

**ERROR ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' WRITTEN DISCOURSES**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to analyze the most frequently occurring errors of college students in order to know their weaknesses and appropriately address them. The corpus was composed of 78 essays written by students taking up Speech and Oral Communication class from business, nursing, and education programs. Errors were initially identified using *Grammarly*, a grammar and plagiarism detection software, supported by manual editing done by researchers. Errors were classified using the headings and subheadings provided by Grammarly, although other categories not captured by the software were added by the researchers. Results showed that the most frequent errors committed by students were on grammar, punctuation, and style. On grammar, the top three errors were verb errors, determiners, and wrong or missing preposition. On punctuation, prevalent errors were found in compound-complex sentences, followed by comma misuse, misuse of semicolon, quotation, and other marks. On style, wordiness was common in many sentences. Such writing difficulties encountered by college students give an implication that English teachers should put more emphasis on grammar, punctuation, and style in their teaching. Thus, a yearly English diagnostic test for students is strongly recommended to identify their weaknesses and apply the appropriate remediation needed.

*Keywords:* error analysis, college students' written discourses, Grammarly

### **Introduction**

The knowledge of students in using the English language may be evidenced by their facility at using the language for communication, either in spoken or written form. As early as 1950s, researchers have been intrigued by the occurrence of errors in second language (L2) learners' corpus. Studies conducted on the subject focused on pedagogical issues, hinting that errors show learners' ineptness and lack of competence of the target language. However, a shift in interests began to emerge with the article of Corder (1967) titled "The Significance of Learners' Errors" which held the view that errors are not something to be eradicated, but are important in providing evidence of the state of a learner's knowledge of the target language.

In both oral and written communication, errors are a conspicuous feature of second language learners that demonstrate the extent of student learning. According to Ellis (2007), it is important to focus on learners' errors, particularly on why they make errors. Knowing the reasons why students commit errors would make it easy for teachers to address them in the classroom. Moreover, if learners are aware of the errors they make, they may be able to correct these themselves.

One way to assess the competence of English language learners is to collect samples of their language when they are called upon to use their L2, and then carefully analyze them (Ellis, 2007). Most often, the focus of analysis is on the structure or grammar of the target language, which is achieved by finding the common errors learners make either in oral or written discourse. This process is called error analysis.

According to Ellis (2007), this process involves identifying the errors, comparing the sentences learners produce with what seems to be the normal or correct sentences, describing the errors, classifying them into types, explaining why such errors occur, and evaluating the errors.

Local and foreign literature surveyed on second language error analysis have a variety of foci: Kafipour and Khojasteh (2012) and Kanungo (2014) examined the types, gravity, and frequencies of errors; Bitchener and Ferris (2012), and Purwati (2011)

investigated the judgment of native speakers and evaluators as to the text produced by the learners; Ferris (2011), and Beuningen, De Jong, and Kuiken (2012) focused on the treatment of errors; Gustilo (2011), Laufer and Waldman (2011), and Ishikawa (2011) dealt on language features while Selinker and Rutherford (2013), Tarone (2012), and Kasper (2010) evaluated interlanguage variation.

In contrast with the methodology used by the above researchers, error analysis using computer learner corpora was ventured by Granger (2013). Likewise, the present study used this new method of error analysis that utilized computer software, named Grammarly.

Grammarly is an online proofreading tool that identifies and classifies students' errors in grammar, punctuation, style, and spelling. Similar studies that used this method were Gustillo (2009), Welton (2014), and Dianati and Cavaleri (2015), and Vojak, Kline, Cope and McCarthey (2011), and Malaca-Sistoza (2016). However, computer softwares, like Grammarly, are not a replacement for a human proofreader. In the study of Welton (2014), he used StyleCheck to identify and classify errors, which confirmed the same errors he identified. However, he found more errors than the software did. Thus, in this study, after the corpus had been run in Grammarly, the authors evaluated the papers again for possible missed errors.

Unlike the surveyed literature on the topic, this paper not only attempts to examine the types and frequencies of errors, investigate the texts produced by learners, and focus on the treatment of errors, but also treads on new territory: that of using computer corpora and computer software in analyzing learners' errors and confirm if the errors are characteristics of the standard Philippine English.

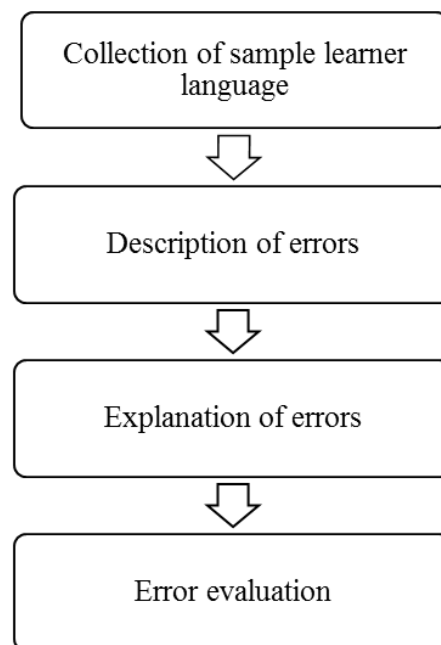
In the foregoing studies, both written and oral discourses were analyzed. However, this paper chose to analyze only the written discourses of students since different standards of English are used in spoken language (exonormative) given the existence of World Englishes. On the other hand, norms of written English in countries where English is a second language should not diverge too far from those of the international written standard [endonormative] (Greenbaum, 1998), which are therefore easier to analyze. The analysis of

learner corpora using computer software was used in this study because the method is relatively new and so that the study's results may contribute to the still limited literature on the topic. Moreover, the analysis of errors was made to support other studies on the characteristics of Philippine English.

Generally, this paper aimed to describe the errors committed by learners of English as a second language (ESL). Specifically, it set answer the following questions:

1. What are the most frequent errors committed by the students per program and as a whole?
2. How may the top three errors of the respondents be described, explained, and evaluated?
3. What are the characteristics of college students' ESL writing in terms of grammatical features?
4. What are the implications of the errors committed to second language teaching and learning?

### Conceptual Framework



*Figure 1.* The process of error analysis by Ellis and Barkhuize (2005).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study used the theoretical framework of Corder (1967) in his explanation of errors and mistakes. Corder suggested that errors occur because of gaps in the learner's English knowledge; whereas, mistakes occur when the learner has not yet learned how to master a certain grammatical form (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). The distinction between errors and mistakes is not easily made in the analysis of data, which makes it difficult to detect an error in a text. However, Corder has created an analytical tool called Error Analysis, which is described as "a set of procedures for identifying, describing, and explaining learners' errors" (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

It is crucial to point out that error analysis is not only about identifying and detecting errors, but also it actually is trying to explain why they are made. When investigating second language learners' material, researchers use several methods to collect data for the research. According to Ellis (2007), the best method to investigate second language acquisition is by collecting samples of the learner's productive English. The written production reveals the learner's grammatical knowledge and provides evidence of how much the learner really knows, which makes essays a perfect sample.

The methodological framework used in this study was taken from the study of Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), as follows:

#### **Collection of a Sample of Learner Language**

When collecting data, one has to consider what the purpose of the study is and then try to collect relevant data for the study's aim and research questions that need to be answered (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

#### **Identification of Errors**

Before analyzing a text, it is important to define what an error is beforehand. For example, when identifying grammatical errors in English learners' texts, one has to compare them to what is grammatically correct in English grammar books. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

## Description of Errors

Corder writes that in order to describe an error, one has to specify how the English learner's error differs from the native speaker's (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Therefore, a categorization of the grammatical errors needs to be developed, as these five following principles show. All examples are taken from Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005):

**Errors of omission.** This occurs when the learner has left out a word. *Example:* "My sister happy."

**Errors of addition.** This happens when the learner has added a word or an ending to another word which is grammatically incorrect. *Example:* "I have *eated*."

**Misinformation/Substitution.** When the learner uses the wrong form of a morpheme or structure; e.g., when he/she uses the wrong preposition in a sentence such as "It was the hardest time *in* my life."

**Misordering.** An example is when the learner places a morpheme incorrectly in a grammatical construction such as "She fights all the time her brother."

**Blends.** When the learner is uncertain of which word to use and blends two different phrases; e.g., "The *only one* thing I want." Even though these principles seem clear and easy to use, it is sometimes very problematic to distinguish which type of an error has occurred. Sometimes, a sentence can be so confusing that it can have two different reconstructions and, therefore, two different types of errors. The type of error is, therefore, dependent on the researchers' reconstruction of the sentence (Ellis, 1994).

Furthermore, one can categorize the errors by word class, e.g., verb, subject or adjective and also develop further categories within each word class. For example verb related errors can be divided into errors of tense, error of aspect, etc. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

### **Explanation of Errors**

In order to find out why the error was made, one has to try to explain it. This is the most important part of Error Analysis as it really describes which factor has affected the learner to make such an error. However, it is not easy to make a distinction between an error and a mistake which makes the explanation of errors more difficult. Furthermore, when researchers try to explain second language (L2) learners' errors, they often use different factors to categorize the different types of errors. Some factors are the following:

**Transfer Errors.** This factor includes all errors where the L2 learner has used his/her L1 to create a sentence which has led to the error.

**Overgeneralization Error.** This occurs when a learner overuses the same type of grammatical rule or structure, thus creating wrong grammatical structures.

As far as the intralingual errors are concerned, they result from faulty or partial learning of the target language rather than language transfer (Fang & Jiang, 2007). Richards (1974) cites four main types of intralingual errors, namely: (1) overgeneralization, (2) ignorance of rule restrictions, (3) incomplete application of rules, and (4) false concepts hypothesized. Later he identifies six sources of errors: (1) interference, (2) overgeneralization, (3) performance errors, (4) markers of transitional competence, (5) strategies of communication and assimilation, and (6) teacher-induced errors.

Stenson (1974) states three main reasons for errors, namely, (1) incomplete acquisition of the target grammar, (2) exigencies of the learning/teaching situation, and (3) errors due to normal problems of language performance.

### **Error Evaluation**

Furthermore, the last step in error analysis is to evaluate and draw a conclusion on the gathered results. It is in this step that the different errors are being weighed in order to distinguish which error should get more attention and be taught in class.

### **Method**

This study used sequential exploratory design, a mixed method approach, by analyzing the data both quantitatively and qualitatively, with the latter used more dominantly. The results of the analysis of the qualitative data in the evaluation phase of the error analysis served to confirm the findings of the quantitative data and vice-versa.

### **Corpus**

A total of 78 essays were collected from second and third year college students taking up Speech and Oral Communication classes for school year 2015-2016. Results of the *t*-test showed students' grades in English with a *p*-value of .072, which means that there is no significant difference in the mean grade of second year and third year students' in Speech and Communication subject from prelim to semifinals. This shows the homogeneity of students when it comes to their English class.

### **Data Gathering and Analysis**

The 78 essays were encoded "as is" in Word document, the encoders being careful to retain all errors found in the original. The encoding was checked by the researcher to make sure that everything was copied verbatim. All essays were then run in Grammarly. The researcher, who also served as coder, identified more errors than the software did. Some errors involving wordiness, conjunction use, antecedent use, among others, were not distinguished by the program, although it helped confirm the errors identified by the researcher.

The researchers used the categories generated by the software in classifying the errors in the corpus per program. The use of error categories produced by the software was likewise utilized in the study conducted by Malaca-Sistoza (2016), Gustillo (2009), and Welton (2014), who also used the categories yielded by the computer software in the conduct of error analysis. The categories were contextual spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, style, and vocabulary enhancement, each having a subcategory.

However, the researchers did not completely follow the Grammarly categories, but added a few more categories to the list as more errors were identified by the researcher. Since some of the errors overlap and do not belong exclusively to just one error category, the researchers discussed with two English faculty professors how the errors were to be classified for uniformity of codes. Codings for errors and mistakes were also discussed before they were finally labeled as errors.

### **Instruments**

The materials and instruments that were used in the study are the following:

1. Error analysis framework (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) to identify, describe, explain, and evaluate learners' errors;
2. Grammarly for computer tagging and error classification;

The study used Grammarly-generated categories and tagged error results to identify and classify the errors. The 78 essays run in Grammarly automatically generated the data for general text characteristics and frequency of occurrence of lexical, grammatical, and clause-level features. The frequency data was computed to generate the means, sums, and percentages.

### **Results and Discussion**

The results showed the whole process of error analysis from identification to evaluation of errors. Due to a large number of errors per category, only samples of the most frequently occurring errors in essays - grammar, punctuation, and style - were presented, and were used as bases for explaining and evaluating why such errors occurred. Table 1 shows the frequency of errors per program and the means of errors per category.

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Table 1

*Most Frequent Errors Committed by Learners per Program and as a Whole*

Error Type	<u>BSA</u>		<u>BSBA</u>		<u>BSED</u>		<u>BEED</u>		<u>BSN</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Grammar	65	21.67	81	21.66	184	33.52	75	25.60	49	27.37	454	26.78
Punctuation	65	21.67	77	20.59	129	23.50	86	29.35	51	28.49	408	24.07
Style	39	13	94	25.13	148	26.96	58	19.80	35	19.55	374	22.06
Vocabulary Choice	63	21	60	16.04	37	6.74	29	9.90	23	12.85	212	12.51
Contextual Spelling	57	19	49	13.10	40	7.29	36	12.29	18	10.06	200	11.80
Sentence Structure	11	3.66	13	3.48	11	2.00	9	3.07	3	1.68	47	2.77
Total	300	100	374	100	549	100	293	100	179	100	1695	100

As can be gleaned from the table, the most frequent errors committed by BSA students are grammar and punctuation (21.67%) while the least common is on sentence structure at 3.66%. For BSBA, the most frequent error is on style at 25%, followed by grammar at 21.66%, while the least is on sentence structure at 3.48%. Grammar (33.52%) and style (26.96), on the other hand, are the most frequent errors committed by BSED students; while punctuation (29.35%) and grammar (25.60%) are the two top errors for BEED students, which are the same for BSN students at 28.49% and 27.37%, respectively. Overall, grammar is the most frequent error committed by students in all disciplines at 26.78%, followed by punctuation at 24.07%, then style at 22.06%. Sentence structure is the least frequent error committed by students across programs.

It may be noted that the percentage of errors of all five programs were close to each other. The figures showed consistency in the categories that students found most difficult in grammar, punctuation, and style. The subcategories under each category are presented in the succeeding tables.

The subcategories under grammar are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

*Most Common Grammatical Errors Committed by Students*

<u>Grammatical Errors</u>	<u>BSA</u>		<u>BSBA</u>		<u>BSN</u>		<u>BSED</u>		<u>BEED</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Determiner use	13	20.00	19	24.05	22	45.83	59	33.15	24	27.91	137	30.04
Wrong or missing prepositions	13	20.00	27	34.18	7	14.58	38	21.35	21	24.42	106	23.25
Verb Errors	28	43.09	20	25.31	13	27.1	46	25.85	34	39.53	141	30.9
a. Subject-verb agreement	14	21.54	11	13.92	2	4.17	21	11.80	15	17.44	63	13.82
b. Incorrect verb forms	9	13.85	9	11.39	9	18.75	19	10.67	15	17.44	61	13.38
c. Faulty tense sequence	3	4.62			2	4.17	3	1.69	3	3.49	11	2.41
Modal verbs	2	3.08					3	1.69	1	1.16	6	1.32
Incorrect phrasing	1	1.54	5	6.33			9	5.06	3	3.49	18	3.95
Incorrect noun number	6	9.23	4	5.06	2	4.17	5	2.81		0.00	17	3.73
Misuse of quantifiers	2	3.08	2	2.53	2	4.17	5	2.81	1	1.16	12	2.63
Misuse of modifiers	1	1.54	1	1.27			6	3.37	1	1.16	9	1.97
Pronoun use	1	1.54	1	1.27			5	2.81	2	2.33	9	1.97
Conditional sentences							5	2.81			5	1.10
Conjunction use					2	4.17					2	0.44
Total	65	100	79	100	48	100	178	100	86	100	456	100

### Grammatical Errors

Results show that the top three most common errors under grammar are verb usage, determiner use, and wrong or missing prepositions.

**Verb usage.** The next most frequent error is verb usage, which is divided into the following: subject-verb agreement, tense, and verb form.

**Subject-verb agreement.** The following are examples of faulty subject-verb agreement: (1) *Many of us was [are] loving this holiday because this was [is] the time for sharing love and be able to be [being] with our families.* (2) *Ringling bells awakens [awaken] our souls; glimmering lanterns brightens [brighten] the night.* (3) *Doing family gathering, having a Christmas Party, was [are] a tradition in our family during the 24th of December.* (4) *The precious moments is [are] very much clear to my mind.*

**Tense.** Most tense errors comprise the use of past tense. Here are examples: (4) *I think this will help them feel that the Lord come [came] for them so that they can feel His love for us.* (5) *I think it started when I am [was] 3 years old.* (6) *I was a bit ashamed to admit that I knew [had known] the real meaning of Christmas only when I became a freshmen.*

**Form.** On form, incorrect verb forms as well as lack of parallelism on verb tense is evident in the following examples: (7). *We just simply attending [attended] mass together.* (8) *I think it is best to be sharing [share] them with those people in need.* (9) *I always told [tell] myself that He is coming again.* (10) *It was already Christmas when we landed at the airport and we can see [saw] a lot of Christmas decoration inside the airport.*

All errors presented on verb usage may be due to ignorance of rule restrictions, or incomplete acquisition of target grammar. Correct verb usage entails knowing the rules of grammar. In the examples given, it is apparent that students are not familiar with simple grammar rules such as subject-verb agreement. The lack of knowledge may be due, in part, to difficulty in identifying the subject of the sentence, since the verb has to agree with the subject.

**Determiner use.** The frequency of errors on determiner use is not surprising since one characteristic of Philippine English is the omission or addition of articles (Bautista, 2000). According to Bautista (2000), the articles *a*, *an*, and *the* are the most difficult to master in the English grammar. Examples of determiner/article errors are the following: (1) *Singing in a karaoke is \_\_\_ past time of my cousins.* (2) *It was one of \_\_\_most wonderful days of my life.* (3) *We go to the church to participate in the mass and to thank the Lord for every-*

*thing that He has given us.* It may be noted that in examples 1 and 2, the articles *a* and *the* are missing in the sentences, while in example 3, the article *the* was added, although it is not necessary. This illustrates that students are confused on when to use or not to use articles.

The reason for this confusion could be intralingual, particularly ignorance of rule restriction. In sentence no. 3, *It was one of most wonderful days of my life*, the article *the* was missing. Students may not be aware of the rule that a superlative is always preceded by article *the*. On the other hand, instances of adding an article such as in sentence no. 3 may be due to language transfer errors because in Filipino, the article *ang* and *ang mga* is always used to introduce a noun. In addition, the equivalent for *ang* may either be *a* or *the* in English, where usage is governed by a rule that is different from the one used in Filipino.

**Wrong or missing preposition.** Missing or wrong preposition subcategory accounts for almost a fourth of all errors. Examples of wrong prepositions are the following: (1) *It is a family tradition to go over [around] the neighborhood to kiss the hands of our relatives and elders.* (2) *It is about rejoicing for [because] the Lord has come.* In this example, a conjunction is more apt to use than a preposition. (3) *He is the most precious gift that we can give and receive in [on] Christmas day.* (4) *Laughing, chatting, and having fun are what you can see on [in] that house.* (5) *Looking forward for [to] a merry and memorable Christmas this year.* Samples of unnecessary prepositions, which means they may be omitted are the following: (6) *The chefs in our family began cooking for our food.* (7) *As for going to other places, like to my godparents [grandparents'], is not something usual.* Other types of errors are superfluous prepositions such as the following: (8) *After eating and receiving the blessings from God, we're planning about to dedicate a song for [to] our relatives.*

The examples given provide evidence that students from different programs find it difficult to choose the appropriate preposition to use in their sentences. According to Yumul-Florendo (2012), one characteristic of Philippine English is the use of different prepositions as used in American English. This could be because Filipino prepositions (*pang-ukol*) are more complex than that of English prepositions. Moreover, the repertoire of Filipino prepositions do not have exact English equivalents. For example, the preposition *for* has two or more equivalents in Filipino such as *para kay*, *para kina*, *para sa*, *para sa mga*.

*For* is sometimes confused with *to* and *in* because both may be simply translated as *sa* in Filipino and may sometimes be omitted when an English sentence is translated into Filipino.

In sentence 5, *Looking forward for [to] a merry and memorable Christmas this year*. The preposition *to* must be used instead of *for*, which when translated into Filipino would read, *Umaasa ako (sa) isang masaya at makabuluhang Pasko ngayong taon*. In the same way, in sentence no. 3, *He is the most precious gift that we can give and receive in [on] Christmas day*. The preposition *in* was wrongly placed for *on*, which in Filipino may both be translated as *sa*: *Siya ang pinakamahalagang regalo na maibibigay at matatanggap natin (sa) Pasko*. The result is consistent with the observation of Gustillo (2009), who said that *sa* can mean *on*, *in*, *to*, *into*, *towards*, and *at* in English. Therefore, the given errors are due to language transfer, where a second language learner uses his first language to create a sentence which led to the error.

Table 3

*Most Common Punctuation Errors Committed by Learners*

Punctuation Errors	<u>BSA</u>		<u>BSBA</u>		<u>BSN</u>		<u>BSER</u>		<u>BEED</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Punctuation in compound/complex sentences	30	46.15	48	62.34	21	42.00	79	57.66	56	65.12	186	55.03
Comma misuse within clauses	25	38.46	22	28.57	16	32.00	34	24.82	19	22.09	94	27.81
Misuse of semicolons, quotation marks, etc.	10	15.38	7	9.09	9	18.00	24	17.52	11	12.79	54	15.98
Closing Punctuation					4	8.00					4	1.18
Total	65	100	77	100	50	100	137	100	86	100	338	100

Punctuation errors are the second most frequent errors identified in the essays. Table 3 reveals that punctuation in compound-complex sentences are the most frequent punctuation errors, followed by comma misuse within clauses, and misuse of semicolons,

quotation marks, among others.

**Punctuation in compound-complex sentences.** The following are examples of missing commas: (1) *There are parties everywhere \_\_[,] but I like staying inside my room better.* (2) *Cooking different kinds of food this Christmas is what we usually do \_\_[,]and we must not forget why we celebrate it.* (3) *After playing \_\_[,]we eat together and talk about some stuff like school, work, lovelife.* (4) *But before the night ends \_\_[,] we say how much we loved each other \_\_[,] and we also thank him for all the blessings we received \_\_[,] and we will receive.*

The examples demonstrate that the most common punctuation error in compound-complex sentences is the lack of comma in - between independent clauses, which results in run-on sentences. Another is the absence of comma in an introductory phrase. Students may not be aware about the rules of using a comma. Thus, the error maybe due to ignorance of punctuation rules. In writing, grammar is as important as the mechanics of writing, where punctuation rules are taught, since the presence or absence of a comma may hinder or aid comprehension.

**Comma misuse within clauses.** The second most common error is using comma where it should not have been. The following illustrate the point: (1) *So I and my cousins, [0]will go to the mall.* (2) *On the 24<sup>th</sup> day of December, [0]2010 [,] that is Christmas Eve.* (3) *Only then with the first star in the sky our wishes come true, [;]we hold our hands in prayer celebrating together with Jesus and the whole Christian world.* (4) *My mom told me to go to sleep and take some rest, [;]she told me she's going to wake me up before midnight so that I can join the countdown for Christmas.* (5) *For dinner we have a turkey with all of the trimmings, [;] we say grace before dinner and then pull our crackers.*

In the former examples, the absence of comma is prevalent. In these examples, however, comma misuse is often, which illustrates students' lack of familiarity in the use of a comma. If they are not sure of the type of punctuation to use, they opt for the comma instead, even when a semicolon is more appropriate. This practice further displays learners' lack of grasp in the comma rule.

**Misuse of semicolons, quotation marks, and other punctuations.** Other punctuations students find confusing involve the semicolon, quotation mark, ellipses, and the dash.

**Quotation marks.** Here are some examples: (1) *Filipinos managed to make one's Christmas experience unforgettable and one might say that 'it's one of a kind.'* (2) *On this occasion, everybody wishes 'Merry Christmas' to each other.* (3) *We could consider it now as the start of "New Year's Eve."*

In the first three examples, the use of quotes was unnecessary. There are rules on when to use quotation, and students are definitely not familiar with them.

**Ellipsis.** The use of ellipsis in the following examples is uncalled for. (1) *My father will be going to pray and so on..... [.]* (2) *We began talking about schools, work, etc...* The maximum number of dots in an ellipsis is three; and four, including the period depending on where the reduction occurs. In sentences 1 and 2, a period would have been more acceptable. There is a rule being followed in using this punctuation, which apparently the students are not aware of.

**Hyphen.** (1) *Things are no less miraculous-[;]the entire atmosphere recalls a fairy tale.* (2) *On this particular occasion, we hold special senses to Jesus and to each other-[;] and so the joyful atmosphere is mutual.* In examples 1 and 2, a semicolon and a comma, respectively, would have been more appropriate. All the examples reveal that students are not aware of punctuation rules.

Table 4

*Errors on Style*

Style Errors	<u>BSA</u>		<u>BSBA</u>		<u>BSN</u>		<u>BSER</u>		<u>BEED</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Wordy sentences	18	46.15	23	24.47	31	67.39	94	64.83	34	58.62	205	53.66
Passive voice misuse	11	28.21	52	55.32	9	19.57	42	28.97	8	13.79	122	32.00
Improper formatting	9	23.08	14	14.89					6	10.34	29	7.60
Inappropriate colloquialisms	1	2.56	3	3.19	3	6.52	3	2.07	4	6.90	14	4.00
Unclear reference			1	1.06	1	2.17	5	3.45	5	8.62	12	3.14
Total	39	100	94	100	46	100	145	100	58	100	382	100

**Style Errors**

Errors in style are characterized by wordiness and passive word use. Although it has other subcategories, only the top two most frequent errors are presented.

**Wordy sentences.** (1) *My brother likes to be with his friends more who are also our relatives than to go with us [My brother likes to go with our relatives than with us.]* (2) *At Christmas, I have always been able to escape the cold and dark real world allowing myself to truly enjoy just several moments in time [I always enjoy the Christmas break.]* (3) *Christmas is one of the celebrations we used to celebrate but for me celebrating Christmas is the most important because it is the day when Jesus Christ was born. [Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Christ.]*

In the given examples, repetitive and redundant words are prevalent in the sentences. These sentences may be further shortened to make the sentences flow smoothly and to aid in comprehension. Sentences inside the brackets are improved versions of the sentences. Wordiness complicates the meaning of the sentence. There are also rules on how to remove redundancy in sentences: avoiding redundant words, changing passive to active sentence, and eliminating prepositions. Obviously, students are not familiar with the rules. Therefore, the error is due to ignorance of these rules.

**Passive voice misuse.** (1) *They want to be visited by us.* (2) *He also wants to be visited by us.* (3) *It's also the time when we are surrounded by lots of things reminding us that it is the holiday season.* (4) *Singing children from house to house are always heard.* (5) *Special Christmas carols are sung in churches.*

Although the use of passive voice in essays provides for variety and prevents boredom on the part of the readers, too much use loses its desired effect and makes for weaker sentences. In the given examples, the sentences may be improved by changing them into passive voice. These errors could be due to normal problems of language performance. Usually, students write whatever comes to their mind without editing the sentences, resulting in poor sentence structure.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Given the results of the study, English language teaching in the first two years of college must be focused on grammar, punctuation, and style. Grammar has always been a difficulty for students to learn possibly because of the weak foundation in the elementary years. A lack of clear understanding of the basic rules of grammar as a student progresses from elementary to high school produces college students who have a poor grasp of the English language, thereby finding difficulty in expressing themselves. The particular forms of grammar that should be reinforced in teaching are verb use, determiners, and prepositions.

Although the trend in English language teaching is the communicative approach, writing is equally important for pragmatic reasons. As one climbs up the career ladder, communication—both oral and written—increases. Thus, polishing on both forms of communication is necessary.

It should also be noted that the mechanics of writing, which includes punctuation, capitalization, and spacing are as equally important as grammar because misuse of punctuation may hinder or aid in understanding of the text. Grammar should, therefore, be taught along with mechanics.

Although a ladder approach to teaching English is offered in the University such as Basic Grammar, Communications Skills I and II, Speech and Oral Communication, and other English subjects, students still find it difficult to master the basic grammar rules, which could be explained by language transfer and ignorance of grammar rules, which can be easily addressed in the classroom.

English professors should be aware of students' particular weaknesses in learning the English language. In view of this, the researchers recommend a yearly English diagnostic test before students proceed to the next year level in order to monitor the progress they have made. Students should also be given more written outputs such as term papers at each year level that will culminate in a thesis during their terminal years. These written outputs must be marked for errors and returned to the students with teachers' comments so that they can improve their writing skills.

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