

Describing Syntactic Errors in Written Works of Grade 8 Students in English - A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract. This research aims to unravel the syntactic errors of the grade 8 learners of the OP-Siena school in Bulacan. The researchers use the phenomenological method, which is a qualitative method in research. An interview was utilized to gather the data needed for this research. The respondents were chosen purposively following the criteria set by the researchers. The study revealed that the usual written activity that students must accomplish is essay writing; the common error their teacher primarily identified is the error in using prepositions. The students also perceived the reason for their errors as psychological factors such as anxiety; they also recognized the environmental factors such as noise, not having enough time to accomplish their writing activity and the teachers' instruction delivery. It is recommended that learners should be given enough time to do a written activity like an essay, further stated by the study of Zafar (2023). Though essay writing can enhance the learner's paragraphing and vocabulary, it requires enough time; learners need most lessons to outline their ideas and, on average, two lessons to complete their essays. It also helps them to plan and organize their ideas during the allotted time. It is also recommended to attend to the needs of the learners, ensure an environment where they do not have to feel anxiety when asking a question, and celebrate every success of the students.

Keywords: Syntactic Performance; Environmental Aspect; Psychological Aspect; Essay; Writing Activities

1.0 Introduction

In linguistics, the accurate and precise formulation of language is paramount. Syntax, the set of rules governing the structure of sentences in a language, is the backbone for effective communication and program execution. However, the inevitable presence of errors in syntax poses significant challenges in linguistic analysis. Syntactic errors, characterized by deviations from the prescribed grammatical rules, can impede the understanding of language constructs or disrupt the functionality of written works. By unraveling the complexities of syntactic errors, seeking to enhance our knowledge of linguistic structures and contribute to the development of more robust written works and languages.

In a study titled *Analysis of Syntactic Errors in English Writing: A Case Study of Jazan University Preparatory Year Students*, they illustrate the integral role writing has played throughout history and across cultures. The origins of writing coincide with the political expansion of ancient societies, where a reliable method of transmitting information, managing finances, recording history, and other essential tasks was necessary. Writing is a pivotal invention in human development, offering lasting documentation of information, ideas, emotions, and discourse. Moreover, it facilitates communication not only amongst contemporaries but also with posterity. Written works are crucial in grading students' understanding of the school lesson. In written works, they have the freedom and ability to share their thoughts and knowledge of the topic presented. The importance of written works encompasses a broad range of aspects and extends across various domains, reflecting its pervasive

influence on communication, education, culture, and beyond. However, in the study conducted by Mushtaq et al. (2024), they discovered that choosing the right words and using punctuation correctly was a significant challenge for learners. Intermediate-level learners commonly make mistakes, which may result from a need for grammatical expertise. According to Nafsi et al. (2023), the primary reason for these local errors is a lack of proficiency in grammar and linguistics. Meanwhile, according to Sarder (2023), a lack of home language practice and inadequate teacher help has hindered students' language development. Therefore, one of the critical factors that will fully contribute to the development of the learners is the positive reinforcement of the significant people surrounding them.

Numerous studies revealed that the quality of education in the Philippines is steadily decreasing. Such an assumption is based on the scores obtained in achievement tests and board examinations. Both tertiary and primary and secondary school graduates are impacted. The Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC) has observed a consistent decline in the pass rates of board examinations across all fields of study. Moreover, one thing that is a buzz in today's time is the recent results of the Program for International Student Assessment, also known as PISA, wherein the Philippines ranked 77th out of 81 countries around the globe. Some factors may influence the learner's successful acquisition of the language, and one of those is classroom management; according to Braga & Queroda (2020), the instructor should also think about what kind of warm-up exercises could best assist the students in organizing, imagining, and producing their compositions. Hence, this study aims to identify the common syntactic errors in written works for grade 8 in English. The causes and the perception of their syntactic error in written works will be tackled in this study. Moreover, the main goal of this study is to provide practical recommendations to educators and curriculum development professionals on how they can develop learning methods to improve high school students' syntactic competence (Nassaji, 2017).

In recent years, the Siena College of San Jose, Inc. has aggressively pursued many strategies to improve their students' syntactic competence, including a partnership with Global Resources for Assessment Curriculum and Evaluation, Inc. On the other hand, St. Dominic Academy of Pulilan Inc. tries to examine ways to teach every Dominican that syntactic errors, be it in writing or speaking, may be enhanced due to practice and undertaking different exercises and activities. They have also teamed up with the Center for Educational Measurement (CEM) in recent years. Over the years, the two schools encompassed syntactic competencies among students essential for effective communication and writing skills. Implementing various practices develops and reinforces syntactic abilities in students, engaging them in various interactive activities that will strengthen grammar concepts, especially in writing.

Nevertheless, the evaluation findings indicate that students need to improve in English and tend to achieve lower scores in this subject. Considering the circumstances described, studying the syntactic performance in the written works of grade 8 students is crucial. The study's findings served as the basis for proposing an additional framework for syntactic mastery. This framework aims to facilitate interaction between variables that promote language acquisition and advance English proficiency, specifically in written works. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of the syntactic problems and challenges faced by junior high school students in the OP-Siena School in Bulacan, as well as the provision of valuable insights and suggestions for teachers and learners to improve their syntactic performance.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This research incorporated qualitative methods; specifically, the phenomenological approach was used as it has some unique advantages over other approaches in qualitative research and reveals valuable information about people's lived realities and experiences. Dovetail Editorial Team (2023) states that phenomenological research attempts to reveal the true nature of phenomena through individualized personal experiences. This method allows scholars to plumb the subjective accounts and interpretations of meanings to which respondents attach their experientials. To better understand the phenomenon of interest, phenomenological research emphasizes what the respondents think. This focus on lived realities is consistent with qualitative research's core values, providing insight into complex human interactions through awareness of personal experiences.

Furthermore, Phenomenology has an accommodating structure that combines descriptive and interpretative elements, enabling a comprehensive study of the phenomenon. Moreover, according to Gallagher (2022), intentionality is one of the leading phenomenological concepts, which means that the idea of consciousness is always focused on something. It is not merely the individual minds involved in our interaction with a world but also how we perceive and experience the external through social relationships. He claims that self and world knowledge are produced based on shared experiences or social relationships. In essence, the phenomenological approach is a valuable instrument by which researchers want to grasp human phenomena together with all their intricacy and depth.

2.2 Research Participants

The research respondents are high school learners from Siena College of San Jose, Inc. and St. Dominic Academy of Pulilan, Inc. This includes and is exclusive only to ten (10) Grade 8 Junior High School Learners – five from each OP Siena School in Bulacan, and all students who participated in this research are selected through a purposive sampling technique. It is a method employed in qualitative research to deliberately choose a particular set of individuals or units for examination. The respondents are deliberately selected rather than being chosen randomly. It is alternatively called judgmental or selective sampling (Dovetail Editors Team, 2023). Moreover, A purposive sample is one whose attributes are specified to be pertinent to the research (Andrade, 2020). Thus, the essential criteria include the following: a) The student is enrolled in Grade 8 at the OP-Siena School in Bulacan, b) for the Siena College of San Jose, Inc., The respondents have already participated in the Pass-test/Pre-test assessment administered by the Global Resources for Assessment Curriculum and Evaluation (GRACE), c) for St. Dominic Academy of Pulilan, Inc., the respondents have already participated in the Pre-test administered by the Center for Educational Measurement (CEM), d) from the results of both assessments, the learners from each school who scored low in their English subject are selected, and when combined, that would make a total of 10 respondents from the OP-Siena School in Bulacan.

The respondents were also informed through parental consent, and a letter approved by the administrators was also provided, assuring the confidentiality of their responses. Moreover, the researchers ensure that the learners are not obliged to include their names in the interview and are free to withdraw anytime.

2.3 Research Instrument

Where phenomenological research aims to reveal persons' lived experiences, semi-structured interviews provide an ideal blend of flexibility and structure. They have several unique advantages over the others. First of all, the open-ended questions help to elicit respondents' narratives in their own words that cannot be biased by researchers but rather reflect reality concerning respondents' subjective worlds (Moustakas, 2019). Secondly, applying a semi-structured guide with core research questions ensures concentration on the chosen phenomenon. It simultaneously facilitates simultaneous exploration of undetermined but valuable insights that may arise during the interview.

(Creswell & Poth 2018). This flexibility makes emergence possible with unexpected themes and circumvents from forcing an unalterable opinion on the respondents' living experiences (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2020). Additionally, semi-structured interviews promote rapport and create a mutually beneficial interaction between the researcher and the participant for extensive analysis of emotion, thought process, and motivation (Koch & Bricken, 2020). This strengthens the respondent's trust and allows them to openly tell their lived experiences, thereby increasing the data quality of the findings for the study. Therefore, combining semi-structured interviews with phenomenological research provides a powerful combination of flexibility and structure that leads to rich data collection processes that improve rapport and facilitate understanding of the studied lived experience.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

First, the researchers wrote a letter to the school principal through the assistant principal asking permission to allow the researchers to conduct a study and see the GRACE and the CEM results to determine the possible research respondents. Attached to the letter provided was an ethical consideration where the researchers highlighted the safety of the respondent's privacy. Second, the researchers selected the respondents purposively, aligning with the selection criteria. Furthermore, the researchers now discussed the study's purpose and benefits

to the institution and the respondents. This will enlighten the respondents on the purpose of the study. Third, after the orientation, the respondents were given parental consent to be signed by their parents and guardians, allowing them to be part of the research. Lastly, the semi-structured interview was conducted, and the data gathered was interpreted thematically.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Gathered data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Usual Written Work in English Class

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of the usual written work the learners must do in English class

	Responses
The usual written work that the learners are required to do in English class.	Respondents 1 Essay
	Respondents 2 Book Activity
	Respondents 3 Essay
	Respondents 4 Essay
	Respondents 5 Essay
	Respondents 6 Essay
	Respondents 7 Essay
	Respondents 8 Essay
	Respondents 9 Essay
	Respondents 10 Essay

As shown in Table 1, most respondents answered Essay on the usual activities they are required to do in their English class. According to Purdue OWL (n.d), essays are frequently given types of writing that all students must complete in academic settings. As a result, the student should develop their writing skills and comfort level with this writing early in their academics.

"Most of the time, our English teacher requires us to write an essay, and we have an activity notebook, and there, we compile all our Essays."

Essays can also be time-consuming, and according to some respondents,

"Sometimes I do not finish my essay writing because of the lack of time; I struggle to compose what is in my mind because of time pressure."

Though essay writing can enhance the learner's paragraphing and vocabulary, it requires enough time. As Zafar (2023) mentioned, learners needed most of the lesson to outline their ideas and, on average, two lessons to complete their essays. It also helped them plan and organize their ideas during the allotted time.

As for the learners from the OP-Siena School in Bulacan, they were given an Essay-type and book activity on their English subject. Their responses also highlighted the need to have enough time to finish their writing activity. As the previously cited study mentioned, students need enough time to plan and organize their ideas.

3.2 Common Errors in Written Work in English Class

Also, as depicted in Table 2, on the common errors that the teacher found in the Essay, the majority of the respondents identified Prepositions as a standard error found by their teacher with their essay writing, and according to the respondents,

"My English teacher always identifies my errors in prepositions, which are prevalent compared to the other."

"I already forgot the rules for using the prepositions."

"Sometimes it is tricky whether to use in or on."

Table 2. The common errors that the teacher found in the essay

		Responses
The common errors that the teacher found in the Essay.	Respondents 1	Preposition
	Respondents 2	Preposition
	Respondents 3	Verb
	Respondents 4	Preposition
	Respondents 5	Preposition
	Respondents 6	Preposition
	Respondents 7	Preposition
	Respondents 8	Verb
	Respondents 9	Preposition
	Respondents 10	Preposition

A preposition is a part of speech that is often confusing to use, and as mentioned by (Septiawan et al., 2020), For students learning English as a second language, prepositions and articles, mainly, are the most challenging elements in grammar. It is further supported by the study of Tulabot et al. (2018), who found that students frequently select improper and out-of-context prepositions. The findings of their study also demonstrated that students' understanding of the many purposes of prepositions needed to be improved.

Verbs are another standard error identified by the teacher during the learners' writing activity. According to Dasna et al. (2024), these mistakes have several reasons, including carelessness, linguistic exposure, and first language influence. Students' grammar errors are mostly seen and committed in their writing activity.

3.3 Students' Perception of the Cause of Their Errors

Table 3. Students' perception of the cause of their errors

		Responses
The cause of the identified errors as perceived by the learners.	Respondents 1	I have anxiety and am nervous to ask questions.
	Respondents 2	Lack of time
	Respondents 3	It is not easy to understand
	Respondents 4	There is not enough time
	Respondents 5	I am slow, and I need to pick up quickly.
	Respondents 6	Noise destruction from classmates
	Respondents 7	Unable to understand the "English" language
	Respondents 8	Do not know how to speak in English
	Respondents 9	Too shy to ask for clarification or join the discussion
	Respondents 10	Confused about the instruction given in "The English" language

Based on the perceived cause of students' errors, factors like environmental, personal/psychological, and even teaching processes were determined.

On psychological factors;

"I have anxiety and nervous to ask questions."

"Afraid of asking questions."

"I am slow, and I do not pick up easily."

"Too shy to ask for clarification or join the discussion."

Some students are too shy to clarify the lesson they are confused about. For this reason, they tend to be left behind with grammar lessons. However, students' needs also need to be understood by the teacher. They should

provide ways to cater to all types of learners because some learners are afraid of standing in front for some reason, and the study by Gatcho and Hajan (2019) where they were able to determine that students' fear of being judged poorly and anxiety related to speaking with others were the most likely to make individuals anxious. Moreover, from the study conducted by Leyaley (2023), students' passivity is caused by internal variables, including anxiety, a lack of confidence, and a fear of making mistakes.

On environmental factors;

"Noise destruction from classmates"

"Confused about the instruction given in "The English" language."

Environmental factors that the learners have identified also play a crucial part in knowledge retention. These factors not just only hinder the other learners from learning but also set an uncondusive learning place. Also, it gives an idea of the factors related to the teacher and how they instruct the student. A decrease in learning will arise when a teacher's instructional management is unsuitable for its learners. On the contrary, according to Francisco and Celon (2020), each incremental enhancement in the instructional management practices mentioned has a corresponding positive impact on students' academic performance. In addition, The classrooms need to be helpful to achieve success in your language studies. Enough room should be set aside for the activities that will be beneficial in the process of learning (Hafiz et al., 2018)

3.4 Students Perceived Rating on Their Syntactic Performance

Table 4. The students' rating on their syntactic performance		
		Responses
Students' rating on their syntactic performance	Respondents 1	7
	Respondents 2	6
	Respondents 3	5
	Respondents 4	8
	Respondents 5	6
	Respondents 6	10
	Respondents 7	5
	Respondents 8	4
	Respondents 9	6
	Respondents 10	6

Most of the learners gave themselves a rating of six out of 10. Therefore, most of the respondents from OP-Siena School in Bulacan have a "Good" syntactical performance, above-average understanding of syntax, and few errors in sentence structure. It was followed by a rating of "five," which got two responses. Students who rated themselves "five" are considered to have an average understanding of syntax and occasional minor errors.

4.0 Conclusion

The usual written work that the learners must do in English class was identified as an Essay. Most respondents answered essays, garnering "nine" out of 10. Therefore, English teachers from the OP-Siena School in Bulacan require their students to have an Essay as their writing activity. The common errors that the teacher found in the Essay. Most respondents answered preposition as an error their English teacher identified and had "eight" responses. One aspect of grammar that the students find challenging to use is the preposition, which is further supported by the study of Septiawan et al. (2020), who mentioned that prepositions are a part of speech that is often confusing. The students perceive the cause of the identified errors. The students identified the different factors that affect their syntactic performance, and they can be grouped into different categories, such as psychological and environmental factors. In the aspect of psychology, students tend to be afraid of clarifying the lesson they are confused about, and some have anxiety and are nervous about asking questions.

On the other hand, in environmental factors, teacher factors play a vital role in the learning process of the learners, and teachers need to have enhancement in their instruction to cater to the needs of the learners. On the

students' rating of their syntactic performance, the majority of the learners rated themselves as having good syntactical performance, above-average understanding of syntax, and few errors in sentence structure. It can also be noted that though students commit errors, most specifically on prepositions, they are still optimistic about perceiving themselves on syntactic performance.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest about the publication of this paper.

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