per error type. The aggregated data were compiled into a spreadsheet for descriptive statistical analysis. The study reports total frequencies, percentage distributions, and descriptive comparisons across essays in order to determine the most common grammatical error patterns among undergraduate EFL students.

Results

The analysis of the 20 essays produced by undergraduate Uzbek EFL students yielded a total of 396 grammatical errors across the dataset. All identified errors were categorized according to the 13-tag classification scheme described in the methodology section. The results indicate that grammatical inaccuracies were distributed across all major morphosyntactic categories, although their frequency varied considerably.

Among the identified error types, Verb-related errors (V) constituted the largest proportion of the total dataset. A total of 85 verb errors were recorded, accounting for 21.5% of all identified errors. These errors primarily involved incorrect tense usage, subject–verb agreement deviations, and inaccurate verb inflections.

The second most frequent category was Article errors (A), with 60 occurrences (15.2%). Most of these errors involved omission of definite or indefinite articles, particularly in noun phrases requiring obligatory determiners.

Preposition errors (P) ranked third, with 48 instances (12.1%). These errors frequently reflected inappropriate preposition choice or omission in fixed expressions.

Errors related to Noun number and form (N) appeared 43 times (10.9%), largely involving singular/plural mismatches. Sentence Structure errors (SS) were recorded 36 times (9.1%), including fragments and structurally incomplete clauses.

Other categories showed moderate frequency:

Word Form (WF) – 32 errors (8.1%)

Word Choice (WC) – 28 errors (7.1%)

Spelling (S) – 24 errors (6.1%)

Punctuation (Pun) – 18 errors (4.5%)

Less frequent categories included:

Insertion (I) – 10 errors (2.5%)

Deletion (D) – 6 errors (1.5%)

Confusing/Unclear (CU) – 4 errors (1.0%)

Linking/Connecting (O) – 2 errors (0.5%)

The distribution demonstrates that morphosyntactic categories related to verbs, articles, and prepositions represent the most recurrent areas of difficulty among the participants. Error frequency varied across essays; however, verb-related inaccuracies consistently appeared in nearly all scripts, indicating a systematic pattern rather than isolated individual deviations.

Overall, the quantitative profiling of the learner corpus reveals a clear hierarchy of grammatical difficulty areas, with verb morphology and article usage emerging as the most dominant error categories in the present dataset.

Table 1. Distribution of Grammatical Errors in the Learner Corpus

Error Tag	**Error Type**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
V	Verb Errors	85	21.5%
A	Article Errors	60	15.2%
P	Preposition Errors	48	12.1%
N	Noun Errors	43	10.9%
SS	Sentence Structure Errors	36	9.1%
WF	Word Form Errors	32	8.1%
WC	Word Choice Errors	28	7.1%
S	Spelling Errors	24	6.1%
Pun	Punctuation Errors	18	4.5%
I	Insertion Errors	10	2.5%
D	Deletion Errors	6	1.5%
CU	Confusing/Unclear Errors	4	1.0%
O	Linking/Connecting Errors	2	0.5%
Total		**396**	**100%**

The Table 1 presents the distribution of grammatical error types identified in the learner corpus of undergraduate Uzbek EFL students. The data indicate that verb-related errors were the most dominant category, followed by preposition and noun-related errors. Verb errors primarily involved tense selection, subject–verb agreement, and verb inflection problems. Preposition errors were mainly associated with incorrect usage or omission of prepositions. Noun-related errors were mostly related to singular and plural form confusion. Sentence structure errors also appeared

relatively frequently, reflecting difficulties in organizing ideas into grammatically accurate complex sentences. In contrast, errors related to spelling, punctuation, word form, and other minor categories occurred less frequently. Overall, the figure demonstrates that morphosyntactic errors represent the major area of difficulty in learners' written production.

Discussion

This study provides important insights into the grammatical difficulties experienced by Uzbek EFL learners in academic writing. The results reveal that grammatical errors are not randomly distributed but instead reflect systematic patterns of language learning challenges. The predominance of verb-related errors suggests that learners experience persistent difficulties in mastering the complexity of English verb morphology. English requires learners to consider tense, aspect, and subject–verb agreement simultaneously, which may create cognitive and linguistic processing challenges during writing tasks.

Preposition errors were also found to be highly frequent. This result supports previous research indicating that prepositions are one of the most problematic areas for EFL learners. The high occurrence of prepositional errors can be explained by the lack of direct structural equivalents in the learners' native language. As a result, learners often rely on translation-based writing strategies, which may lead to inappropriate prepositional choices.

Noun-related errors, particularly those involving singular and plural forms, indicate that learners still struggle with basic morphological rules. These errors may reflect insufficient practice in using countable and uncountable nouns in context. Similarly, sentence structure errors demonstrate that learners face challenges in organizing ideas into coherent and grammatically accurate sentences, especially when constructing complex or compound sentence structures.

The relatively lower frequency of spelling and punctuation errors suggests that learners have developed a certain level of control over surface-level writing mechanics. Nevertheless, the presence of these errors still indicates the need for continued attention to editing and proofreading skills. Limited opportunities for extensive writing practice may contribute to the persistence of these minor errors.

In summary, morphosyntactic accuracy remains a major challenge for EFL learners, and targeted pedagogical interventions are necessary to improve writing proficiency**.**

Conclusion

The present research sought to identify and analyze common grammatical error patterns in the written production of Uzbek EFL undergraduate students. The analysis demonstrated that learners continue to experience significant difficulties in several core areas of English grammar. In particular, verb-related errors were found to be the most frequent, highlighting challenges in applying correct tense forms, maintaining subject–verb agreement, and using appropriate verb morphology. These findings suggest that the complexity of English verb structures remains a major obstacle for learners during academic writing tasks. Furthermore, preposition errors and noun form errors were also observed regularly in the dataset. These errors may reflect the influence of the learners' first language structure, as Uzbek grammatical patterns differ significantly from English in terms of prepositional usage and noun pluralization rules. While surface-level errors such as

spelling and punctuation were less frequent, they still affected the overall readability and academic quality of student writing.

The study emphasizes the importance of improving writing pedagogy in EFL contexts. More attention should be given to explicit grammar instruction, guided writing exercises, and continuous corrective feedback. Teachers are encouraged to integrate communicative writing tasks that allow students to practice grammar in meaningful contexts rather than memorizing rules in isolation.

In closing, the study confirms that grammatical accuracy remains a key challenge in EFL writing development. Future studies may extend this research by examining different proficiency levels or using longitudinal data to track learner progress over time.

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