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An Analysis of Preposition (Idiomatic Phrases, Prepositional Phrases and Zero Prepositions) Detection Errors in the Writing of Graduate ESL Learners of Pakistan

Sumaira Akhtar [α], Waqas Sohail [σ] & Muhammad Rizwan [ρ]

Abstract- In this paper we describe a methodology for detecting preposition errors in the writing of ESL graduate learners. To investigate the nature of errors in the writing skill problems of graduate learners, two fifty graduate male and female learners randomly selected from four colleges and one university were asked to complete two writing skill tasks: Fifth word deletion and open composition test. The study is related to the research question: Why ESL graduate learners commit errors in their writing skills? (a) Prepositions, phrasal verbs and idiomatic phrases. It is detected that preposition overuse and preposition omission are the common problems for ESL. Besides, students deem prepositions quite tricky to use in their writing. So the findings show the wrong use of prepositions specifically 'with, in, of' and unnecessary insertion of prepositions. It is observed that errors are because of the interference of L1 in L2. Besides, the final results of the two tests showed that Prepositions (prepositional verbs, prepositional phrases, phrasal verbs, zero prepositions) are quite problematic for ESL learners. The learners try to put prepositions on the same patterns of L1 which ultimately leads them towards errors.

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I. Introduction

The performance of the learners in writing skill performance-based assessment tasks such as the constructed-response in essay mode is often evaluated by the language experts. Most commonly used rubrics to assign a score to writing in performance-based assessments (PBAs) are analytic, holistic and primary traits rubrics (East & Young, 2007). But for the purpose of this study, the researcher has used analytic scoring technique because it can upgrade (Xi & Mollaun, 2006) reliability among measures. Each linguistic feature is assigned a separate score in analytic scoring technique. In a writing skill assessment task, it provides sufficient diagnostic information of the underlying ability of the learners. On the other hand, in holistic scoring technique only a single score is assigned to the overall performance of the learners in a writing task and this is what is practiced by the examiners in Pakistan. A probable threat posed by this technique is that it does not expose merits and demerits of the learners' writing skill (Weigle, 2002). The present study focuses on prepositions and grammatical accuracy to analyze the writing skill of ESL graduate learners. Keeping in view the nature and purpose of the study, it is important to explain what is meant by '*errors'* and '*mistakes'*. The words and sentences used by the learners during their writing task are checked by language instructors in the process of evaluating ESL learners' writings. They are commonly termed as errors, mistakes and slips. The presence of errors refers to the learners' inability to employ properly the semantic categories, structure of grammar and other linguistics units. The terms 'mistakes' and 'errors' are repeatedly confused and interchanged with each other with the notion of their being synonymous for each other. Actually they are not semantically synonymous; there is a lucid and clear line of difference between these two terms. There are a variety of definitions of 'errors' and 'mistakes' which seem quite relevant to this study and support to make a difference between these two terms. In an unequivocal way, Norrish (1983) drew a line between 'errors' and 'mistakes' by positing that errors refer to the deviation of the learners from the systematic rules of language that they have not learnt; they use them in a wrong way again and again. Norrish describes mistakes as a deviation that is inconsistent, it means that a learner is delivered an accurate form and he tends to use only one form at times and skip the other form. So this inconsistency of the deviation of a correct form is termed as a mistake. Winkler (2008) is of the view that we can know from the mistakes of the learners how far they understand the language than the correct things they say in their communication. Davidson (2007) has made a difference between errors and mistakes, he analyzed that mistakes occur due to a momentary laps or carelessness in thought, the correction of which is possible. At a deeper level, errors refer to the faulty expression. It is something that has not been learnt as

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well as the correct version is not known by the learners. In this way, the correction of errors is not as straightforward as is the case with mistakes. According to Brown (1980) mistakes allude to the failure in order to use a system that is known by the learners in an approved manner. He further precedes his argument that it is a performance error. Finally, we can infer from Brown's point of view that in his native language, a native speaker can make a mistake but he cannot make an error which non- native learners typically commit. To Edge (1989) an ESL learner can correct his mistakes by himself/herself but to correct his errors, he definitely requires the supervision of some competent language instructor. From aforementioned discussion, it is quite vivid that errors are the result of lack of knowledge with regard to the language rules.

A learner has to go through a complicated, hit and trial process to learn a second language. In Pakistani education system, English language teaching has always occupied a superior status. Students are scarcely conscious towards the process of English language writing skill in Pakistan because particularly at college level there is not any systematic procedure and implementation of error analysis system. Besides, in this regard teachers hardly make any committed effort. Consequently in English language writing skill, ESL learners go on making errors and mistakes. Teachers do not rectify these errors and as a result they become a constant feature of learners' writing skill in the long run. The linguist is seriously concerned with the errors of the learners in modern languages pedagogy because the analysis of the errors of ESL learners provides useful information to teachers about the problematic areas that require to be rectified. On students writing skill, an integral part of second language instruction is the feedback. It supports in knowing how far the students have been able to steer on the road of amelioration in their writing skill. Perhaps on the part of teachers, this is estimated to be one of the most vital responsibilities. No doubt, the feedback given by the teacher affects of how ESL learners should move toward the writing skill process and make revisions to their writing for improvement (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). In learning a language, error analysis gives an access to the learners' strategies that they employ to point out the factors involved in learners' errors, to be familiar with the difficulties of learners to learn a language (Richards, Plott & Platt, 1996). For teachers, students and researchers, the analysis of the students' errors is greatly effective and valuable (Michaelides, 1990).

The response of the teacher towards students' errors attracts the researchers more than anything else. Ferris (2002, 2003) and Goldstein (2001, 2005) both give great importance to "judicious" and "purposeful" error correction. On the techniques of error correction research, a lion's share of error correction research has its fundamental focus on it. There are two major error correction techniques (1) direct and (2) indirect error feedback. Hendrickson (1980) explained that the provision of correct structures is the direct error feedback and overt correction. According to Ferris (2003, p. 52) in indirect error feedback, the teacher merely identifies the students' errors and underlines them but reluctant to offer correct forms or structures. For students, an indirect error feedback is beneficial. Ferris (2002, 2003) opines that in the beginning stages direct feedback is appropriate for ESL learners because when the students are beginners; their errors are "untreatable". In other words, the students do not have the competence to correct their errors such as the structural and vocabulary errors.

a) Problem Statement

From school and college level, English language is taught as a compulsory subject. Conversely, in spite of its being taught for so many years, the ESL learners at graduate level still have problems in their second language especially in prepositions and grammatical accuracy. The learners have to face many difficulties of how to write accurately in accordance with syntactic rules. They even cannot develop meaning between sentences. They cannot write an essay accurately with the correct use of prepositions. In writing skill, linguistic features are of great significance. In this feature, the lack of competence brings about a great detriment to their educational performance. So this study was conducted to investigate this problem.

b) Purpose of the Study

The most important object of the study was to find out the problematic areas related to the area of prepositions and grammatical accuracy in the writing skill of ESL graduate learners. To have an access to the most challenging domains of the learners in their process of writing activity; each linguistic feature under analysis was evaluated through repeated measures in two writing skill performance-based tasks.

II. Methodology

This section briefly discusses the methodology used in the present study: nature of study, research design, population and sample and instrument used in data collection procedure.

a) Research Design

The study uses descriptive research design to describe the nature of the problems and difficulties of graduate ESL learners' writing skill proficiency. So, this study describes an authentic and actual phenomenon without the intervention of any experiment. The focus of the descriptive nature of the present study is to describe the errors of ESL learners and provide practical measures to be taken to solve them.

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b) Population and Sample

The population of the present study comprises the students doing their Bachelor studies in both public/ private sectors college/university of Punjab, Pakistan. The sample comprised two hundred and fifty male and female students from medical and non-medical both arts and science groups were selected for this paper. The researcher follow quasi- random sampling technique.

c) Research Instruments

Two types of tests were used as instruments to collect data from the graduate ESL learners. The first test fifth word deletion used to assess their overall grammatical accuracy and capability to fill blanks appropriately, the second test was a controlled discussion question that was to be answered in an essay form entitled "Terrorism". In fifth word deletion, they were asked to put apt prepositions in idiomatic and prepositional phrases. Besides, they were asked to point out carefully zero prepositions.

III. Literature Review

a) Interface of L1 in L2

Articles are involved in the interaction of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge and a variety of discourse processes. The article system is a reflection of an interface (Maratsos, 1974) (Huebner, 1985). The differences between Hindi and Urdu are sociolinguistics, because at phonological and grammatical level they are closely related. (Schmidt, 1999, p. xiv), and these languages are morphophonologically different (Bhatia, 1993). The expression of definiteness is the same in these languages. Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi (Kachru, 2006), (Schmidt, 1999), (Bhatia, 1993) are articles languages. According to Hegarty, 2005, to the child universal set of features are accessible and the child's acquisition selects only those features that are installed in his/her L1. These features are drags into language-specific lexical items. The children acquiring their L1 compose lexical items with a sequence; the sets of features are accessible to them. In L2 acquisition, the process is different. The features that are not present in the first language are obtainable to learners and acquirable, but on the other side, morphological differences in how features are assembled in lexical items present a factual learning problem, even in the case of L1–L2 pairs when both languages opt for the equivalent subset of related features. In this case, the acquisition problem entails the learners' figuring out how the relevant features are remapped onto new language-specific morphophonological forms.

b) Interference of L1 in L2

Bertkua (1974) declares that the interference of L1 is accountable for errors in L2. Bryant (1984 P: 3) tried to scrutinize the errors of articles by analyzing round about 200 English essays written over a three year period by the University students of Japanese, and he evaluates the frequency of errors in articles encountered among Slavic and Asian students which have no article system (Bryant 1984, p. 3). Cohen recommended that errors are due to the *deep misconceptions* of article system (Cohen 1998, p. 156). Spontaneously, the usage of articles depends upon the speakers and circumstances. A number of researchers are of the view that the article organism is unlearnable, they consider it a natural exposure of language (Duly, Burt, & Krashen 1982). It is a fact that if articles are learnt under fixed pattern where they are spoken by native speakers (Kimizuka 1968, p.79). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) said that *definite* and *indefinite* articles fundamentally depend on discourse context to determine them (Celce-Morcia-Freeman 1983, p. 172). Rutherford (1987) explains his argument that it is quite obvious to say that the subjects of the sentences are essentially governed by discourse not syntax, the interaction between grammar and discourse emerge from determiners (Rutherford 1987, p. 59). Master (1987 & 1997), Parrish (1987), all have studied the *learning of articles.* Most of the researchers revolve around the English functional words which have a considerable focus on English article system (Chaudron & Parker, 1990) seem to focus on two prevailing areas: the process of acquisition pedagogy and its effectiveness. Master (1987) highlighted that articles are acquired differently and they depend on the fact whether they occur in the native language of the learners. The definite article *the* precedes the indefinite article *a* (Huebner, 1983). Numerous studies have been conducted on the wrong use of the definite article *the*. The proficient learners can improve their correct use of indefinite articles *A* (Huebner, 1985) viewed the over generalized of definite article *the.* Thomas (1989) tends to say that across proficiency level, the zero article is generalized. Master, (1997), proposed that in early stages of language learning for those learners who have articles languages (like polish Urdu Asian, Slavic etc) seem to dominate in all environments. Parrish (1987) proceeds to point out an order of acquisition that *zero, definite* and *indefinite* articles are consecutively acquired. Inter language is the process of L1 and L2 learning which is solely related to an intermediate language as a stage between the native and non native language. Lennon's analytically classified (Brown, 1994) which consists on prepositional errors regarding disordering 2%, substitution 61%, omission 11% and addition 26% are drawn after data analysis in Leonon's study. The ultimate results indicate that in domain of substitution i.e. 60% is the highest incorrect use of prepositional system of L1 (Urdu) and L2 as well as in the process of selecting proper and relevant prepositions in order to describe distinctive relationships in linguistic elements. Primary category of errors is

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communication strategy-based (James. 1998). The occurrence of interlingual errors is fundamentally due to the interference of native language. On the other hand, over co-occurrence restrictions of prepositions are viewed under the category of intralingual errors (James 1998).

c) Language Transfer

Inter language consists of the features of native language and non native language. The mother tongue of the learner largely influences the learning of their L2. Selinker (1972) argues that language transfer refers to the processes that produce fossilized competences that are central to the second language learning processes. There are two types of transfer: negative transfer and positive transfer. Positive transfer from native to foreign language occurs when the native language and foreign language have the same form and its similarity assists L2 acquisition. Negative transfer occurs when native language pattern or rules bring about an inappropriate form in the target language.

d) Error Analysis

Since 1950s, the error analysis (EA) in both languages Second as well as Foreign language (L1/FL) learners is playing its leading role in L2/L1 pedagogy. To develop linguistic system, EA tries to investigate learner's inter language which can emerge between the L2/FL (Selinker 1972). A British linguist, Pit Corder (1967) refocused his concentration on errors from the language acquisition and language processing perspective. He mentioned in his paper: *'The significance of learner Errors'* that errors are quite important because improvement is not possible without errors. In this way, they are termed as *developmental errors*. Richard noted that error analysis shows straight roads to deal with differences between the way adult native speakers of the language use and the way people learning a language speaking (Richard, 1971, pp. 0.1). EA has adopted several ways to contribute in the teaching of languages. Firstly, it provides to language developers and teachers the identification, description and classification of errors which offer an informed knowledge of language which are deemed somehow problematic for learners at large. Moreover, it makes strategies and policies to improve the learning and teaching process regarding error correction and remedial teaching (Richard 1980). Secondly, the errors of learners give a certain account of the competence and linguistic knowledge (Gass & Selinker 2001) offers valid information to teachers that students are still required to learn. EA attempts to explain those errors which are because of psycholinguistic strategies and mechanism (Dulay, Burt & Krahen 1982).

Belhaj (1997) conducted a research on his student's errors which they committed mostly in their translation papers. The end results showed that students had verb formed tense errors and errors in the domain of relative clause, prepositions, articles, noun, adjective and miscellaneous. Radwan (1988) highlighted lexical and grammatical errors of the learners. The result pointed out that students committed most of errors in the area of articles. Dessouky (1990) also seemed to investigate the similar problematic area regarding second language learners, but the difference laid on the occurrence of these errors. Kao (1999) examined the errors in the writing skill of Taiwanese students. Kao (1999) studied one hundred and sixty nine compositions which were written by 53 Taiwanese college students. In this study, 928 errors were identified. The greatest frequency among these errors occurred with regard to grammatical errors was 66%, lexical errors were 18%. Lin scrutinized 26 essays of Taiwanese college students and the outcomes showed that in sentence structure, the error frequency was 30.43%, wrong use of verb form was 21.01%, and wrong use of words and sentences fragments were 15.94%. Chen observed that the most frequently occurred grammatical errors were the misuse of English articles in the compositions. Han et al. (2006) have offered a maximum entropy classifier in order to identify the errors in articles; it has achieved 83% accuracy. Chodorow et al (2007) analyzed the identification of errors in preposition and he has drawn a consequent report regarding 80% precision and 30% recall of these errors. Ultimately, Gamon et al (2008) utilized an intricate system which contained a language model and a decision for both articles and prepositions errors. On the other hand, Yi et al (2008) suggested a web account organism in order to correct determiners/ articles errors (P 62%). Turner and Charniak (2007) reported the best results on articles. Additionally, errors are deemed positive and systematic which are generally meant rule-governed and internally consistent. In tune with tendencies in researchers of L2 and social inguistics, Ellis (1985) argued about the existence of systematic variation of L2 learning regarding production. In advance, this variation can be predicted as well as explained. It has two types of variability: variability of linguistic context or situational context and variability of individual learner factors. Some researchers have elaborated that in order to explain the frequency of errors, it is the high degree of polysemy and the number of preposition has nearly made the task of systemization impossible. Accordingly, this confusion is reflected in grammars, books as well as in textbooks. Specifically in the latter, care is not taken to make emphasis on vital areas because a given preposition has more than one meaning. It is dependent on the content because and some verbs require an obligatory preposition. Farnandez (1994, p .52) argued that students tend to learn verb without learning and they are required to follow the specific preposition. Correa and Gonzalez (1992) analyzed four prepositions of location in English; such as: *in, on, at* and *over*. Both of these researchers have concluded that we find learner's common errors

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which occur primarily due to the interference of mother tongue (L1) into the second language (L2). The most exciting premise underlying this hypothesis is that similarities can facilitate learning and differences can hinder it between the two languages and ultimately as a result, the frequent errors occur in second language (L2). In second language writing, two main errors are valuable: (1) interlingual (2) intralingual errors. At the outset, it was the widespread conviction about language errors which are occurred by the transformation from one language to another, some considerable studies have been conducted by Richard (1971) in the sphere of learner's errors. Richard was the pioneer to break new grounds in this framework who robustly refuted this certainty that L1 interference is accountable for learner's errors. His study includes learners of Japanese, Chinese, French, and West African backgrounds. A many errors have been put forward, for instance, prepositions, articles, distribution and production of verb groups and the use of questions. He is of the view that a number of learner's errors generated in the process of language acquisition and the mutual interference of the target language.

e) English prepositions

English has 60 to 70 prepositions that is a higher number (Koffi, 2010, p. 29). Furthermore, over 90 percent of prepositions usage is estimated to involve nine most frequently used prepositions: (with, to, from, at, in, of, by, for and on). However, on the basis of their functions, prepositions can be categorized such as preposition of time, instrument, direction and agent. Prepositions occupy a huge multiplicity of meaning which is context dependent. A specific preposition can change the actual meaning. Generally, prepositional errors can be found in both speech and writing of non-native learners. In the process of discovering the language, a learner's errors are considered crucial as they can give an enough evidence of learning and unfolds many procedures and strategies which are employed by the learner (Corder, 1981). Different prepositions are used to indicate many relationships because one preposition can have various translations. When students try to speak or write anything; they consciously make an endeavor to find similar structures to Urdu in English. So learners cannot forget their prepositional knowledge of L1 (Lam, 2009. P .3).

Prepositions are called group of words or merely words which become apparent either before (noun phrase or indicate syntactic associations (Methew, 1997). Agoi (2003) verified that prepositions are used to explain the link of noun or noun equivalents which it governs. Hamadallah and Tushyh (1988) pointed out that prepositions are basically measured as functional words which establish a link between phrases, clauses or words in sentences. EFL and ESL learners, have to face problems to use prepositions exactly. As far as a phenomenon known as language transfer is concerned, a few rules are applied from L1 to L2. It happens during the learning of new language. For second language learners, it seems to create problems because every language has its own rules and we cannot make unnecessary changes in it. Thahir (1987) described that prepositions create problems for Arabic learners of English because Arabic prepositions are a few in number. According to Abbas (1961) only twenty (20) prepositions are in Arabic. To Hayden (1956) English language has fifty seven (57) prepositions. There are three problems are common for ESL regarding prepositions: (1) deleting the necessary prepositions (2) usage of incorrect preposition (3) using unnecessary prepositions. According to Arab researchers, Arab EFL learners and, Jordanian EFL learners have to face tough time in the usage of English prepositions. (Al-Marrani, 2009) reported that the learning of English prepositions is a permanent problem for EFL. Hamadallah and Tushey (1988) mentioned that (EFL) as both Arabic and English language belong to two different languages so Arab learners of English language have to face problems in learning process of English. Thahir, (1987) analyzed that as a second language, students find many problems when they make an actual usage of prepositions.

f) Phrasal verbs, Idiomatic phrases and prepositional phrases

McArthur (1992) interprets that Samuel Johnson was the pioneer to introduce phrasal verbs in 1755, calling them a *composition,* but Walker (1655.P 1) calls them as some particles as words which could be included as part of the signification of the foregoing verb. It shows the verb-particle combination semantically. Phrasal verbs are used in speech and in an informal writing. They also occur with growing frequency and in more formal writing. A change in form and construction are accompanied by a transform in meaning (Goldberg, 1995, pp. 8-9). The particle may be put after the verb's object, separate from the verb to which it is connected. This alternation occurs in transitive sentences. There are also some phrasal verbs which consist on this construction and they are ungrammatical (Curzan & Adams, 2006, p. 148). A preposition is the first word of a phrase that contains a noun or a pronoun. In sentences, prepositions show a relationship between its object. So most of sentences must have preposition in English. They can show relationships in time and they can show relationships between objects in space. So, in English, prepositions have entirely different functions and meaning in sentences. In speaking and writing, we use prepositions. The learners remain conscious of how to use it because it is very useful both in speaking and writing. It is very essential because it expresses the meaning expressed by adjective and adverbs: when,

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where, how and what kind. Prepositions which begin grammatical structures often called prepositional phrases which always begin with a preposition and end with a noun or a pronoun which is the preposition's object. For instance:

They take a rest *after the singing competition*.

g) Challenges towards Prepositions

Prepositions are problematic for the ELL as each language has a set of rules which are responsible for the clash points. (James, 2007). One of these clash points, prepositions are at the heart. According to Celce- Murica and Larsen-Freeman (1999), prepositions are typically completed by the use of inflections. But in each language, prepositions do not behave in the same manner. A mismatch problem can be detected between English and other languages. A second language learner will elucidate an English word from its native equivalent; but this method seems inadequate for function word but it works for content words. There is a diversity of opinions along with a mismatch problem between languages. Preposition is called a word which shows the location of one object in relation to another. It seems multifarious for English language learners (ELL) to learn the nuance of all the English prepositions, how to bring into play them and how to comprehend them. In the contemporary teaching strategy, despite these challenges, prepositions are scarcely addressed. Prepositions are not only hard to recognize but also inflexible for teachers to teach. In the definition, one is incapable to explicate a preposition without using one or two more prepositions. So, the teacher would have to elaborate those new prepositions. In this way, the teacher and the student are trapped in a spiraling whirlwind of prepositions. Without using an alternative preposition, a teacher cannot define a preposition. The meaning and the definition are often fuzzy and have not an unambiguous understanding for the students. Several teachers and the textbooks do not teach prepositions and that's why student remain in constant trouble.

To Noam Chomsky (1981), UG is an exact system of rules. In this way, universal grammar explores two deep-seated aspects: First, the theoretical frame-work of prepositions secondly, an interaction of UG with SLA. It is that in order to explain the frequency of errors is the high degree of polysemy and the sheer numbers of prepositions have nearly made the task of systemization impossible. This confusion is reflected in textbooks and grammars. So a due care is not taken on the important areas because a given preposition has more than one meaning. It is dependent on the content that there are verbs followed by prepositions. Farnandoz (1994, p .52) argued that students tend to learn verb without learning and they are required to follow the specific preposition. He has analyzed four prepositions of location in English; such as: *in, on, at* and *over*. Both of these researchers have concluded that we find learner's common errors due to the interference of mother tongue. Similarities can facilitate learning and differences can hinder it between the two languages and ultimately the frequent errors occur in second language (L2).

h) Contrastive Analysis of Prepositional Errors

To Lado, in foreign language learning, the comparison between native and foreign language lays the key towards ease or complexity. The elements which are different will be difficult and those that are similar will actually be less difficult for the learners (Lado, 1957, pp .1-2). In sixties, CAH (contrastive analysis hypotheses) developed during the domination of behavioral psychology and structural linguistics. Brown states in his book "Language learning and teaching" that the heaviest barrier towards L2 acquisition is the first language interference. However, a structural and scientific analysis of both languages in question would yield taxonomy of linguistic contrasts between them which enable the linguistic to predict the complexities a learner have to encounter in turn (Brown, 2000, p. 208). A linguistic model of CAH was expounded by Bloomfield (1933). Further, this model was elaborated by Lado (1957). James (1985) pointed out that the psychological fundamentals of CAH are 'Associationism'. The assumption regarding CAH is that in L2 utterances, the second language learners use to transfer certain features of native language. (Lado, 1957, p.2). The meaning of 'transfer' in this context is that to carry on the habits of L1 into L2 (Corder, 1971, p. 158).

Three versions regarding CAH are classified: *Week*, *Strong* and *Moderate*. *Strong version* is highly impractical and unrealistic version (Brown, 2000). Wardaugh (1970) viewed that this version expects primarily of linguists to have a set of linguistic universals (Brown, 2000). Moreover, it must be formulated within a comprehensive linguistics theory which properly deals with phonology, syntax and semantics at the very least. An observational use of CA is termed by Wardaugh in the *week version* of CA (Brown 2000). Wardaugh (1970, p. 125) is of the view that teachers and students have successfully employed this weak version of CA regarding the unique linguistic knowledge to observe the difficulty in the L2 learning (1970. P. 126). Oller and Ziahoss (1970. P. 186) proposed a moderate version of CA. According to their perceived differences or similarities, the categorization of abstract and concrete patterns is the basis of learning. So, when patterns are distinct in form and meaning then confusions can be created in it.

i) Error frequency Rate in prepositional System

In a corpus of one million English words, one in ten words is a preposition (Fang, 2000). For theories of syntax, prepositions are problematic. Prepositions are held to be one of the four main lexical categories along

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with nouns, verbs and adjectives, and are contrasted with the functional categories (FC) like determiners, inflection and case. In generative theory of syntax, the distinction between lexical and functional categories has played a central role. The scheme that the functional element Infl(ection) heads the sentence (Huang, 1982) ultimately led to a parallel re-analysis of Noun Phrases as Determiner Phrases (Abney, 1987). Since Pollock's (1989) Split-Infl hypothesis, the questions about functional categories have largely concentrated on the nature of the formation of functional projections, rather than the verity of their existence (Belletti (1994) for a first-rate depiction of the development of agreement projections in Generative Grammar). However even the categorization of prepositions as a closed class is awkward. and their membership is taken to range from 50 – 60 members, as it is found in traditional grammars of English (Warriner & Griffith, 1977), to 248, as found in a corpus study of prepositions (Fang, 2000). It is accepted that innovative prepositions can be put into the class (Kortmann & Konig, 1992) even though at a very slow rate.

j) Acquisition of English prepositions in English

Primarily, prepositions are taken to be a closed class, a characteristic of functional categories and not lexical ones. Prepositions put a semantic content in sentences, as demonstrated through their theta-role assignment, but a few exceptional prepositions are argued to be empty Case assigners which are unable to assign any theta-roles and the so-called Dummy Case Assigners. Prepositions are taken by most fields of language research to be a single, homogeneous category despite these fundamental contradictory characteristics. In modern syntactic research, the inconsistencies are pointed out in the category of prepositions (Tremblay, 1996). As these accounts differ in their details, they all pointed out a theoretical division between prepositions which are lexical in nature and those which are syntactic and functional in nature. The largest parts of prepositions express semantic relations, as realized in their assignment of theta roles. But a few, like *of* and (arguably) the dative *to* seem to be syntactic because they are required for Case assignment, but do not include any thematic properties to the structure. The majorities of prepositions assign Case as do verbs while the syntactic ones assign Case inherently in a parallel observation (Ura, (2001).

k) Empirical Evidence of Prepositional Errors

The researchers have tried to conduct a survey on *acquisition of preposition of time* by English undergraduates at Jordanian university or at Balqa University. Zughoul (1979) highlighted in learning preposition that Arab EFL learners face extraordinary problems. (a) Grammar translation problem which is a traditional method of teaching motivates students to translate in their minds, (b) the interference from their native language, Arabic (c) by a preposition; the English preposition is not expressed in Arabic. In addition, its equivalent is expected to be different part of speech in this domain. Scott and Tucker (1974) expressed that to Arabic prepositions, English rarely correspond to it. The concept of substitution in preposition stemmed from both English and Arabic forms. Hashim (1996) made a meticulous inspection and concluded that the main cause of errors for EFL learners is because of the influence of mother tongue. Kharma and Hajjaj (1997) have examined that prepositions are the most troublesome aspect of syntax. Moreover, is called an eternal problem for EFL learners. Hamadallah and Tushyeh (1988) reported that in a contrastive analysis of both English and Arabic prepositions, it is found that to a non-native speaker of English, preposition constitute a learning difficulty for them. Onike (2007) conducted a study in which he examined that under second language learning situation, the learners typically misuse prepositions. Furthermore, the conclusion indicates that the problem of usage is because of interference factor. Catalan, R.M.J (1996) observed variability as well as frequency in errors regarding the specific use of English prepositions. In this study, the sample was consisted on 290 essays. These essays were written by third year students of English by three Spanish secondary school students in Madrid Spain. In the list of participants, there were 172 females and 118 males approximately. The test draws conclusion that for the students, prepositions are certainly difficult for foreign language learners. She made an emphasis that most frequent errors are commonly substitution than addition and omission errors. She further precedes her argument that for Spanish learners of English, prepositions are deemed somewhat tricky area to comprehend. Fion (2005) observed ESL Chinese learner's acquisition of English spatial preposition (in, on, at). The consequences expose three focal problems of ESL learners regarding preposition: (a) the overlook of the preposition (at) (b) the interpretation of the function of spatial preposition (c) idiomatic difficulties. The preposition "at" is used more fewer times than the other two because they regard it more abstract. ESL learners have absolutely found out that the acquisition of idiomatic is the worst and most difficult to learn for them because it is abstract in nature. Sudhakaran (2008) noticed prepositional errors Malay students of ESL from International Islamic University Malaysia; he analyzed the procedure of preposition in both writing and speaking process. Besides, he draws conclusion that students have omitted necessary prepositions. In the same writing task, some learners did their best in preposition (to, of, an) in speaking as well (for, in, about). Boquist (2009) analyzed a study which is primarily based on L2 acquisition of English preposition. In this study, he endeavors to commence the new-fangled approaches towards teaching prepositions for second language learners. The end result of this study

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fundamentally indicates the fact that for several reasons, prepositions are relatively complicated to grasp especially for second language learners. The reason is that there are certain clash points which are imposed by prepositions. There are numerous errors which are committed by Iranian students in their translation. Moreover, the researchers made a comparison between the errors of senior and junior students in order to identify the errors. In this manner, these errors have been corrected at the university during their study. In this study, 40 senior and 40 junior student's errors have been examined at Azad and Payan-e- Noor University in Iran 2009/2010. The errors are categorized into two categories. The top findings showed that in English grammar, there are considerable shortfalls and 98% of the respondents have grammatical errors which are because of intra-lingual influence. It is indicated by (Scott and Tucker, 1974) the negative impression of mother tongue in interference in learning English prepositions is the root-cause. In addition, the errors of EFL/ESL learners their use of English preposition are demonstrated by (Hamadallah Tushyeh, 1988). In English prepositions, the positivity of mother tongue interference is highlighted by (Scott & Tucker, 1974).

l) Defining writing skill and its significance

Writing is considered a formal interpretation which contains a logical and succinct model. Furthermore, within a minimum amount of space, it has the inclusion of information. It is peculiar to human species because it is observable recording of language. It offers us the flexibility in order to transmit our ideas independent of space and time. Through the usage of a set of signs, it illustrates language in a textual medium. It has been explained and interpreted from a numerous ways and this indicates how complicate the writing process is. In order to display the graphical and grammatical system, we make use of the visual medium in writing (Widdowson, 1979). In broader term, writing is not just to write down language into symbols rather it is a product and process dexterity that requires purpose, instruction, coherence, feelings, knowledge, organization, experience and purpose to communicate. It has various forms regarding formal and informal academic texts. At the level of grammar, each type of writing marks manifold feature which are largely observable within the sentence. As far as the level of text structure and the level of grammar are concerned, it is observable beyond the sentence (Nunan, 1999). Taken as a whole, there are three important objects of writing namely "entertainment", it includes novels, newspaper features and comic strips, "action", it has product labels and public signs, "information, it includes magazines and newspaper (Nunan, 1999). Irmscher (1979) made an inspection that writing skill is extremely important because it is considered essential for concentration and personal development. Likewise, in a graphic form, discipline and focus are obligatory for the representation of thoughts. Byrne (1979) stated that in a syntactic order, writing is a production of a sequence of sentence arrangements that made a link to form a coherent whole. In the commencement of writing, words are formed by the use of symbols and letters and afterwards arranged in a sequential order by applying syntactic rules in order to form clauses and sentences. Murray (1985) argued that as far as the creative activity of the writing is concerned, it is steeped discovery because the writer's exclusive objective is to discover, construct and shape meaning especially when he moves his pen across the page. Writing is fundamentally a private activity which tends to involve four stages: editing, drafting, revising and planning. A recursive on-line approach is, however, used by many good writers regarding the writing of a draft. It is interrupted by revision leading to reformulation and planning. Graham and Harris (1993) stated that in learning, writing has occupied the central position because it performs an active role in the development of the learners as well as his ultimate success in educational career. Above and beyond, the teachers need to become competent writers in order to assist the learners in their efforts. Lannen (1989) scrutinized that writing is a process which transforms the absolute material that is discovered by trial or errors and research inspiration to transmit a lucid and obvious message. In addition, it is a process that is extraordinarily supportive in order to reflect deliberate decision. Writing boasts up the potential of the learners to enhance language learning. In this way, they make multiple experiments with vocabulary, sentences and words which they learn in the class domain to make an effective communication. Berdan (2006) pointed out that learn the writing skill is the basic component of education and this imperative quality is regarded as the greatest asset for learners in their entire life.

m) Linguistic Difficulties

Principally, there are numerous native and non native speakers and users of English in English speaking world. Approximately, it is spoken by 1000 million people (Deterding & Kircptrick, 2006). In Pakistan, English bears an upper rank as it is deemed an effective medium of communication as well as in colleges and universities; it is a medium of instruction. At school level, it is taught as a compulsory subject; but ESL learners are still incompetent in writing skill. Even though they are admitted to college yet they have several grey areas in it. Akhtar (1997) affirmed that English is not taught as a language but as a subject in Pakistan. On the other hand, teachers stimulate the students to memorize a few selected essays, questions and grammatical rules. Resultantly, the students reproduce the crammed data in order to get through tests and exams instinctively. In this way, less concentration is directed towards the creative aptitude

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of the students. In addition, teachers encourage students to ponder over the literature based syllabi. They make an emphasis on the genres of literature instead of the language proficiency which can make them creative writers. Mahbob and Talat (2008) experienced that in Pakistan, English language learning seems to be requisite. Broadly speaking, they are of the view that in English language writing skills, no serious measures have yet been taken in Pakistan regarding amelioration of ESL learner's performance. Harris (1993) viewed that language is not considered an innate natural ability rather it is a cognitive ability which can be achieved by years of training. Saddiqui (2007) pointed out the participation of the learners regarding writing skill activities. It is not enough for the learners to confer instructions and guideline or teaching steps to put in order flawless content. Unfortunately, sheer verbal instructions are focused and their genuine contribution is meticulously neglected in writing procedure. It is the innermost root cause of their anxieties because in order to get through the examination, they have a preference to memorize notes from the standard guides and help books. Correspondingly, the learners have no self-reliance for what they have written. The reason is that the feedback and response from the teacher convey a gesture of trepidation for them which enormously blemish their inventive faculty and potential. Saddiqui further pointed out the defective evaluation criteria which hinder their creative competence. Typically, in the main stream of colleges, examinations are conducted in order to estimate and calculate the memory not the creativity of the learners. The literary genres are the object of focal point for lecturers and teachers and non- literary genres are not under inspection which leads toward the production of ESL learners in Pakistan. Chowdhury (2003) pointed out that in Pakistan the existing trends and circumstances are altering because now people are progressively alert about the education. Pathetically, there are still lots of teachers who have the same cold, authoritative and unproductive pedagogical techniques. Nunan (1999) acknowledged that the most important source of linguistic problems is written discourse because it consists on clauses which are internally complex. A majority of learners do not have the aptitude to produce more complex language in written expressions. Keshavarz (2008) said that the analysis of errors in identifying the linguistic difficulties can assist the ESL learners. Yule (1996) observed that the discourse structure focus on the main elements that play a vital part to form a well-stretched text. Schiffrin (1994) opined that the linguistic product of discourse is related to TEXT and as a linguistic role its study is impossible without reference to contextual elements. Moreover, it is not the interferences that are available to the hearer and reader but the linguistic contents, for instance, expressions meaning of words and sentence.

n) Non-linguistic Difficulties Psycho-cognitive

Writing is an activity of ESL learners which do not involve audience or the consultation with the reader during the process. It is quite opposite as compare to speaking process. The psycho-cognitive problems of ESL learners decide and finalize the information of their readers and locate the reasonable way to express. Because of this, it made the learners confused to decide that what type of style in writing should be adopted. Cognitive difficulty lies in the fact of how the learners can organize their concepts and ideas on the paper. Essentially, in certain conditions, it seems somewhat problematic when an assignment is given to the learners as an essay. Likewise, the object of it is not obvious and for any personal reasons, the piece of writing is not being composed. Among ESL learners, this sort of problem is quite prominent because the content is already available in the textbooks which are exclusively designed for exams. This is the reason for why students pay less concentration on their assignments as they are well familiar that they will simply cram the textbooks and achieved good score in exams. Consequently, for Pakistani student writers, it is difficult to invoke audience and the teacher is the one and only audience in the writing task. The learners are well recognizable for the demand of the examiner which is the reproduction of the crammed content from the text books which is chiefly the deep-seated cause to cripple the inventiveness and resourcefulness of the learners. As far as the English language writing skills are concerned, apprehension and emotion are possibly the most analyzed psychological complications and variables. Betancourt and Phinney (1988) asserted that L2 less skilled writers remain in constant apprehension regarding the course of action in writing. But different writers have different source of apprehension. In all probability, it relies on the proficiency level and the degree of experience of L2 learners. On the other side, when the bilingual writing experience increases the percentage of apprehension mechanically decreases. The learners who possess the lower quality of writing have to face a high degree of apprehension. Lee (2005) pointed out that in writing skills; Lee's free reading on the part of ESL learners causes in less apprehension. On the other hand, in second language writing, free reading facilitates in reducing the apprehension of the writer. Clachar (1999) highlighted that emotions can influence the strategies of the writing utilized by ESL learners. On two diverse topics, ESL learners were delegated regarding writing activity: first one is an unemotional procedure and the second one is an emotional text that was designed for the elicitation. It is indicated that more time is devoted to syntactic issues, lexical and morphological; the sheer intention behind this is to underline the intended meaning regarding fidelity. Furthermore, as far as the particular linguistic structures are concerned, they tend to articulate the semantic connotation at large. On

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opposite side, it is omitted in the non-emotional text writing. Cognitive models are exceedingly ready to lend a hand in solving writing problems (McChutchen, Tesk & Bankston, 2008). At this juncture, the term *problem solving* leads towards the conceptualization regarding information process. To Calkins & Daiute, 1986), the presence of audience can increase the length and quality regarding the output of the students. Argumentation, the writer must construct his argument in the process of writing with solid evidence and reason. These evidences and objections must be finalized according to the prejudices, viewpoints and objections of the audience. This is not necessarily the matter that given concentration which is delivered to the audience is irrelevant to narration. In the learning of the students, writing skill performs a distinctive part to construct an environment. In addition, it develops organizational and cognitive strategies which are appropriate in linking outline information, new concepts, strengthen their conceptual framework and organize knowledge (Bangert-Drowns, Hurly & Wilkinson, 2004). By and large, self-monitoring, concept building and planning are attached to the activity of writing in order to promote the establishment in the sphere of knowledge (Bankert-Drowns et al, 2004). Moreover, to write well is the prevailing challenge as it is a test of language proficiency, thinking ability and memory simultaneously. As far as the topic form-term memory is concerned, it requires swift revitalization of domain-specific knowledge (Kelloge, 2001). About significance knowledge, writing competence has its dependency regarding the capability to probe unequivocally (Nickerson, Perkins & Smith, 1985).

At the outset, it was observed that the greatest reason of second language errors is that when the learners transfer from L1 in L2. They automatically commit errors. The learners of native language have to face certain challenges in order to make a grip on L2 features. The influence of native language is just a little bit L2 learners because it influences 3-25 % of errors. (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007). Richards (1971) challenges this conviction and argued in his research that the learner's errors are owing to the strategies which are used in language acquisition. Error analysis supports teachers to find out proper methods in second language classroom to select material and develop curriculum which can smooth the progress of the learning process (p. 208). Bataineh (2005; p.56). He highlighted that the error of indefinite articles committed by first, second, third and fourth year EFL students; use of indefinite article with adjectives, uncountable nouns, marked/unmarked plural, misuse of the indefinite article, put indefinite article *a* as part of the noun/adjective. This whole detail shows that it is because of the learner's native language (Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007).

A number of ESL/EFL practitioners, specifically writing teachers, become conscious that the article system (i.e. *a, the, an* and *null*) is a trouble for ESL learn them correctly. The English article system fundamentally consists of three main classes: *a, an, the* and *null the zero* articles. The principal function of the three articles is to demonstrate that the conception may or may not be marked off or indicate the object because it is thought of within certain imaginary and physical limits.

The article system is an interesting domain of inquiry as its three members appear so often in the field of second language. However, in English language *a* and *the* constitute two of the ten words which are most frequently used. So it seems quite complex task to locate written or spoken sentences which don't have one of the three articles at least. In many ESL teachers, researchers, textbooks and syllabuses, the articles are occupied short shift despite this frequency. Thus, the prevailing view of the teachers and textbooks standpoint is that in the process of acquisition, the articles will simply get learned. As far as the research standpoint is concerned, to the noun phrase (NP), articles are mere appendages which are often not considered essential to spoken communication. Normally, a native speaker of English acquires the article system by the age of three. The majority of native speakers are unable to formulate rudimentary rules for the usage of article because it is quite automatic system for native speaker. The errors of non-native speakers in the article system are somewhat easy to identify. Therefore, repeatedly misuse of the system from the non-ESL oriented native speaker leads towards endless irritation. If the misuse of the article system can lead towards negative disposition for the listener or reader, this seems rather natural for non-native speakers of English, specifically university students who often express themselves in written mode. Conversely, in the written mode, article errors are most glaring. Understandably, students want to familiar about how to improve their usage of article; because this leads towards numerous pedagogical approaches to teach the article system. A material builder and developer should know how the article system works, how it is acquired and how it is used by native speaker; for it is indeed to build a truly efficacious pedagogical method in order to teach the article system.

IV. Objectives

- The present study focuses on the investigation of errors in Prepositions of graduate ESL learners.
- Prepositions, phrasal verbs and idiomatic phrases are examined.

a) Research Question

(1) Why ESL graduate learners commit errors in their writing skills?

(a) What is the frequency of errors in Prepositions? (phrasal verbs, idiomatic phrases)

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b) Nature of Current Research

The present study opts for quantitative analysis for two sets of data in order to investigate the frequency and type of errors found in prepositions of Pakistani graduate ESL learners. For this study, the quantitative approach is opted purposely as it can statistically be reliable. This study not only allows the outcomes to be analyzed, but also makes a clear comparison with other parallel studies. In the first set of data, the researcher analyzed the errors in prepositions and grammatical accuracy of ESL learners respectively through fifth word deletion. This test marked out the errors in these domains and counted correct answers. In the second test of data, topic-based analysis of prepositions and grammatical accuracy was mainly focused. In these two sets of data, the necessary prepositions, zero prepositions as well as an apt use of idiomatic and prepositional phrases were assessed and calculated afterwards.

Analytic and deductive approaches are related to the research design of this study. An analytic approach centers around a single or multiple specific aspects of language proficiency. What we actually mean analytical approach is that the phenomenon of second language is largely analyzed in its constituent parts as well as one or more of these certain constituent parts are brought under analysis in detail.

One significant linguistics feature is examined in this study namely prepositions in the English language writing skill of ESL graduate/masters learners. A descriptive research design is used which enumerates existing phenomenon without any manipulation of the subjects. Hence, the researcher makes a measurement of things as they are without the intervention of any experiment.

c) Population and Sample

In order to check the frequency of errors in the writing skill, the researcher selected fifty participants from each institution. The total four colleges and one university id focused to conduct this research. In this study, the researcher followed the sample size with a minimum number of 250 for the generalizability of her findings.

Fundamentally, the participants of this study belonged both to the rural as well as urban backgrounds. As far as the age of these learners is concerned, they ranged from nineteen to twenty one years. Moreover, they were from Urdu medium background who had from school level studied English as a compulsory subject. In English language writing skills, it was dominantly expected that they had acquired necessary knowledge required for creative competence in order to communicate ideas. It is important to mention here that in public sector colleges, the majority of graduates have faced problems in their writing skills in Pakistan.

d) Research Instruments

Two types of tests were used as instruments to collect data from the ESL learners in order to investigate prepositional errors and grammatical difficulties of ESL learners. To analyze L2 writing proficiency, two tests were used by the researcher, because for gathering the required data, test is considered the most reliable and authentic tool.

In the first test, every fifth word is deleted with intent. The students were asked to supply the missing word appropriately and grammatical features. In the second test, there was a composition to make a discussion in an essay mode on "Terrorism" comprising 250-300 words approximately in order to assess their errors in prepositions and their overall grammatical ability. The topic given to the students was selected keeping in view their language proficiency so that they can display their creativity.

e) Data Collection Procedure

The researcher collected data from two hundred and fifty graduate ESL learners to make an investigation into the English language compositional problems. Side by side, the participants were provided precise instructions how to attempt each test. During this process, the researcher didn't put them under any time pressure to complete this task. However, the researcher calculated the completion time of each test to view how far the participants were quick in response. As far as the topic based activity is concerned, the learners were not only given an outline of the topic but also some key points were discussed for twenty minutes before the actual commencement of the writing proceeding so that the participants might have sufficient grasp of the topic. The topic of the essay "Terrorism" was intentionally selected by the researcher as it didn't support the learner's crammed knowledge.

f) Data Analysis

The data from two hundred and fifty graduate ESL learners from four colleges and one Universities were read, analyzed and classified carefully into various error categories. Descriptive statistics analysis method was used, which primarily focused on the error frequency of the learners. The data were carefully analyzed and presented in tables and frequency bar graphs by using Microsoft Excel.

g) Validity and Reliability

It is essential that the usefulness must be maximized for the validity and reliability of an instrument. For a particular population under investigation, it should be developed keeping in view a specific object in order to make an instrument useful. For this study, the vital thing in the development of the instruments designing was the identification of errors regarding prepositions and grammatical accuracy. I measured the ESL learner's writing skill competence through these two

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instruments. The usefulness of an instrument solely depends upon reliability to provide the required information about the ability which is to be measured (Bachman, 1990; Bachman and Palmer).

h) Data Analysis

The data were analyzed following analytic scoring rubrics technique. The major focus was functional category such as Prepositions and grammatical accuracy. In the present study, the statistical procedure was descriptive statistics which intentionally made a focus on frequency count of the ESL learner's errors and presented then into tables. In frequency bar graphs, the same data were also presented by using Microsoft Excel. Side by side, in order to draw frequencies Antconc software has been used in this research study. In statistical studies, graphical presentation of the information is of enormous significance which seems to perform two functions: (1) presents the gathered information (2) and the way learners perform in each grammatical category. Moreover, frequency classifies which type of error occurs how many times and shows how many learners committed the same type of errors.

Table 01: Fifth word Deletion Test (Prepositional Errors)

Category	Error Frequency
Phrasal Verbs	450
Prepositional phrases and Prepositions	718

The table 01 is related to the performance of ESL learners in the performance based test, fifth word deletion. The column 01 is related to the errors of the learners in phrasal verbs and prepositional phrases. The column 02 is related to the error frequency of the learners in this test. The error frequency in phrasal verbs is (N=450), in prepositional phrases it is (N=718).

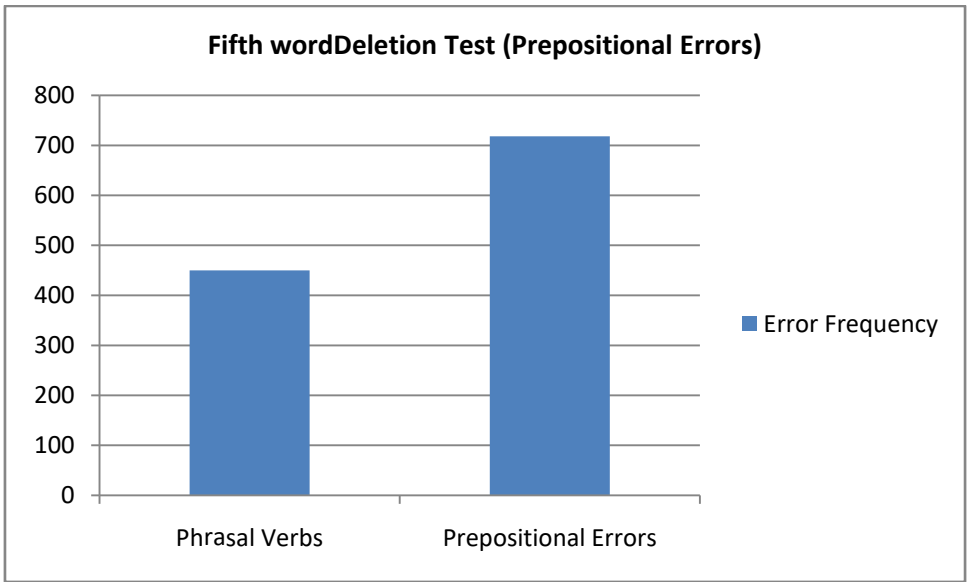


Figure 01

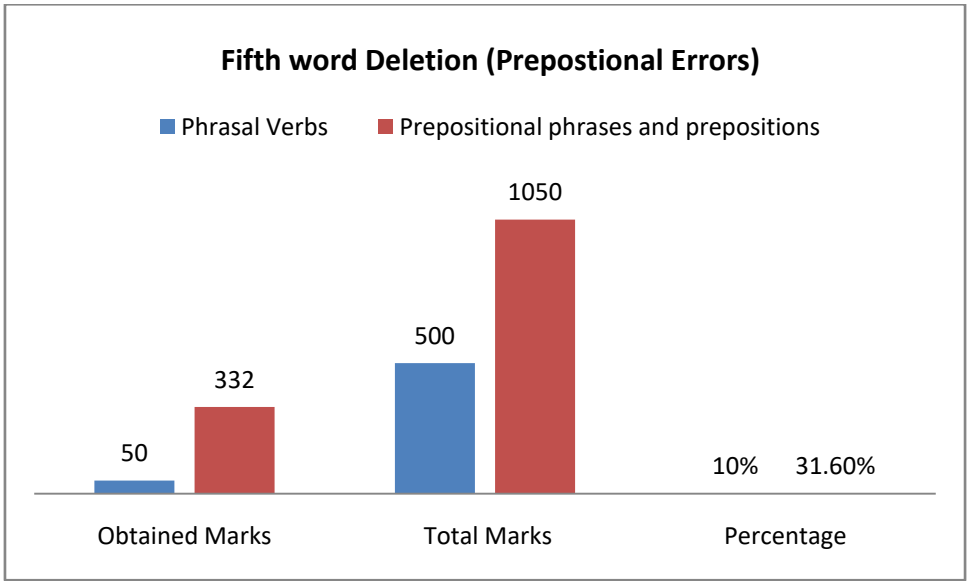


Figure 02

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Table 02: Composition Test

Category	Error Frequency
Definite article	150
Indefinite Articles	120
Zero Articles	152
Preposition	182
Tense	116
Auxiliary	172
Conjunction	105

The table 04 is related to the performance of ESL learners in the performance based test, an open composition. The column 01 is related to the errors of the learners in definite, indefinite, zero article, prepositions, tense, auxiliary and conjunction. The column 02 is related to the error frequency of the learners in this test. The error frequency in definite article is (N=150), in indefinite article it is (N=120), in zero article it is (N=152), in prepositions it is (N=182), in tenses it is (N=116), in auxiliary it is (N=172) and in conjunctions it is (N=105).

The above analysis shows that in this test if we accumulate the definite, indefinite and zero article errors (N=150+N=120+N=152) they are (N=422) in total. In this way, the learners have committed more errors in the domain of articles. The second most frequently committed errors are in the domain of prepositions (N=182). The third most frequently committed errors are in the domain of auxiliaries (N=172). The forth most frequently committed errors are in the domain of tenses (N=116). The fifth most frequently committed errors are in the domain of conjunctions (N=105). The same information has been presented in the figure 07 given below.

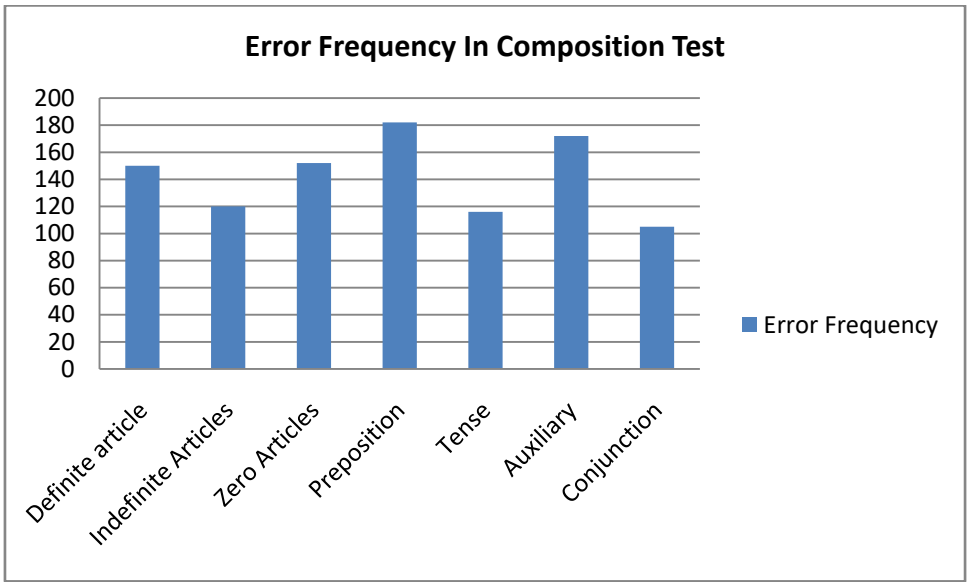


Figure 03

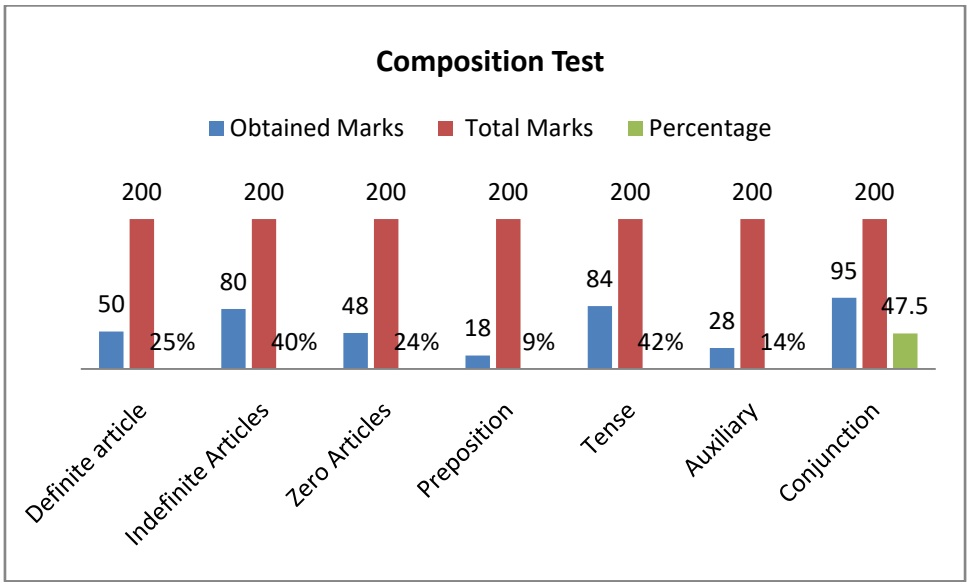


Figure 04

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V. Findings

In order to address research question, the researcher gathered data by two performance based tests: (1) Fifth word deletion (2) Composition.

There were frequent errors of Tenses (N=116), conjunction (N=105) and prepositions (N=182). The learners used unnecessary prepositions in their use of phrasal verbs and idiomatic phrases; they also used prepositions with non prepositional verbs.

- In fifth word deletion, the learners committed more errors in prepositions (N=1145), especially in inserting the following prepositions: *with, in, by, on, and of*. There were also errors in the area of definite articles (N=500).
- The learners committed frequent errors in the use of prepositional phrases (N=718), and less errors in the zero articles (N=450) and in phrasal verbs (N=450). Side by side multiple errors were observed. For example, the learners have problems in verb forms, subject -verb agreement, definite article, prepositional verbs.

VI. Discussion and Conclusion

If we analyze the overall performance of the learners in the linguistic feature under investigation, it is quite understandable that in their writing skills, the graduate/master learners had more problems in *prepositions* domains. One reason is that because a large number of students more or less belong to different backgrounds. Since this study is closely related to the falling standards of academic writing skill of ESL graduate learners. Without making an investigation into it, it seemed not possible to predetermine anything. The researcher gathered data by using two performance based tests (fifth word deletion test and composition) in order to address the first research question: What is the frequency of functional errors of ESL graduate learners in their writing skill? In the analysis of grammatical accuracy, it was pointed out that the learners committed more errors in article, preposition and in tense/verb than other areas of grammar. During the research it was noted that most of the learners in composition were unable to contextualize the topic. Because according to Eggins (2004), in order to derive meaning, contextualization refers to the capability of addressing the topic. But for contextual knowledge, we can never decide the exact meaning because context lies in the text (Eggins, 2004). As Myles (2002,p . 10) argued that it depends on proficiency level, if the text is creative and rich in contents, there is greater possibility for errors at morphosyntactic level. The researcher also noticed the use of various tenses in a single sentence and the wrong use of verb forms which consequently violated accuracy. The learner's concepts about gerund and progressive tense were not clear; they were unable to make a difference between them. They use past tense instead of present tense; even they were totally unfamiliar about the use of modal auxiliaries in accordance of their specific function. It was noticed that the students have serious problem towards vocabulary and because of this they cannot write properly. It seems necessary to accelerate ESL learners' vocabulary knowledge to write well. For the learners, it is essential to have sound and deep knowledge of words that refers to a word's literal and metaphorical meaning, syntactic-morphological forms, semantic relations with other words such as synonyms, antonyms and collocations (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). The researcher stresses that the learners' inaccurate and limited knowledge of words is due to the lack of research in the area of vocabulary especially in Pakistani context. Learners' vocabulary knowledge can be developed by using variety of ways: learners' direct instructions by creating a words sharing atmosphere in the class, memorization of words and by developing the habit of dictionary usage (Yopp & Yopp, 2007) However, for accurate writing, grammatical proficiency is the first step of the journey. (Valette, 1991). The outcome of the present study seems in complete harmony with the outcomes of the study which conducted by (El-Sayed, 1982; Kim, 1987, 1988; Kao, 1999). As far as error analysis is concerned, El-sayed (1982) observed that the participants committed (1140) total errors and among these errors (159) were found in the use of pronouns, (640) in verbs, (143) in the use of articles and the rest of in the adjectives, prepositions and nouns. In order to analyze the errors of Korean learners, Kim (1988) conducted a research study. In this study, the participants were 120 intermediate Korean ESL learners and for these learners, the task was the translation of forty two Korean sentences into English. The learners committed (720) errors related to tenses, (930) errors related to the moods of verbs and (885) related to voice. Kao (1999) conducted a study on what type of errors are largely committed by Taiwanese college students in their writing skill. So, 169 compositions were collected from 53 Taiwanese college students for this purpose. The total errors of the learners were (928) and the frequent errors were pointed out in the domain of grammar. The learners committed 18% errors in semantics 66% in grammar and 16% errors in lexical items. On the other hand, prepositions create problems for ESL learners. As compare to other languages, English prepositions have been commonly used in English and they are 70 in total. (Koffi, 2010, p. 297). According to Grubic (2004), a foreign language speaker has to face three problems regarding prepositions: (1) deleting the obligatory and required prepositions (2) usage of erroneous preposition (3) using additional prepositions.

In main practical conclusion, it was noticed that overall grammatical accuracy appeared to be problematic to the learners in their writing skill. Cutting it

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short, the performance of the learners gives an idea that they stumbled upon all the features under analysis.

The study gives a few points through which a line of action can be practiced to improve the existing standard of the learners' writing skill. The pace of changing the learners to improve their writing skill seems to be slow in the current conditions. In this regard, it requires committed approach not only on the part of teachers but students and government as well. Bringing changes in the curriculum to reserve more space to the writing skill components, the training of teachers and making them aware of the L2 learning processes, theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies in connection with second language writing, specific and idea-based feedback of teachers to the learners' writing and bringing changes in the pedagogical methods can assist to a great extent in order to make the learners competent as well as creative L2 writers.

Future Study

The researcher proposes that there needs an exhaustive research in the field of L2 writing particularly in Pakistani context. It is eagerly required because this area has not captured as much consideration and thoughtfulness of the researchers as the other language domains have done. Hence, in second language writing, there is need to broaden the scope of research and the focus should be laid both on the linguistic knowledge (grammatical, lexical, orthographic) of the learners and prepositions. The present study focal point is only on the graduate/master male and female students' compositional problems selected from Public/private Sector College/university with reference to prepositions, idiomatic phrases and prepositional phrases and zero prepositions and grammatical accuracy. The upcoming studies can be conducted on female graduates or on both male and female at undergraduate level in order to assess whether gender differences affect the outcomes in the occurrence of errors. Furthermore in Pakistani context, it is also suggested for the forthcoming studies to investigate writing strategies of L2 learners that they make use in their first and second language such as translation activity.

In the future study what seems to be of vital significance is collecting more oral data (e.g. via recordings, spontaneous speech during conversation classes) because this can surely be more fruitful regarding L2 learning.

Appendix A

Fifth Word Deletion

1. In July 2010, following ……. monsoon rains, the Indus …… rose above its banks ….. flooded the surrounding area. …… the rains continuing for …… further two months, large …… of Pakistan were affected …… various degrees. As of …… August, the heaviest flooding …… moved southward along the …… River from already severely …… Northern districts in Khyber ….. of heavily populated areas ….. Western Punjab and the …… province of Sindh. In …… recovery phase, there will ….. a need to assure …… balance between two strategies : ……. action, where still needed, …… at protecting lives and …… disease, malnutrition and disabilities …… the vulnerable populations in ….. affected areas, and to ….. the foundations for the …… actions designed to strengthen ….. institutional capacity to pursue ….. terms health developmental goals ….. a context of good …… , to assure human security …… extend social protection in ….. .
2. Early recovery includes efforts …… be activated in all …… from the initial phase ….. relief so that the …… foundations for fully fledged ….. work are laid. Early …… continues during the prolonged ……. of extended emergencies and …… long transition that follow ….. the aftermath of natural …… and the post conflict ……. . There is no clear-cut …… but rather a contiguum …… the relief and recovery …… . It is important to …… that the disaster management …… is an unbroken chain …… human actions whose phases ……. . The health cluster and …… want to thank all …… health partners for their …… and interest in the …… recovery process. It only …… that due to time …… the consultation process had ……. be limited. As this ……. a dynamic document which …… have to be adopted ….. the changing reality over …… next months. The goal …… the health recovery plan …… in this document is ……. support the reactivation of ……. health care system in …… affected by the floods …… special emphasis on maximizing ….. . The aim of this …… is to describe the ….. actions to be undertaken ….. the health sector from …… 2011 on, to facilitate …… recovery activities and as …… follow up to the ……. interventions currently underway. On …… other hand, the institutional …….. with the district and ……. health authorities is insufficiently …… .

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