

Syntactical Scrutiny: Inaccuracies in the Lesson Planning of Non-Language Pre-service Teachers

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ABSTRACT: This study scrutinized the syntactical inaccuracies in the lesson planning of the 21 non-language preservice teachers at Isabela State University San Mariano Campus. The data collected were thoroughly analyzed using Gass and Selinker's EA model. Sentence fragments, article issues, run-on sentences, prepositional issues, SV agreement, and verb tenses are all noticeable results at the syntactical level of linguistics. These imprecisions are caused by two factors: (1) the students' incapability to master the target language's rules and structure; and (2) the L1's interference with the target language's learning.

Keywords: *syntactical error, interlanguage, intra-language, error analysis*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is imperative in a community because it serves a variety of vital functions. However, its significance extends beyond communication to include numerous sources of study and human sciences (**Zedan et al., 2013**), indicating its significance as a source of learning and information. Language can be translated both through oral or written; nevertheless, **Sparks et al., (2014)** put a strong emphasis on written language as it is regarded to be more credible because of the critical engagement of linguistics, social, and conceptual processes, which are essential in producing a high-quality output during the writing process. This instance makes writing more difficult especially to students, as this mode is prevalently used in schools and universities.

There have been multiple reported difficulties in learning the English language, particularly in applying its rule in writing. Among them is the passages' structural ambiguity. Specific structures are perplexing to both native English speakers and second and third language learners. Implying that there must be a comprehension of the sentence's context first before they are likely to comprehend its meaning. In this regard, the language's nature tends to become more complex, mainly if it is used as a second or third language, resulting in a more difficult comprehension of how the language should be utilized appropriately. Thus, writing turns out to be more technical when the target medium is different from what the learners are acquainted with. Indicating that L1 directly affects learning the L2, **Brown (1994)** explained that learning a second language is a complex process that requires knowledge of grammar structures, vocabulary acquisition, and communication skills. **Özkayran and Yilmaz (2020)** substantiated this assertion specifying that the interference from the mother tongue was identified as the primary source of errors made by students while learning the English language. Others have also reported that self-efficacy has a direct impact on the writing ability of the students. **Sabti et al., (2019)** revealed that 59% of the Iraqi EFL students from their study displayed low self-esteem, indicating that they were worried about their writing performance which subsequently led them to a poor writing output. Similarly, **Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope**

(1986) reported a significant association between foreign language learning and anxiety, proving that students can experience anxiety in language classes, resulting in poor writing performance.

Conversely, **Khanbutayeva (2020)** clarified that the issue of sentence structural ambiguity is not new, explaining that this occurs when words and phrases are arranged incorrectly or when a necessary word is omitted. Additionally, he stated that grammatical means and syntactic structure play a significant role in the formulation of ambiguity. Hence, the syntax is seen as fundamental in providing an accurate and clear message as this oversees the proper word arrangement in written texts. However, some studies showed that learning this linguistic organization is one of the most challenging parts of language mastery. **Farooq and Wahid (2018)** reported that syntactic errors are relatively common in EFL texts in their study on syntactical errors. In some situations, the text becomes quite tricky due to poor word order, concluding that the errors made by students can be linked to both Mother Tongue influence and the lack of an appropriate atmosphere in which English is taught. Similarly, **Dinamika & Hanafiah (2019)** discovered that students struggled to comprehend and apply correct English grammar in their study of text syntactical errors using an error analysis procedure. The students' syntactical errors were due to two primary sources: intra-language error and intra-language error. Furthermore, **Habibi, Wachyuni, & Husni (2017)** found out that non-English students from One Islamic University in Jambi faced difficulties in writing, particularly in word choice, logical sequencing, or appropriate structural organization. They suggested that the students need assistance to overcome their difficulties during the writing process. These findings confirm that writing is a difficult-to-learn skill that necessitates an in-depth understanding of syntax structures.

Additionally, it is reasonable to assume that syntax errors contribute to paragraph-level difficulties. When sentences are grouped together to convey meaning, paragraphs are formed. As a result, sentence-level errors contribute to the structure of a poorly written paragraph. **Temporal (2016)** discovered in her study of college students' logical organization skills in paragraph development that when it came to idea sequencing, respondents lacked proficiency, preventing them from forming a coherent paragraph. This may seem trivial, but it impedes the production of high-quality writing; and hence, syntax investigates the relationships between the sentences contained within a paragraph.

It has been observed that non-language pre-service teachers at Isabela State University San Mariano Campus struggle to construct grammatically accurate written works. This is partly due to their lack of exposure to the English language, given that the new curriculum in higher education includes only one subject linked to language learning. Thus, the purpose of this study is to ascertain whether the identified writing difficulty of the participants also applies to their lesson plan writing. The Error Analysis model designed by **Gass & Selinker** in 2008 was used, which corresponds to six steps: data collection, errors identification, errors classification, quantification, analysis, and remediation. Furthermore, the objectives of this study are to (1) analyze and evaluate the syntactical errors that non-language pre-service teachers frequently make when writing their lesson plans; (2) classify the source of the errors. The findings of this study will set the foundation for advancing pedagogical measures to prevent future batches of non-language pre-service teachers on campus from making similar set of writing errors.

II. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative descriptive approach was used in this study. Gass & Selinker's Error Analysis model was used to explain and analyze the syntactical inaccuracies in non-language pre-service teachers' lesson planning. This Error Analysis details six steps in the data analysis, including data collection, error identification, classification, quantification, analysis, and remediation.

Participants

This study was conducted at Isabela State University San Mariano Campus, with participants from the Teachers' College who are non-language major students. These 21 participants are all graduating students and will undergo on-the-job training; however, demonstration teaching is required prior to deployment. The tools analyzed were their lesson plans for demonstration teaching.

Instruments

The participants were asked to share the lesson plans for their final demonstration. They were not constrained in their writing, and they had complete discretion over the topics they discussed. With the students' consent, these lesson plans were used as the tools in this Error Analysis.

Procedures

The EA model utilized in this paper consists of several steps: (1) data collection, (2) error identification, (3) error classification, (4) error quantification, (5) error analysis, and (6) error remediation.

The first step was to collect data from the participants' lesson plans. After obtaining copies of their outputs, the analysis began with examining the syntactical imprecisions, which were classified according to their type. After clustering the errors, they were quantified to determine the frequency of occurrence of the identified syntactical flaws. Along with identifying the source of the errors, an explanation of why they were committed was also conducted. Following the analysis steps, recommendations for remediation or pedagogical implications were made.

III. RESULTS

Following a thorough analysis of 21 lesson plans written by non-language pre-service teachers, it was discovered that they contain numerous syntactical inconsistencies. Six types of errors were identified during their lesson planning process, including the presence of sentence fragments; the addition and omission of articles; run-on sentences; inaccuracies in the use of a proper preposition; errors in subject-verb agreement; and incorrect verb tenses.

Sentence Fragments

The first type of error identified was the presence of sentence fragments in participants' lesson plans. The table below contains random examples.

Table 1. Fragments

Participants	Error Type	Frequency	Examples	Source of Inaccuracy
P1	Fragment	63	<i>As you can see here in the picture.</i>	Intra-Language Error
P8			<i>In your 1/2 sheet of paper. Draw a...</i>	
P12			<i>...which can participate in any reaction. Cannot survive in free state.</i>	
P20			<i>Without your father and mother.</i>	

The table above provides several examples of sentence fragments sourced from participants' lesson plans. These random examples are dependent clauses that did not express a thought completely. The incorrectly punctuated dependent clauses contributed to this issue. As a result, it can be inferred that the problem began with an improper use of punctuation marks.

Besides that, sentence fragments were discovered in two distinct contexts. The first was observed on the instruction-giving process. This context is evident in P8's example passage. The other context was observed during the discussion, as evidenced by P1, P12, and P20. Following data analysis, quantification was performed. There were 63 inaccuracies discovered in sentence fragments.

Additionally, it was discovered that the majority of the errors are due to intra-language errors. This indicates that participants incorporated sentence fragments into their lesson plans due to their inability to master the L2 or target language.

Omission and Addition of Articles

The analysis revealed that article misuse, such as adding and omitting articles, is prevalent in the participants' lesson plans. The table below contains illustrative examples of various types of errors.

Table 2. Articles

Participants	Error Type	Frequency	Examples	Source of Inaccuracy
P2	Article Omission	91	<i>Kindly give one example of external part of a male.</i>	Intra-Language Error
P4			<i>This diagram shows the different phases of moon and their positions around...</i>	

P3	Article Addition	46	<i>The words that we formed in the 4 pics 1 word are <u>the</u> fish, eggs, meat...</i>	Intra-Language Error
P18			<i>...observe because I'll ask <u>a</u> questions later on.</i>	

The table summarizes the two types of article usage errors. The first category illustrates the absence of articles in various texts. The passage from P2 was an example of an article omission, specifically the indefinite article "an" that should have been placed before the noun "external." P4 was also an instance of an article omission, particularly on a definite article. The article "the" was omitted, which was supposed to precede the specific noun "moon."

Meanwhile, there are sentences in the lesson plans included the addition of articles. Both passages from P3 and P18 violated the rules characterizing the use of articles in relation to the plurality of the noun. The article "the" was used in a series of nouns in P3, and the article "a" was used in the plural noun "questions" in P18.

Following a series of analyses, it was determined that there are 137 quantified errors in the usage of articles. Additionally, it was discovered that the source of inaccuracies was intra-language errors, which explains their inability to comprehend the target language's rules for using articles.

Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence was another syntactical error discovered in the lesson plans. The table below illustrates the three run-on sentences that were discovered during the analysis.

Table 3. Run-on Sentence

Participants	Error Type	Frequency	Examples	Source of Inaccuracy
P10	Comma Splice	1	<i>The group A will stay here in front, the group B will stay at the back, the group C will stay in the middle.</i>	Intra-Language Error
P11	Fused Sentence	2	<i>The four heart valves make sure that the blood flows freely in a ward direction that there's no backward leakage blood flows from your right and left atria to left ventricles through the open mitral and tricuspid valves.</i>	Intra-Language Error
P13			<i>The Pharynx or throat is located posterior to the mouth it is the common</i>	

*passageway for digestion
and respiration.*

Depicted in the table above are the two different types of run-on sentences discovered in the lesson plans. The error was classified as a comma splice in the first instance. P10 committed a comma splice because the passage's three independent clauses were improperly linked using commas. This passage could have been improved by separating the three independent clauses. A coordinating conjunction can be used to separate these independent clauses, thereby avoiding a complex sentence.

Additionally, a fused sentence was discovered in the participants' lesson plans. The examples from P11 and P13 were classified as fused sentences due to the lack of a punctuation mark or coordinating conjunction to denote the separation of two independent clauses.

This syntactical error was found to have the fewest errors, consisting of only three run-on sentences. The source of inaccuracy was identified as an intra-language factor, which signifies why participants struggle to distinguish and separate independent clauses.

The Use of a Proper Preposition

One of the most frequently occurring errors identified in this analysis was the incorrect use of a preposition. Random examples were chosen from the participants' lesson plans. The table below explicitly illustrates these prepositional errors.

Table 4. Prepositions

Participants	Error Type	Frequency	Examples	Source of Inaccuracy
P5			<i>I've seen his eyelashes, eyebrows, and the lines <u>in</u> his skin.</i>	
P15	Preposition Error	38	<i>What do you think is the next level <u>to</u> atom?</i>	Inter-Language Error
P17			<i>...familiar <u>in</u> the formula and process of...</i>	
P21			<i>...proceed <u>on</u> your respective group locations.</i>	

The prepositional errors made by participants while writing their lesson plans are described in Table 4. It was ascertained that the primary issue is an incorrect preposition choice in a sentence. The examples drawn from the chosen participants substantiate this claim. The passage taken from P5's output contained an error in choosing a preposition that denotes an object on a surface. Meanwhile, P15 made a prepositional error, which refers to the relationship of a part to its whole. The term "atom" refers to the whole and the term "level" to its parts. In the case of P17, there was a misunderstanding regarding the use of a preposition to mean

"possessing," which is with. Finally, P21 encountered an issue when attempting to use a preposition that denotes direction and movement.

This analysis identified a total of 38 prepositional errors and determined that the primary source of these inaccuracies is the inter-language factor.

Misapplied Number Agreement

Numerous studies have revealed that subject-verb agreement has always been a problem in students' writings. The table below details the number agreement errors made by participants.

Table 5. Subject-Verb Agreement

Participants	Error Type	Frequency	Examples	Source of Inaccuracy
P1	Number Agreement Error	61	<i>The glans <u>is</u> the most distal part of the penis.</i>	Inter-Language Error
P4			<i>...Mars are full of irons and when they're exposed, they <u>oxidizes</u> and turn reddish.</i>	
P6			<i>...it <u>digest</u> and absorbs nutrients from the food.</i>	
P12			<i>The PAGASA monitor the movement and development of weather disturbances.</i>	

The subject-verb agreement errors derived from the output of random participants are displayed in Table 5. It was discovered that some students are still unfamiliar with the concept of subject and verb agreement, which requires that the verb agrees with the noun's number. The passage from P1 demonstrates how the linking verb "is" was misused to complement the plural noun "glans." Similarly, P4's passage contained an erroneous use of the verb "oxidizes," which does not correspond to the plural form of the noun "irons." P16 and P12 both contain the singular nouns "stomach" and "PAGASA." The participants made errors when they used the plural forms of the verbs "digest" and "monitor."

Quantification of the inaccuracy revealed that all participants made 61 errors in total. These errors are due to inter-language errors, of which the L1 was a source of interference during the target language's acquisition.

Tenses of Verb Erroneousness

The final syntactical inaccuracy identified in the participants' output concerns verb tenses. The table below contains random examples of errors.

Table 6. Verb Tenses

Participants	Error Type	Frequency	Examples	Source of Inaccuracy
P1 P19	Verb Tense Error (Active voice)	9	<i>Today, we will going to have a "treasure hunt".</i> <i>I had given you an activity last meeting.</i>	Inter-Language Error
P5 P6	Verb Tense Error (Passive voice)	2	<i>Keratin is produce by a predominant cell type of epidermis...</i> <i>The group that has the highest score will be <u>announce</u> as the winner.</i>	Inter-Language Error

Two categories of verb tenses issues were identified after a thorough analysis of the lesson plans. The first category dealt with verb tense errors in active voice sentences. The example taken from P1 contained an error due to the omission of the auxiliary verb "be." The passage is written in the future progressive tense, and the correct formula should have been will + be + verb (-ing). Meanwhile, the sentence from P19 lacks a second event that indicating an incorrect use of the past perfect tense. The simple past tense is presumed to be the correct tense.

Additionally, the second category identified was inaccuracies in verb tenses in passive voice sentences. The examples from P5 and P6 are written in simple present tense and simple future tense, respectively. In this case, the verb should take the past participle form. Thus, in P5's example, the verb should be "used," while in P6's example, the verb should be "announced."

The quantification revealed a total of 11 verb tenses errors. These errors occur as a result of the inter-language factor.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study discovered six distinct types of errors from the participants' lesson plans. A total of 313 syntactical imprecisions were quantified. Among these errors, those involving the proper use of an article were the most prevalent, accounting for a total of 137, or 43.77 % of all errors. Following that were sentence fragments (20.13 %), Subject-Verb Agreement (19.49 %), prepositional errors (12.14 %), verb tenses (3.51 %), and run-on sentences (.96%).

These errors were examined, and it was discovered that sentence fragments, omission and addition of articles, and run-on sentences occurred not as a result of L1 interference but as a result of participants' inability to master the target language's rules and structure; thus, the primary source of these errors is intra-language inaccuracy. According to **Kaweera (2013)**, intra-lingual errors are not caused by the transfer of the first language but rather by the target language itself. Additionally, **Richards (1974)** defined intra-language interference as falling into several categories, including over-generalization, simplification, communication-based

errors, induced errors, analogical errors, ignorance of rule restriction, insufficient application of rules, and false hypothesis. This analysis identified several of these categories.

The first instance of an intra-language error occurred with sentence fragments. **Bashir et al. (2016)** stated that a fragment is not a sentence because it cannot stand alone, and that fragments are a hindrance to students' successful writing. The passage "*As you can see here in the picture.*" is an example. It can be said that a critical element of the passage is missing, as it does not convey a complete thought. In this case, the respondent punctuated the passage incorrectly, failing to consider the rule that a complete sentence must contain a noun and a verb. **Fine (2010)** affirmed this analysis, claiming that when a dependent clause is punctuated, fragments occur. As a result of the respondent's failure to use a fully developed structured sentence, this error can be classified as an *incomplete application of rules*.

Second, the omission and addition of articles were identified as another type of intra-lingual error. **Sermsook, Liamnimit, and Pochakorn (2017)** discovered that article usage is a syntactical issue at the word level in their study of Thai students' English writing. They discovered that Thai students were perplexed about using the articles the, an, a, and zero article. The findings of their study on the use of articles are corroborated by an analysis of the example "*The words that we formed in the 4 pics 1 word are the fish, eggs, meat...*" The first two "*the*" articles in the passage were used correctly because they were followed by countable nouns "*words*" and "*4 pics 1 word*"; however, the latter article was misused because it was followed by a series of nouns that are used to mean general for the term "*words*". As a result, this marks that the respondent *over-generalized* the article's rules.

The run-on sentence was the final intra-lingual error discovered in the analysis. **Lester & Beason (2013)** asserted that the concept of a complete sentence is problematic, and they noted run-on sentences and sentence fragments as the most common errors committed by writers. While they support their assertion, it conflicts with the quantification provided by this analysis, which demonstrated that run-on sentences were the least frequently committed error with only three. However, based on the structural analysis of a sentence formation, this error is still unavoidable. The passage "*The group A will stay here in front, the group B will stay at the back, the group C will stay in the middle.*" is one example. The sentence is incorrect due to the improper use of the punctuation comma; thus, its inaccuracy began with an inability to use the exception to the punctuation rules. In conclusion, the existence of this run-on sentence is classified *ignorance of rule restriction*, as the respondent failed to apply the proper punctuation rule in a passage where it should have been applied correctly.

Meanwhile, interlanguage errors were discovered to be the primary source of error in terms of prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and verb tenses. **Lado (1964)** defined interlanguage errors as a negative influence of the L1 on the target language's performance. This type of error occurs when learners believe that the target language's forms are similar with that of the native language (**Brown, 1994**).

The first interlanguage error in the analysis was on the use of an appropriate preposition. As a medium of instruction in the Philippine educational system and as the national language, it is reasonable to assume that the participants' understanding of the proper use of prepositions in the target language was influenced directly by the Filipino language. The Prepositions of the Filipino language take on various forms depending on their functions. The preposition "*sa*" is distinct in the language with its function; however, it is still used in conjunction with other

prepositions; and cannot be separated regardless of their functions such as "*para sa*" and "*mula sa*". The former is translated as "*for*," whereas the latter is translated as "*from*." This situation explains why participants are perplexed about the proper usage of the target language's prepositions, as their first language has only one major prepositional use.

The SVA was the second type of error that falls under the category of interlanguage errors. The subject and verb do not agree on their number in the Filipino language; in contrast to the English language, when the subject is singular, the verb should be singular as well. In the context of the Filipino language, the noun's number can only be pluralized by adding the determiner "*mga*", but the verb remains unchanged. Thus, it can be concluded that the SVA of the English language is inapplicable to the Filipino language, which explains why a small percentage of students failed to apply the SVA rules in their writings.

Finally, the confusion over verb tenses was identified as an interlanguage factor error. Numerous points were made in light of this analysis. (1) In the Filipino language, whether in active or passive voice, the verb form does not change, whereas in the English language, the verb must be in the past participle when the sentence is in passive voice. (2) The Filipino language lacks the perfect tense. (3) Finally, in the case of future progressive tense, which follows the pattern *will + be + verb (-ing)* in the English language, future progressive tense can be achieved simply by adding affixes to verbs in the Filipino language. This signifies why some students continue to struggle with verb tenses and other aspects of the target language due to the two languages' differing verb tenses rules.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

Writing is one of the macro skills that teachers must possess. Because most teachers' activities involve writing, they are subject to censure, mainly if the writings are packed with errors. It is critical to communicate the pre-service teachers' writing struggles and emphasize the critical nature of high-quality writing in their chosen field of specialization. The following remediations were made considering the analysis's findings:

1. Language teachers should tailor fit the sole General English subject in the tertiary curriculum to include the basics of syntax rules;
2. proliferate the writing and reading exposures of the non-language students;
3. present an opposite approach in teaching to invigorate the students in expressing their thoughts using the English language, and subsequently becoming aware of the language's structure; and
4. to condition the language learning, both language and non-language teachers should scrupulously note the unconscious language misused by the students and give feedback (mentoring).

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to ascertain whether the intricacies of non-language pre-service teachers' academic writing also apply to their lesson plan writing. Syntactical inaccuracies were identified through an analysis of the lesson plans. The errors identified were further examined, and it was discovered that most of them are interlanguage errors, which explains why non-language students have difficulty learning the target language. This is due to their lack of exposure to the English language. In comparison, intra-language factors account

for only a quarter of the total errors. This result demonstrates how the L1 directly affected their learning and comprehension of the target language.

These findings accentuate the significance of teaching the basic concepts of linguistics to non-language teachers to lessen the syntactical imprecisions in their lesson plan. This would subsequently lessen their errors in the delivery of instruction inside the classroom.

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