

An analysis of English as a foreign language undergraduate students' written errors

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 14 July 2023

Accepted: 10 October 2023

Available online: 14 December 2023

doi: 10.59400/fls.v5i3.1881

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ABSTRACT: Writing is an intricate process in the first language and its intricacy increases when writing in the targeted language. Although Kurdish students of English study English writing at most levels of their education in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), it has been observed that they commit serious errors even in the basics of writing. These errors may influence their writing in English and their overall English language proficiency level. Nevertheless, meticulous research in the arena of error analysis is scanty in the KRI context compared to the body of research conducted in this area in the Arab world. This study was undertaken to analyze the errors committed by English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) undergraduate students to recognize the most and the least prevalent errors committed by students and present and explain some possible causes and sources of those errors. The study investigated errors in a collection of 57 argumentative essays. Four categories of errors were taken into consideration, namely, grammatical, lexical, spelling, and punctuation as well as their subcategories. Frequencies and percentages of errors were first recognized, and then the common subcategories of each of the errors were tabulated, explained, and described with examples from the corpus. The reported results showed that the overall frequency and percentage of the errors were high and grammatical errors were the most common. Lexical errors were found to be the least common errors in students' written productions. Additionally, the most prevalent subcategories of the errors were presented and interpreted. The study concluded that the major causes of written errors in the KRI context were both interlingual and intralingual errors.

KEYWORDS: written errors; EFL Kurdish undergraduate students; interlingual; intralingual

1. Introduction

In language learning, committing errors is a normal part of the learning process (Brown, 2014; Khansir, 2012). Children learning their mother tongue make numerous errors compared to adults. They gradually learn to produce what is well-formed in their first language by receiving feedback from others. In the same way, adults commit errors until they have control over the rules of the target language. Then, they take advantage of the feedback they receive for their errors (Brown, 2014). Keshavarz (2012) asserted this by stating that one cannot learn a language, whether it be a first language or a second language, without making errors and that learning a second or a foreign language includes committing errors.

Although committing errors by EFL learners is unavoidable, the provision of feedback is central and has been much focused on in the literature (Bensen Bostancı, 2019; Bensen Bostancı and Şengül, 2018; Guo, 2019; etc.).

There are two major theories in dealing with errors of learners, namely the behaviorist theory and the cognitivist theory (Khansir, 2012; Kırkgöz, 2010; Sari, 2016). The behaviorist theory is mostly based on imitation according to which learners imitate and practice the patterns which can then become habits and fossilized (Lightbown and Spada, 2006; Yufriзал, 2021). The theory also dictates that errors of learners have to be avoided to obtain perfect language teaching. If errors are tolerated, they will become a habit for the learner and will be difficult to correct (Aziz et al., 2021; Jackson, 2019; Khansir, 2012; etc.). The proponents of behaviorism attribute errors to ineffective teaching or to the failure of the teaching process (Jackson, 2019; Maicusi et al., 2000). Opposed to this opinion, the cognitivist theory, whose strategies are significant for human beings to understand the objective world (Zeng, 2019), advocates that, errors normally occur despite the efforts of teachers. This does not mean the students fail. The students' success and progress result from the errors they commit. Additionally, errors can assist teachers in assessing their students' cognitive development and are a necessary part of language instruction (Jackson, 2019; Kırkgöz, 2010; Lightbown and Spada, 2006; etc.). Initially, students may not notice elements or errors that affect meaning. However, they gradually notice them through experience and practice and it becomes easier to process and access quickly and automatically (Lightbown and Spada, 2006).

Writing is one of the basic productive skills of a language and one of the important means of communication. Yet, most undergraduate students consider it one of the most challenging and problematic skills of the four skills of a language (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019; Mahmood, 2016; Mahmood, 2021; etc.) as errors are more obvious and observable in writing than other skills (Basher et al., 2019), thus, students do not have much experience with written expression (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019). Serious errors of all kinds are observed in undergraduate students' written productions in KRI (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019; Mahmood, 2016; Abdullah, 2020; etc.). This difficulty is faced by students whose first language is substantially different from the English language (Basher et al., 2019). Kurdish undergraduate students study English writing in basic education. Moreover, they study it at university as a separate course in two successive years, namely, the first and second years. Nevertheless, they do not have the required level of proficiency in writing and they commit errors even at advanced levels. Students in general and students of English majors in particular in the KRI should have good writing skills in order to be successful in their academic and professional careers. Failing to do so, especially for university students, results in failing the students' future academic and professional careers (Ismail et al., 2010). It is essential for students to be able to write effectively as they need writing in their written examinations, research work, coursework, and research projects (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019; Basher et al., 2019), and to gain success in language proficiency (Cole and Feng, 2015).

Writing has been taught at different stages of pre-university education and is being taught at universities now in the KRI. Students claim that their writing is good based on self-report questionnaires, especially at university (Ahmed, 2019). However, their writing is not as good as it appears and, when it comes to writing a composition or an essay, students commit several types of errors, such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, lexical and grammatical errors (Ahmed, 2017; Mahmood, 2016; Omar, 2019). They commit errors in the most essential elements and rudiments of writing. There are many different factors behind students' weaknesses or errors in writing including the approach that is utilized

for teaching writing at university (Abdullah, 2015), which is more of a product-oriented approach (Chaqmaqchee, 2015; Qadir, 2021). For instance, proper feedback is sometimes not given on students' writing (Mahmood, 2021) and most of what is taught, based on the curriculum designed by university lecturers, is more or less associated with mechanical exercises that have limited effect on students' writing performance (Qadir, 2021). Another reason could be attributed to the affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, and confidence as previous studies have shown that writers experience these emotions even at advanced levels and certain emotions such as increased apprehension and decreased motivation can negatively affect writers (Basher et al., 2019; Krashen, 1982; Qadir, 2021; etc.).

Although academic writing encompasses different complex skills such as planning, organizing, task response, and coherence, grammatical and lexical accuracy are regarded as the most crucial aspects of assessment criteria (Almasi and Tabrizi, 2016). However, writing does not include only knowing and understanding grammatical structures and vocabulary. Rather, it entails how to use these grammatical structures and this vocabulary correctly and appropriately. It also entails correct spelling, punctuation, and so on (Basher et al., 2019). In spite of writing being taught at different stages of pre-university education and at university, teachers complain about their students' bad writing at university and observe several types of errors in students' writing performances (Omar and Barzani, 2022; Qadir, 2021). Students' writing errors may be due to cross-language interference (interlingual errors), the features of the target language (intralingual errors) (Keshavarz, 2012), and anxiety. Richards and Schmidt (2010) maintain that learners' errors result from taking patterns from the native language or extending patterns from the target language such as overgeneralization of patterns. Therefore, the aim of the current study is twofold; to identify, classify, explain, and describe the type and frequency of the common errors committed by EFL Kurdish undergraduate university students in their final examination written scripts as well as exploring some sources of those errors.

In order to reach our aim, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the most and least prevalent errors made in writing by English-as-a-foreign-language Kurdish undergraduate students?
- (2) What are the sources of the errors made in writing by English-as-a-foreign-language Kurdish undergraduate students?

2. Literature review

Learning language involves making errors. It is similar to swimming, in that learners take advantage of errors by making new attempts via receiving feedback (Corder, 1967; Mahmood and Aziz, 2023; Tawfeeq and Abbas, 2018). Errors show that learning is taking place (Sari, 2016). An error is precisely defined as a second or foreign language learner's consistent deviation from the adult grammar of a first-language speaker (Brown, 2014; Sari, 2016). That is, it "reflects the competence of the learner" (Brown, 2014, p. 217) which is distinguished from a mistake, in that it is a slip or a random guess reflecting a speaker's performance. Based on James (2013), an error occurs only if there is not an intention to commit one. It arises because of inadequate competence in the target language (Sari, 2016). An error results from a deficiency in competence that cannot be self-corrected, whereas a mistake can usually be self-corrected (Brown, 2014) and is caused by a lack of attention, memory limitation, carelessness, fatigue, emotional strain, and other facets of performance (Richards and Schmidt, 2010; Sari, 2016).

Important to the notion of errors is error analysis, which is influenced by behaviorism (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Error analysis is the area of applied linguistics that is regarded as a significant tool for handling errors in second or foreign language learning and teaching. It originated in the late 1960s to put

forward the idea that learners' errors are not only caused by the interference of the mother tongue but are caused by some universal strategies; therefore, error analysis was offered to be an alternative to contrastive analysis (Khansir, 2012; Richards and Schmidt, 2010; Yufriзал, 2021), which dealt with the transference of the mother tongue into the target language. Error analysis is simply the observation, analysis, and categorization of a second or foreign language of learner's errors to explore something about the system employed by the learner (Brown, 2014). Although the error analysis method was an alternative to contrastive analysis in the 1950s and 1960s, students' errors cannot be tackled properly without considering contrastive analysis (Khansir, 2012).

Investigating learners' errors reveals the language system that they are employing at a specific time of their learning journey. To be more precise, learners' errors are crucial in three different ways. Firstly, they can inform the teacher about the extent of the progress of the learner towards the goal and inform the teacher about the unlearned part as well as provide immediate practical application to language instructors (Abushihab et al., 2011; Corder, 1967, 1982; Ellis, 2008; etc.). Secondly, they help the researcher identify the way language is learned and the strategies or procedures the learner is using in his discovery of the language (Abushihab et al., 2011; Corder, 1967, 1982). Thirdly, they are indispensable to the learner him/herself since s/he utilizes the making of errors as a means for learning (Abushihab et al., 2011; Corder, 1967, 1982; James, 2013). Based on the literature reviewed by Omar and Barzani (2022), Sari (2016). Identifying errors can also help reveal the causes of those errors and suggest remedies for them (Sari, 2016).

During the past few decades, a large body of research has been conducted in the area of error analysis. There are several lines of research in this regard. Some studies have focused on written errors in general, that is, they have dealt with more than one error type simultaneously (Ahmed, 2019; Aziz et al., 2021; Mahmood, 2016; etc.). Other studies have considered all error types and have revealed that grammar is the most difficult area to be encountered (Ahmed, 2019; Mahmood, 2016). In addition, it was shown that learners crave writing and hold positive attitudes toward it (Ahmed, 2019) but they encounter many difficulties. One of the most recent studies that has considered all error types includes Omar and Barzani (2022) who tackled 37 third-year Kurdish (Kurmanji, another major dialect of Kurdish) students' writing errors majoring in English whose primary data collection tool was the midterm exam sheets in poetry. They revealed that Kurdish students commonly encountered punctuation and capitalization errors. The limitation of this study is that they have detached article and preposition errors from grammatical errors. In other words, they have considered grammar, article, and preposition as different major categories while article and preposition errors should be considered under the category of grammatical errors. Another study that investigated Kurdish students' written errors considering all error categories involved Mahmood (2016) who studied 26 Kurdish students' written errors using a Cambridge test as the tool for data collection. Different from Omar and Barzani (2022), he found that grammatical errors were the most common errors and punctuation errors were the least common. While the study provides valuable information regarding Kurdish students' written errors, it fails to offer insights into the more specific error types, providing statistical data. However, some attempts have been made to qualitatively offer interpretations.

Other studies have attempted to deal with one broad category of written errors at a time such as grammatical errors (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019; Salehi and Bahrami, 2018), lexical errors (Ander and Yildirim, 2010), spelling errors (Abdullah and Muhammad, 2020; Ahmed, 2017; Omar, 2019), and punctuation errors separately (Abudllah, 2015; Abdullah, 2020). Sulaiman and Mohammed (2019) devoted their attention specifically to investigating the grammatical competence of Kurdish (Kurmanji)

students using a competence grammar test and an essay test on a sample of 93 undergraduate students. They found that students scored very low in the use of prepositions but high in the use of pronouns in the competence grammar test. However, their result for the essay test was different. Students' most common grammatical errors were article errors and the least common errors were coordinator errors. They attributed the disparity between the commonness of grammatical errors in the competence grammar test and the essay test to students avoiding complex grammatical structures in the essay test. The study is limited as it does not define the error subcategories with sentence examples from the data. Another study, by Ander and Yıldırım (2010) tackling lexical errors among 53 Turkish students, found that the most common lexical errors were wrong word choice and incompleteness errors. As our review shows, studies of lexical errors are rare in the literature, particularly in the Kurdish context, no studies have been specifically devoted to them. As for spelling error studies, they are many and various. In this regard, Ahmed (2017) investigated spelling errors among university students and revealed that the most common spelling errors included omission, capitalization, and substitution errors. However, Omar (2019) found that omission, spacing, and insertion were the most common spelling errors. These two studies have considered capitalization to be a spelling error. However, most other recent studies (Abdullah and Muhammad, 2020; Ahmed, 2019; Aziz et al., 2021; Omar and Barzani, 2022) have not classified them under spelling errors but under punctuation or as a specific major category.

Yet, a third line of research has discussed more specific subcategories of the main categories including, e.g., articles (Hassan and Ghafur, 2011), past tense (Ali and Mostafa, 2013), and so on. Studies of this sort in Kurdish are scanty. Hassan and Ghafur (2011) studied fourth-year Kurdish students' abilities in the use of articles employing a multiple-choice test. They revealed that most Kurdish students struggled with the use of zero articles and they were unable to distinguish between the generic and the specific use of articles.

Lastly, other studies have attempted to determine the sources and causes of the errors to unveil whether they are interlingual or intralingual. Kırkgöz (2010) aimed to identify the sources of grammatical errors of Turkish non-English major students of English in a corpus of 120 essays. He found that most of the errors were interlingual errors because students in his study were beginners. Al-Shujairi and Tan (2017) tackled the sources of errors in the Iraqi context and revealed a substantial difference between interlingual and intralingual errors, with intralingual errors outnumbering interlingual. Hassan and Ghafur (2011) probed into the causes of errors made by Kurdish students in the use of articles in English and found that one-third of the errors were caused by the transfer of the first language due to differences between Kurdish and English; the definite article is a suffix (i.e., bound morpheme) in Kurdish while it is an independent morpheme (i.e., free morpheme) in English that occurs before another word. Additionally, two-thirds of article errors were caused by intralingual transfer and the context of learning. In the current study, the sources of the errors will be classified based on Richards (1974), similar to Kırkgöz (2010) and Al-Shujairi and Tan (2017), as the other more recent categorizations' subcategories overlap.

As the above-reviewed literature indicates, several studies have been conducted regarding students' written difficulties in Kurdish, Turkish, and Arabic contexts that are relevant to the present study in several ways. However, there remain several limitations of those studies. First, the results obtained in some of those studies in the same educational context tackling errors in general (Mahmood, 2016; Omar and Barzani, 2022) and spelling errors (Ahmed, 2017; Omar, 2019) are not conclusive since they contradict as explained above. Second, the categorization of the errors in some previous studies cannot be trustworthy, e.g., capitalization errors have been considered as spelling errors in Abdullah and Muhammad (2020) but not in Omar (2019) and Ahmed (2017). The 'missing word' subcategory has been

classified as a lexical error by Ander and Yıldırım (2011) but as a grammatical error by Aziz et al. (2021). Third, previous studies have not investigated Kurdish students' written errors in argumentative essays, which is a significant genre. For this reason, this study attempts to tackle the errors in argumentative essays. Fourth, the sample of several previous studies (e.g., Abdullah and Muhammad, 2020; Ahmed, 2017; Mahmood, 2016; etc.) are rather small, which might be less effective in producing conclusive and more generalizable results. Fifth, a few studies (e.g., Omar, 2019) have called for more research in the field of error analysis to offer more comprehensible insights into students' written problems and indicate the areas of students' weaknesses.

Notwithstanding all the research in the area of error analysis, there remain several problems in dealing with students' errors in writing. One such problem involves the taxonomy of errors in terms of both types and sources or causes of errors. Different studies have used different classifications of errors and two studies have used the same classifications. Some studies have adapted from one or more previous studies, and some have invented taxonomies of their own based on their collected data. In terms of types, error categorizations are many and various, particularly grammatical error categorizations. Bussmann (2006) categorized learners' errors based on five different criteria:

- (1) Based on modality, he classified errors into writing, speaking, listening, and reading errors.
- (2) Another criterion he considered was the classification of errors based on the levels of linguistic description, namely phonetic, phonological, orthographic, morphological, syntactic, lexical, and stylistic errors.
- (3) According to form, he categorized errors into omission, insertion, substitution, transposition, and contamination errors.
- (4) Additionally, he distinguished between competence and performance errors in terms of type.
- (5) In terms of cause, he distinguished between interference, interlingual, and development-related errors.

Based on the literature reviewed by Sari (2016, p. 90), intralingual errors can be subclassified into four types, namely overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of the rules, and hypothesis of false concept. According to James (2013), sources of errors can be divided into four types: interlingual, intralingual, communication strategy-based, and induced errors. Brown (2014) put forth that errors occurred due to interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, the context of learning, and communication strategies. However, based on Richards (1974), all errors can be classified under two types in terms of sources of errors, namely interlingual and intralingual. From our point of view, the most comprehensible taxonomies are those that adapt from previous research based on the collected data and those that add new ones if new categories appear from the data.

As aforementioned, studies investigating students' writing problems are scanty in the Kurdish context. A few studies have tackled Kurdish EFL students written errors and have revealed certain aspects of difficulties. However, no studies have reported Kurdish students' writing difficulties in argumentative essays. Therefore, this study was undertaken to tackle this issue.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

A descriptive research design was employed for this study because the main purpose was to analyze the errors by identifying, categorizing, and describing them and the results were deduced depending on

a descriptive and frequency analysis (McCombes, 2023). Thus, the study is descriptive in terms of both the data collection and analysis.

3.2. Participants

Fifty-seven second-year students of the English department at a public university in the KRI constituted the participants of this study. All of the students came from the same ethnic background, i.e., Kurdish and their first language was Central Kurdish, which is one of the four main dialects of the Kurdish language spoken by Kurds in the northern part of Iraq and it belongs to the Indo-Iranian languages of the Indo-European family (Khalid, 2020). Students' ages ranged between 19 and 25 and they belonged to both genders; 27 male students and 30 female students. These students were enrolled in a reading and writing course designed for second-year students in the English department. They had also been taught writing in pre-university education at basic and high school stages in their English curricula. However, writing had been taught to them in their pre-university education only in passing and most final exams did and still do not focus on writing. Additionally, they had been taught other courses such as reading, listening and speaking, and grammar which are seen significant for enhancing writing skills. These students have been learning English for twelve years and they are considered English proficiency pre-intermediate level, that is, a B1 level in the Common European Framework of References (CEFR).

3.3. Research instrument

The instrument for the study involved all 57 argumentative essays written by undergraduate students of the English Department at a public university in the KRI. The essays, which were normally 250 words long, were considered to provide real student written language; therefore, we preferred to select this source of data as this length is typical for second-year students in which were required to write under a limit and write as accurately as they could. Additionally, as Basher et al. (2019) stated, failing to produce a well-written argumentative essay would result in failing to pass the writing course. Therefore, the data is considered to be both real and authentic. The topic of the essay was, "A successful person is someone who has made a lot of money. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience". The students were asked to write an argumentative essay regarding the topic within a time range of 90 min allowing students to write without restrictions. They were not allowed to use dictionaries and other material and were required to take into consideration the elements of a good piece of writing.

3.4. Data collection

Prior to data collection, we obtained consent from the ethical committee of the Near East University (North Cyprus), and further explained the purpose of the research to the instructor of the writing course, the head of the English Department, the head of the examinations committee, and the dean of the faculty in a written formal letter. After we made the concerned parties sure that the research would not be harmful to any one of the participants, they all granted consent to use the data from the essays. Additionally, after ensuring the students that the data would only be used for the purposes of research, they also granted consent. To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, the names of the students were concealed by the examinations committee and coding numbers had been employed for the students.

After obtaining consent, we collected all second-year students' final examination written scripts to collect the study data and achieve authentic material. We collected all the essays, and identified, described, and classified the errors. Then, the essays were given to two instructors who had three years of experience in teaching English and they checked for the appropriateness of the identification of the

errors and the categorization. When disagreements appeared, we would discuss the types and assign an error to an appropriate category based on a common discussion that occurred among us.

3.5. Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, we used the procedures suggested by Corder (1974) and Ellis (1994) for analyzing learners' errors. The procedures included collecting student language samples (written sample essays), and identifying, categorizing, and describing the errors. After the description and explanation of the errors, we presented the sources of those errors based on the researched information.

There are many and very different classifications by different researchers. Of all the studies reviewed, none of them were found to use exactly the same categories. This study categorized the errors into four broad types, namely grammatical, lexical, spelling, and punctuation errors by adapting from Corder (1967), Weir (1988), Darus and Ching (2009) as well as Mahmood (2016) who had also borrowed it from Weir (1988). More importantly, these categories were classed into their subcategories. To further explain, grammatical errors were classified into eleven kinds: (1) the addition, omission, and misuse of articles; (2) agreement errors; (3) addition, omission, and misuse of prepositions; (4) tense and aspect errors; (5) addition, omission, and misuse of conjunctions; (6) subject addition or omission; (7) wrong verb forms; (8) infinitive and gerund errors; (9) word order; (10) voice; and (11) pronoun reference errors.

In order to identify the grammatical errors and classify them into subclasses, the present study has benefited from previous research carried out in this area. It has adapted from various studies, especially the works of James (2013), Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017), Seitova (2016), and Younes and Albalawi (2015). Based on the errors that emerged from the data, the following types of grammatical errors were recognized. The study has borrowed from the literature only those categories that emerged from the data, as exemplified in the following table (Table 1):

Table 1. Exemplification of the subcategories of grammatical errors.

N	Grammatical errors	Examples
1	Article errors	Finally, I think money is not everything in *the life.
2	Agreement errors	Having a lot of money *have two points.
3	Prepositions and verb particles	We can buy a big house, a nice car, and marry *with a nice girl.
4	Tense and aspect errors	I *saw many people who do not have a lot of money but they are happy.
5	Conjunction errors	*While you have money, you don't have to pride yourself.
6	Subject addition or omission	We have a lot of people that *they are very poor.
7	Verb and verb form errors	I*m disagree with this statement.
8	Infinitive and gerund errors	For example, someone needs *buy a ticket.
9	Word order errors	You cannot *with money buy love, time, health, etc.
10	The incorrect use of voice	Real success indeed *achieve by working and trying.
11	Pronoun reference errors	Many people think a successful person is someone who has money. I think *they should have education, knowledge, and experience.

Similarly, the literature is replete with diverse categorizations of lexical errors. The dichotomy between the categorizations is that some studies have distinguished broad types of lexical categories while some of them have subcategorized the broad types into more specific ones. Most studies have used James's (2013) categorization of lexical errors to identify and classify errors. The present study has adopted two lexical categorizations to satisfy and fit the needs of the study, that is, to cover the complete

error types that emerged from the data, including Ander and Yildirim (2010) and James (2013). Lexical errors were classed into six subtypes: wrong word choice; word formation; misformation; redundancy; omission or incompleteness; and collocation, as shown in **Table 2** below.

Table 2. Description and exemplification of the subtypes of lexical errors.

N	Lexical errors	Description of the error subtypes	Sentence examples
1	Wrong word choice (Misselection)	The use of a wrong word in place of a correct one resulting from semantic confusion, homophony, or the form of the word in general	He worked hard and *invited Facebook.
2	Word formation	An error that occurs due to the use of a wrong form of a lexical word resulting from the incorrect derivation of the word, such as replacing a noun with a verb, a noun with an adjective, and so on.	There isn't anything in life that deserves *sad.
3	Misformation	James (2013) subcategorizes this type of error into three subtypes: borrowing, coinage, and calque. Borrowing involves students' use of the first language word without change. Coinage is inventing a totally new word that does not exist in the target language using one of the rules of word formation. A calque includes the translation of a word or a phrase from the first language or more precisely the literal translation of a word or a phrase.	You can't take the money to *Qeamat. You can *rich your heart with many things. She studies *for being a doctor.
4	Redundancy error	This includes those errors that result from the repetition or unnecessary use of a lexical item.	The disadvantage *point of it is that maybe some people by that money do something bad.
5	Omission or incompleteness errors	This error occurs when a lexical item that is important to complete the meaning of a sentence is missing.	We must remember it can't *value always. A successful person *who has made a good personality.
6	Collocation errors	This includes the wrong use of a lexical item with another that does not collocate with it.	He doesn't care about *doing mistakes.

Nevertheless, the categorization of spelling errors is not as diverse and problematic as the categorization of the other errors introduced earlier in this study. Most of the spelling categories are common among different authors' categorizations. Although there are some cases of uncertainty as to whether an error is a spelling error, a grammatical one, a lexical one, or a punctuation error, context or linguistic clues can sometimes be helpful in determining this. As an illustration, consider the following example from the data:

- *Having a lot of money may be changes the personality of a person.

On the one hand, writing may be in this way with this sense can be considered as a spelling mistake in that if the space is removed, the error will no longer exist. Thus, having a lot of money maybe changes the personality of a person is both grammatical and contains no spelling errors. On the other hand, altering the verb form changes to changing can again resolve the grammatical problem, i.e., it can make the sentence grammatically well formed with no spelling errors. Therefore, having a lot of money may be changing the personality of a person is free from both grammatical and spelling errors. Although this error should be considered a grammatical error given the fact that maybe usually but not always occurs in the initial position and not in this position before the verb, the use of maybe in the students' scripts multiple times can also prove that it is a spelling error.

The identification and classification of the spelling errors in this study were built upon the data and the literature, especially the works of Al Jayousi (2011), and Kusuran (2016). Accordingly, we identified the spelling errors tabulated in **Table 3** below.

Table 3. Description and exemplification of the subtypes of spelling errors.

N	Spelling error subtypes	Description	Examples
1	Insertion	It refers to the insertion of an unnecessary additional letter into the word.	*famouse, develope, importaint, persone
2	Omission	It is the deletion of a letter in a word.	*begining, finaly, mony, lisener
3	Substitution	It refers to the replacement of one letter by another.	*mast, acter, conclution, every bady
4	Transposition	This involves the transposition of two adjacent letters.	*tow, frist, childern, thier, soical, criem
5	Apostrophes	This occurs when an apostrophe is deleted or an unnecessary apostrophe is added to a word.	*cant, wan't, other's
6	Spacing with words	It is the deletion or addition of a space within the elements of a word or within two words.	*alot, aproblem, ahuge, *everything, your self, any thing, any one
7	Other errors	This encompasses spelling errors that cannot be classified under none of the above categories and multiple letters are inserted, deleted, transposed, or there are more than one type of the above errors	*suced, succsseful, deffirent, Mark Zewkerberg, him selfe, succesful, bissniss

Finally, the classification of punctuation errors was adapted from Awad (2013) and Younes and Albalawi (2015). Accordingly, punctuation errors were grouped into ten subcategories, namely (the addition, misuse, and/or omission of the comma and the period as well as incorrect capitalization; the addition and omission of semicolons, colons, and quotation marks and the incorrect use of parenthesis; the absence of dashes at the end of a line when dividing a word into its parts; misuse of the question mark; semicolon; run-on sentences, and the wrong use of the exclamation mark), as shown in **Table 4** below.

Table 4. Description and exemplification of the subtypes of punctuation errors.

N	Punctuation	Sentence examples
1	Comma	● Omission of comma and period: Finally * I think money is not everything in life*
2	Period	● Incorrect use of parenthesis and period, and the addition of comma: Having a lot of money have two points*, *(advantage*. disadvantage), the advantage point to having a lot of money is that*, may be some people have a lot of money, and ...*).
3	Capitalization	● Incorrect capitalization, the omission of commas, and the addition of a period: In my opinion* *A successful person is not someone who has made a lot of money*. Because money alone
4	Semicolon	● Substitution of comma for colon, incorrect capitalization: *In conclusion*: Person successful when have a good polity*
5	Question mark	● Unnecessary use of several periods before, etc.: because you cannot by money buy love, time, health, *..., etc.
6	Quotation marks	● Use of the question mark instead of a period with a declarative sentence: A successful person is someone who has made a lot of money*?
7	Parentheses	● Omission of commas, periods, and quotation marks: So* there is a proverb in English* *money comes like a turtle and goes like a rabbit**
8	Dash	
9	Run-on sentences	
10	Exclamation	

Frequencies and percentages of the overall errors were utilized to report the findings of the study. In reporting the results, all types of errors were calculated for the major categories regardless of any errors repeated but within the scope of the study. For instance, when an utterance contained two errors of the same type, it was counted twice. As for subcategorizations, we followed the same procedures. More importantly, to obtain reliable results, we conducted two sorts of reliability, intra-rater reliability and inter-rater reliability. The next section presents the results and discusses them based on the context under study and the literature.

4. Results and discussion

The purpose of the study was to identify the most and least common errors committed by EFL Kurdish students and describe their sources. In this section, the collected data are analyzed based on four types of errors that were committed by Kurdish EFL students in their final examination written scripts, and the results are presented and discussed as well. The errors were categorized into four types, namely grammatical errors, lexical errors, spelling errors, and punctuation errors. Within these categories, subcategories were also identified. Frequencies, as well as percentages, are utilized to identify the total number of errors committed by students for each category and subcategory. Moreover, the sources of the errors are described.

4.1. The most and least prevalent written errors committed by EFL Kurdish learners

Based on the identification and classification of the errors, a total of 3768 errors were identified (see **Figure 1**). Among these, the data from the essays revealed that the most prevalent errors committed by Kurdish learners of English were grammatical errors with 1414 errors in total, that is, 37.52% of all the errors committed. Following grammatical errors, spelling errors were the second most common with 979 errors, that is, 25.98% of the total errors. Punctuation errors were also common among learners. Of all the errors, 804 were punctuation errors, making 21.33% of the total. The least frequent were lexical errors with 571 (15.15%) errors.

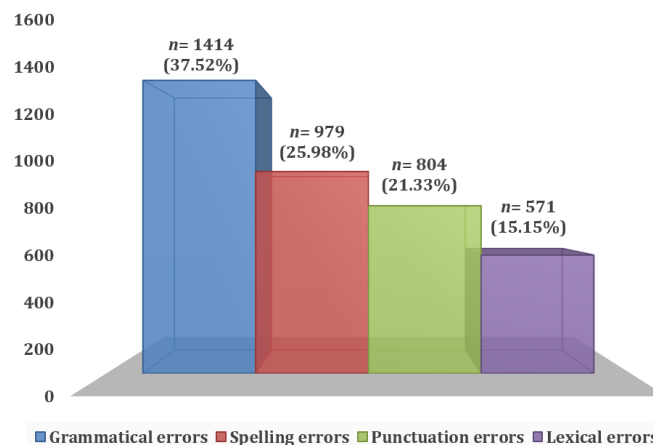


Figure 1. Frequency of EFL Kurdish students' written errors.

From **Figure 1**, it could be understood that students had faced many written problems in all the four areas mentioned above and some explanations can be suggested. First, the high frequency of the overall errors is due to several reasons including exceeding the word limit specified in the question, repeated errors of the same type such as article and agreement errors, constructing long sentences and paragraphs without punctuation marks, the misapplication of rules such as capitalizing the first letter of the first word in each line. Other reasons behind this high frequency of errors might be attributed to the fact that all types of errors have been considered in the present study. Furthermore, writing is mostly the neglected skill of the four fundamental language skills in the context under investigation, especially in pre-university education (Qadir, 2021). Other reasons might be associated with writing apprehension (Ahmed, 2019; Qadir et al., 2021), lack of knowledge about the basics of writing, traditional and teacher-centered methods of teaching, and lack of practice (Ahmed, 2019; Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019). It is reported in a study (Ahmed, 2019) that students rarely do writing outside the classroom which is significant for developing writing skills. Based on Smith (2005), since the English language is irregular, complex, and

ambiguous, it makes it hard for students to learn the language, particularly writing skills. These results relatively echo previous studies' results dealing with different aspects of writing (Ahmed, 2019; Aziz et al., 2021; Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019; etc.). Nevertheless, the errors are not so frequent in those studies. This can be associated with the nature of the data collected. To illustrate, since the data of the present study included argumentative essays and the length of the essays was high, it required students to write more to be able to provide and prove their arguments.

Second, as the results suggest, grammatical errors accounted for more than one-third of the overall errors. One possible explanation for the high number of grammatical errors can be attributed to the instruction of both writing and grammar. In teaching both, traditional methods are more prevalent and practiced by most Kurdish EFL instructors (Chaqmaqchee, 2015). They provide students with mechanical exercises that are more associated with the product approach to teaching writing (Chaqmaqchee, 2015; Qadir, 2021), and based on both Sulaiman and Mohammed (2019) and Qadir (2021) in the KRI context and Bensen Bostancı and Çavuşoğlu (2018) in the Turkish Cypriot context, the process-genre approach is seen to be more effective. Additionally, grammar, which can reinforce students' writing accuracy, is usually practiced and instructed out of context and separated from other language skills. Students are provided with a few notes and these notes are practiced within certain sentence examples without providing a larger context such as a reading passage or a paragraph contextualizing the rules, patterns, and notes presented. Our results parallel strikingly with previous studies showing that most Kurdish students struggle with grammar and that grammatical errors were the most frequent errors among all error types (Aziz et al., 2021; Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019; Mahmood, 2016; Nuruzzaman et al., 2018; etc.). Research has also found that grammatical errors were not only found to be the most frequent errors in essay writing, rather they were found to be the most common in paragraph writing, too (Nuruzzaman et al., 2018).

Third, lexical errors were the least common errors. As observed in the essays, the students limited and low variability in vocabulary resulted in this low frequency of lexical errors compared to the frequency of grammatical errors. Normally, undergraduate students do not possess much vocabulary and therefore use a limited number of words and repeatedly use this vocabulary (e.g., the use of the words 'money, successful, optimistic, etc., many times in the essays), as confirmed by Ahmed (2019). Furthermore, some students might possess lots of vocabulary but they might not take risks of using their potentially inactive vocabulary resulting in committing more lexical errors. Although the frequency of lexical errors is still high, their smaller number compared to grammatical errors is promising as lexis is believed to be one of the strongest measures of writing and text quality (Doro and Pietila, 2015) and carries more important meaning than grammatical elements. Our results contradict to those obtained by Mahmood (2016) who found that lexical errors were the second most common errors among the four categories of errors. Nevertheless, this study is congruent with other previous studies in terms of a smaller number of lexical errors (Ahmed, 2019; Aziz et al., 2021; Owu-Ewie and Williams, 2017) who all found that lexical errors were less common than grammatical ones.

Fourth, spelling errors were unveiled to come second in commonness. The fact that some students committed errors in rewriting the topic of the essay and writing a word somewhere in their essay correctly but the same word in another environment incorrectly may demonstrate inattentiveness, time constraints, writing apprehension, and/or uncertainty about the word on the part of the students, as shown in a previous study by Ahmed (2019). Not writing notes in class and depending too much on technology on the part of the students can again account for most of the students' errors in spelling (Ahmed, 2019). Another reason behind this large number of spelling errors is that spelling is not much focused on in

writing skills courses and it is not instructed (Ahmed, 2019; Abdullah, 2015). Most importantly, since Kurdish employs the Arabic alphabet, writing skills in English for Kurdish students might be more challenging and needs more arduous efforts (Omar and Barzani, 2022). Although spelling errors are not normally seen as serious as the other types of errors, they can be so at times. Our results support previous studies conducted in the area of spelling errors in writing (Ahmed, 2017; Ahmed, 2019; Mahmood, 2016; etc.).

Fifth, in terms of punctuation errors, although ranking third in commonness, we can say that they are the most neglected part of writing instruction in the Kurdish context (Abdullah, 2020). It is noticed that, students are not taught the rules of punctuation in their first language completely and constructively. This is evident in students' unpunctuated long sentences and paragraphs based on the analysis and the data obtained. Since punctuation does not carry content and does not greatly affect meaning as grammar and lexis, punctuation errors are considered less serious than grammar and lexical errors. However, changing the position of a comma might sometimes seriously affect meaning. For instance, the meaning of the sentence Let's eat, kids would drastically change if the comma is omitted as it would invite the listeners to eat kids. Our results are somewhat similar to the ones obtained by Mahmood (2016) who found that punctuation errors were the least frequent errors.

4.2. Grammatical errors

The previous section presented and discussed the results obtained for the prevalence of the main categories of errors committed by Kurdish EFL students. This section further investigates the errors by classifying, presenting, and discussing the subcategories. **Table 5** below presents the subcategories for the grammatical errors.

Table 5. Frequency and proportion of grammatical error subtypes.

N	Categories of grammatical errors	N	%
1	Addition, omission, and misuse of articles	377	26.66
2	Verb addition, omission, or wrong verb forms	251	17.75
3	Agreement errors	185	13.08
4	Subject addition or omission	143	10.11
5	Addition, omission, and misuse of prepositions and verb particles	98	06.93
6	Word order errors	98	06.93
7	Omission and incorrect use of conjunctions	79	05.58
8	pronoun reference errors	72	05.09
9	Tense errors	59	04.17
10	Bare infinitive, infinitive with (to), and gerund errors	42	02.97
11	The incorrect use of voice	10	00.70
Total		1414	100

As the table indicates, grammatical errors were prevalent among Kurdish EFL students. To indicate the commonness, we can draw a line between the five most common errors and the five least common errors. Accordingly, article errors scored the highest frequency (377) and proportion (26.66%), constituting one-fourth of all the grammatical errors. This was followed by auxiliary and verb form errors ($n = 251, 17.75\%$), agreement errors ($n = 185, 13.08\%$), subject addition and omission errors ($n = 143, 10.11\%$), prepositions and particles ($n = 98, 6.93\%$) and word order errors ($n = 98, 6.93\%$). However, the

least frequent errors included errors in voice ($n = 10, 0.70\%$), infinitive and gerund errors ($n = 42, 2.97\%$), tense errors ($n = 59, 4.17\%$), pronoun reference errors ($n = 72, 5.09\%$), and errors in the use of conjunctions ($n = 79, 5.58\%$).

On the one hand, the results obtained above are expected as the article system of English is complex and strenuous for most EFL learners (Al-Shujairi and Tan, 2017; Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019; Hassan and Ghafur, 2011; Nuruzzaman et al., 2018). On the other hand, the students of the present study were not given much detail regarding articles in English. A possible explanation for the large number of errors is the fact that teaching methods used in the KRI have been shown to be ineffective because they are mostly based on traditional approaches to writing such as the product approach (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019). Another possible explanation for the large number of article errors is the misapplication of rules in the target language. The fact that students used the definite article even with proper nouns explains the point in question as, in Kurdish, the same rules apply to proper nouns, that is, the definite article is not used with proper nouns in Kurdish similar to English. Additionally, the lack of practice in the classroom and teaching grammar not integrated into the language skills, particularly writing might be another reason for the erroneous use of articles (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019) in particular and the other errors in general. This result confirms prior studies in the Kurdish context that articles are challenging for Kurdish EFL students (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019). The reasons provided for the commonness of articles can be true for errors auxiliary and verb form errors, agreement errors, and prepositions and particles. However, the high number of subject omissions is mostly associated with the null constituency (because Kurdish is considered a pro-drop language) nature of the subject in Kurdish, that is, the subject is, in most cases a covert subject. The subject is not expressed overtly as can be observed in the sentence, “At the same time *helps you change your life.” In Kurdish, the subject is not necessarily to be expressed overtly. This might be one reason for the student removed the overt subject ‘money’. The same thing might be true for word order errors. The word order in Kurdish (SOV) is quite distinct from that of English (SVO). Therefore, most of these errors can be considered cross-linguistic or interference errors. As for the least frequent errors, the only interpretation that can be plausible is that tense and voice are normally consistent throughout a piece of writing; therefore, there is less opportunity for students to commit errors in these grammatical aspects. Additionally, since students avoid complex and compound grammatical structures, they usually commit fewer errors in the use of conjunctions. This confirms earlier assertions that writing performance does not always reflect writing competence (Sulaiman and Mohammed, 2019).

4.3. Lexical errors

Another category of errors committed by Kurdish EFL learners involved lexical errors. **Table 6** below depicts the lexical errors committed by Kurdish students.

Table 6. Frequency and proportion of lexical error subtypes.

N	Categories of Lexical Errors	N	%
1	Wrong word choice	288	50.43
2	Omission or incompleteness errors	119	20.8
3	Word formation	101	17.68
4	Redundancy error	41	7.18
5	Collocation	14	2.45
6	Misformation	8	1.40
Total		571	100

Table 6 clearly shows that the most common lexical error subtype was wrong word choice ($n = 288$, 50.43%), accounting for more than half of all the lexical errors, followed by omission and incompleteness errors ($n = 119$, 20.8%), representing one-fifth of the lexical errors, word formation ($n = 101$, 17.68%), redundancy ($n = 41$, 7.18%), and collocation ($n = 14$, 2.45%). The least frequent error included misformation errors ($n = 8$, 1.40%).

The low number of lexical errors compared to the other types seems to fairly reduce the impact of the overall number of errors the students committed in grammar, spelling, and punctuation because lexical accuracy is considered essential and carries most of the content. Although, the number of lexical errors is still high. As evident, the most common lexical error, consistent with Ander and Yıldırım (2010) and Aziz et al. (2021), was wrong word choice. As explained earlier, it is plausible and logical for Kurdish students to score high in terms of word choice as this subtype of error results from semantic confusion, homophony, or anything that leads to confusion due to the form of a word. This relates to the discrepancy that exists between English and Kurdish on the one hand and the discrepancy between English pronunciation and spelling on the other hand. Additionally, as Ander and Yıldırım (2010) confirm, wrong word choice and incompleteness errors can stem from the participants' level of proficiency as their proficiency might not allow them to select the right word and write complete sentences. As for the least common lexical errors, that is, redundancy, collocation, and misformation, again it is related to the students' proficiency as they might avoid utilizing complex words (Ander and Yıldırım, 2010). In addition, students rarely translate and borrow words from their language and include them in their essays because they can be easily noticed by their lecturers which might result in a low grade in their essays.

4.4. Spelling errors

Spelling errors were also considered in the present study and the following types of errors were identified in the students' written essays.

Table 7. Frequency and proportion of spelling error subtypes.

N	Categories of spelling errors	N	%
1	Spacing with words	325	33.19
2	Omission	296	30.23
3	Substitution	103	10.52
4	Insertion	97	9.90
5	Other errors	94	9.60
6	Transposition	44	4.49
7	Apostrophe	20	2.04
Total		979	100

As **Table 7** displays, the most frequent spelling errors included spacing errors ($n = 325$, 33.19%) that have increased the overall number of errors. Other common spelling errors were omission errors ($n = 296$, 30.23%) and substitution errors ($n = 103$, 10.52%). Nevertheless, the least common errors were insertion errors ($n = 97$, 9.90%), followed by other errors ($n = 94$, 9.60%), transposition errors ($n = 44$, 4.49%), and apostrophe errors ($n = 20$, 2.04%).

Since the spelling errors scored a high frequency, they had a great effect on the frequency and proportion of the overall number of errors. Moreover, among the spelling errors, spacing accounted for one-third of the spelling errors committed. One explanation is that students committed errors of the same

type. For instance, they wrote the words “a lot, anything, everything, everyone” and so on. incorrectly many times in their essays. Furthermore, the words “a lot, someone” were the words found in the question of the essay but students wrote them inaccurately. This shows students’ inattentiveness, writing apprehension, or time constraints or they might consider these errors less serious compared to errors that change meaning. As for omission errors, they are normally related to the differences that exist between English orthography and pronunciation. To exemplify, students deleted letters that were not pronounced or double letters such as “personaly, liserer, etc.”. As for substitution errors, one reason might be the lack of morphological knowledge (Ahmed, 2017), as can be observed in a word like “acter”. However, the least common error, apostrophe, does not usually occur with words in English except for contractions. Our results are in complete agreement with those obtained by Ahmed (2017) who found that omission, substitution, and spacing were the three most prominent errors among the participants. Quite similarly, Omar (2019) found that omission, insertion, and spacing were the three most prevalent errors among Kurdish EFL undergraduate students.

4.5. Punctuation errors

Punctuation errors, which were also common, scored a high frequency and proportion, as subcategorized in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Frequency and proportion of punctuation error subtypes.

N	Categories of punctuation errors	N	%
1	Comma	344	42.78
2	Capitalization	180	22.38
3	Period	147	18.28
4	Run-on sentences	102	12.68
5	Dash	7	0.87
6	Semicolon	6	0.74
7	Quotation marks	6	0.74
8	Exclamation	5	0.62
9	Parentheses	4	0.49
10	Question mark	3	0.37
Total		809	100

Table 8 illustrates that the three most occurring errors in students’ essays were errors in the use of commas ($n = 344, 42.78\%$), capitalization ($n = 180, 22.38\%$), and period ($n = 147, 18.28\%$). However, all the other eight error types accounted for less than 18% of the overall punctuation errors. The three least occurring errors were errors in the use of the question mark ($n = 3, 0.37\%$), parentheses ($n = 4, 0.49\%$), and the exclamation mark ($n = 5, 0.62\%$). The only plausible and logical reason behind the commonness of these errors can be due to the occurrence of these punctuation marks in academic writing. Without these punctuation marks, even a sentence cannot be constructed. However, a punctuation mark such as an exclamation or a question mark is not usually commonly used in academic writing. As said earlier, the ineffective teaching methods, the negligence of the punctuation marks on the students’ part, and lack of practice may also be three significant reasons behind this large number of errors in the three subtypes. These results are supported by previous research (Ahmed, 2017), particularly with regard to capitalization.

4.6. Causes and sources of the students' errors

This section involves a description of two often-cited inclusive sources of errors, namely interlingual and intralingual causes across the four major categories of errors. It presents and explains examples from the data.

At the outset, Richards (1974) and Sari (2016) mentioned two sources of errors namely, interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors are those that result from the interference of the first language (language transfer). The data showed many examples of students' errors that resulted from first language interference. One of the common grammatical errors was transferring the null subject rule of the Kurdish language to English. In English, the overt form of a subject cannot be deleted, whereas in Kurdish it can usually be and its grammatical and semantic features can be determined through inflection. This can clearly be observed in the data. As an illustration, the sentence, "I think if someone has a lot of money, has a lot of problems" does not contain a subject in the second independent clause, that is, the subject he or she has been deleted. In Kurdish, the overt form of a subject in that position is not required. One may consider this to be due to the application of the target rule that in a compound sentence, the subject is not necessarily to be repeated. However, the repetition of this error in various positions in a sentence in the data can justify that it is due to the transfer of the Kurdish language rule, as in if have a lot of money or not, we must respect people, they believe that with money can be successful. The grammatical interference of the Kurdish language is also visible in the application of the plurality agreement rule between a determiner and its noun to English, as in these ways, any problem. In English, the correct forms of these nouns should be 'these ways or this way' and 'any problems' respectively. However, in Kurdish, there is no need for the noun that follows these determiners to be plural and to agree with the determiners. It is also noticeable in a sentence like, "Although they have a lot of money, but they are not successful" where the use of but in this position is not allowed in English but it is necessary in Kurdish. This error has been noticed not only in students' writing but also in their speaking many times.

The influence of the first language is not only evident in the application of grammatical rules, but it can be clearly seen in orthography as well. For instance, the words Adison from the data for Edison, playing carts for playing cards, sychology for psychology, for instnce for for instance, all these spelling errors are caused by the interference of the Kurdish pronunciation. The students wrote these words based on how they are pronounced in Kurdish. To explain, the word 'Edison' is pronounced as 'Adison' and 'card' as 'cart' in Kurdish. Furthermore, the abbreviation Dr. in D. Mahmood in students' answer sheets is misspelled instead of the correct form Dr. Mahmood due to the interference of the Kurdish spelling since the abbreviation is spelled as D. in Kurdish. Above all, since Kurdish is a phonetic language, i.e., there is usually a one-to-one correspondence between sounds and spelling and English is the opposite, many other spelling errors occurred due to the influence of the Kurdish language, among several other factors.

Lexical interference of the first language was also obvious in students' written scripts. One of the most related areas where there was interference of the Kurdish language was the literal translation of words and expressions. To illustrate this, the word eating in the sentence, "The person is eating the money of people" could well demonstrate the interference of the Kurdish language to mean, "The person is taking and using people's money" in English. Again, here, grammatical interference occurs in using the possessive construction the money of people in the same sentence. The Kurdish literal translation for being a doctor was also made for the word medicine in the sentence she studies for being a doctor. Other examples of literal translation include It is a right thing that ... where the student meant It is true that. The choice of the word bigger to mean older in the sentence, "When he became bigger, he went to Canada"

is also caused by the influence of the Kurdish language. In all these instances and others in the data, since the learner does not know the exact word or expression, he/she resorts to mother tongue items.

Many of the causes of the students' errors cannot be due to the interference of the students' first language. In fact, intralingual transfer currently accounts for a large number of errors. According to Brown (2014) and Ander and Yildirim (2010), most errors occur due to the influence of the first language at the early stages of foreign or second language learning but when learners progress in their learning the system of the target language, intralingual transfer, i.e., transfer within the target language itself occurs. Thus, intralingual errors include errors that result from "faulty or partial learning of the target language", or more specifically from "the influence of one target language item upon another" (Richards and Schmidt, 2010, p. 294; Sari, 2016). They "reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply" (Mahmood, 2016; Richards, 1971).

Accordingly, many examples of intralingual transfer appear in the data. Consider the following erroneous sentences:

- *I am agree with this statement.
- *They don't related happy life to money.
- *Money can't doing everything.
- *The money is the dirty of the hand.
- *They have a lot of money but they didn't successful.

In all these sentences, the cause or source of the errors is intralingual, i.e., there is the influence of target structures. Considering the sentences, there is the addition of the auxiliary verb *am*, the use of the wrong form *doing* after the modal auxiliary *can't*, the use of the wrong form after *do*, the addition of the, the substitution of *weren't* for *didn't*, and respectively.

Lexical intralingual errors also occur in the data, as can be clearly seen in the following sentences:

- *The major of people around the world used it.
- *If you would like to know my overview about this topic, keep the reading up.
- *Money is a very important think.
- *Money is one thing for our lives easier.

As the above sentences illustrate, no interpretation of the interference of the first language such as literal translation or choosing a form that is similar to the first language can be made. Rather, they are all caused by the incomplete learning of the words. The learners have substituted *major* for *majority*, *overview* for *point of view*, *think* for *thing*, and omitted *making before our* in the sentences consecutively. Based on Richards (1971) and Mahood (2016), the cause of these errors except for the last one can be "faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language".

Spelling errors are also prone to the effects of intralingual transfer. The data of the present study revealed that some spelling errors resulted from the influence of the pronunciation of the target language itself as it can clearly be seen in spelling the words *any* as *eny*, *different* as *diffrent*, *interest* as *intrest*, *instance* as *instnce*, *because* as *becouse*, *obvious* as *abvious*, *suitable* as *sirable*, *body* as *bady*. In these words, the influence of the pronunciation of the target language on spelling the words is evident. Additionally, the last three misspelt words *abvious*, *sirable*, *bady* have been spelled in this way due to the effect of the American pronunciation. Since most students are profoundly influenced by and have affection for American pronunciation, they misspell the words on this basis. This can be evidenced by the fact that one of the researchers, who has direct access to the students, has noticed the influence of the

American accent on students' accents when speaking. Some misspellings occur owing to overgeneralization of rules of the target language such as spelling actor as acter, inventor as inventer, cannot as can not, or incomplete application of rules such as successful as successfull.

As concerns punctuation errors, many intralingual errors can be observed including the omission of the comma after transition words and in complex sentences, constructing long sentences without punctuation marks, and incorrect capitalization. All these errors occur as students do know how to apply the rules and they have not fully acquired the rules of punctuating even in their mother tongue.

Finally, although causes or sources of errors are many and categorizations vary from researcher to researcher as mentioned in the literature, most researchers are content with these two broad categories of the sources of errors and it is thought that subcategorizing the main categories is problematic due to the overlap of the subcategories.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Error analysis of students' written work means studying the students' interlanguage, which can greatly reflect the areas of weaknesses. For this purpose, this study diagnosed the areas of EFL Kurdish second-year university students' difficulties in writing essays as well as described the causes of those difficulties. In addition, it described the numbers and kinds of errors committed by the students. The results of the study concluded that the overall frequency and proportion of the errors were high. It further revealed that the most difficult area for Kurdish students was the application of grammatical rules among the major categories. As for the subcategories, the study showed that the incorrect use of articles (among grammatical errors), the selection of the wrong word (among lexical errors), incorrect spacing (among spelling errors), and the incorrect use of commas (among punctuation errors) were the most frequent errors among Kurdish students.

The study also confirmed that the errors occurred owing to two types of transfer, namely interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer. That is, some errors resulted from features of the English language that were present in English but not in Kurdish while some others resulted from misapplication and overgeneralization of English language rules. From our point of view, two other causes of errors including the context of learning and communication strategies mentioned by Brown (2014) are also productive in understanding the causes of students' errors. The results of this study can provide insight to learners to recognize their errors and improve the language they employ in writing and to researchers and teachers to review the approaches and the methods they have used, particularly in teaching writing and grammar.

It is noticed that although the new curriculum has launched the possibility of using a communicative approach from basic education to preparatory education and then to university, traditional approaches to teaching English are still in heavy use. In other words, although the curriculum at pre-university education is integrated, most teachers' focus usually goes to grammar, and grammar is taught out of context detached from the four language skills. Writing activities are often skipped and are not instructed. The baccalaureate final exam (a test taken at the end of their preparatory education) does not include questions testing writing. Additionally, writing is taught using traditional or ineffective teaching methods at university (e.g., the product approach) or certain mechanical exercises are taught (Chaqmaqchee, 2015). Therefore, the current study suggests that pre-university teachers focus on teaching writing activities considering the difficulties students encounter in writing by doing remedial teaching. Another recommendation would be for EFL university instructors to teach writing by employing the more modern and tried-and-tested methods, for instance, the process approach views writing as a process rather than a

product. This is also confirmed by prior studies (Zohoorian, 2023) that solitary pre-planning and teacher-led pre-planning tasks are effective in enhancing writing performance. Another recommendation is for instructors to encourage their students to use proofreading tools such as Grammarly to improve their writing, particularly when writing at home because, according to Astuti et al. (2023), Grammarly is a proofreading tool that can enhance students' writing skills. Additionally, the provision of explicit written corrective feedback and indirect corrective feedback might be helpful in reducing the number of errors, particularly grammatical errors as previous studies in the Kurdish context have shown positive results regarding explicit corrective feedback (Mahmood and Aziz, 2023; Tawfeeq and Abbas, 2018).

The findings of this study will contribute and add to the body of studies carried out in the area of written error analysis. Furthermore, the study will be of great help to undergraduate students in general for identifying their errors and correcting themselves. It will also aid instructors in the English departments in paying attention to the areas of difficulty in designing their syllabuses, and including, emphasizing, or excluding certain subjects in their syllabuses. The results of the study will also be beneficial for both researchers and linguists in the field of error analysis.

6. Limitations and suggestions for further research

The study is limited to second-year students of a public university in KRI. It is also confined to written errors only not spoken errors. It was not within the scope of this study to statistically cover and describe all the subcategories of the errors, e.g., the subcategories of preposition errors or articles. Therefore, this study suggests conducting more specific and separate studies concerning grammatical errors, lexical errors, spelling errors, and punctuation errors in the KRI context. More importantly, doing an error analysis of the causes of errors is highly suggested, both quantitatively and qualitatively, studying students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the errors.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, SMQ; methodology, SMQ; software, SMQ and HBB; validation, SMQ and HBB; formal analysis, SMQ and HBB; investigation, SMQ and HBB; resources, SMQ; data curation, SMQ; writing—original draft preparation, SMQ; writing—review and editing, SMQ and HBB; visualization, SMQ; supervision, HBB; project administration, SMQ and HBB; funding acquisition, SMQ and HBB. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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