

Deciding on the Degree of Emphasis on Micro skills for Writing Classes Based on the Frequency of Error Occurrence

Behnam Hashemi

PhD, English Department, Punjab University, Chandigarh, Punjab, India

Abstract: *Good English writing competence is widely recognized as an important skill for educational, business and personal reasons. So, English writing instruction has an important role in foreign language education. In this regard, extracted and edited from his MA thesis, the purpose of the researcher in this study was to decide on the degree of emphasis on micro skills for writing classes based on the frequency of error occurrence. The first step for carrying out the research was to analyze the essays of a pilot group (i. e., 30 students) to provide the researcher with a rough checklist of the most frequent types of errors. Then the researcher administered the instrument to a random sample of university students' essays that were majoring in TEFL, Literature and translation in Islamic Azad University, Roudehen Branch. The analysis of the sample obtained 13 types of errors and the researcher applied the obtained checklist to categorize the errors committed by all 300 subjects of the research. To do this the researcher used descriptive and qualitative method to gather the research data without manipulating the research context. Based on the occurrences of errors, the researcher presented a hierarchy of error types and suggested some strategies in the process of pre-writing, writing and post-writing.*

Keywords: Writing, Micro skills, Error, Error Analysis

1. Introduction

The field of teaching has been in a great fluctuation and variety since one hundred years ago. Richards and Rodgers (2002) state that after diminishing the strength of the GTM, in which the language was for the sake of itself, a lot of new methods like DM, ALM, SL, etc...emerged. So, the oral language was very important because of the need for oral communication, but after sometime, the world faced the demands of written communication and now mostly because of the development of the World Wide Web there are a lot of web loggers, forum writers, as well as the students and scholars who go online and share their knowledge through writing which is undoubtedly in English. In this new situation, writing has been considered a unique skill in order to communicate across the globe and the need to find appropriate procedures to teach it effectively is felt. The psycholinguist Eric Lenneberg (1967) once noted, in a discussion of "species specific" human behavior, that human being universally learn to walk and talk, but that swimming and writing are culturally specific learned behaviors. We learn to swim if there is a body of water available and usually if someone teaches us. We learn to write if we are members of a literate society and usually only if someone teaches us (Brown, 2001, p. 334). Written expression is probably the most difficult skill to teach because it is the most complex form of communication. All of us must write in some form or another throughout our lives, but some where many of us detest writing. In school we have to and even sometimes are threatened to write irrelevant topics. What is often the result for all of this hard work? Papers overwhelmed in red ink. Students participate in writing classes with the expectations of becoming more proficient writers in the English language. They want to write close to error-free texts. How can it be accomplished?

In addition to the feedback on content, form, and structure of writing, or at least as their sub-categories that Myles (2001)

believes students need to get from their teachers, there are other types of feedback that students can benefit from. Among them are teachers' feedback on students' errors in organization of writing, discourse (i. e., unity, transitions, cohesion), vocabulary (i. e., collocates), and mechanics (i. e., spelling, punctuation).

On the other hand, errors provide feedback for the teachers. "They tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of his teaching materials and his teaching techniques, and show him what parts of the syllabus he has been following have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention," (Keshavarz, 1992, pp.23-4).

2. Statement of the Problem

Some of the problems that students have in writing stem from inadequate preparation. Teachers need to prioritize the micro skills for writing in order to emphasize appropriately on the students' needs. In order to determine the students' needs, it is necessary to analyze the errors made by the students in compositions, and put them in different categories (i.e. organization, content, discourse, syntax). The outcome, then, can be used as a basis for devising remedial lessons and exercises, or designing a new syllabus or program of teaching for a new group of learners.

3. Research Questions

1. Regarding the frequency of the error occurrence, what are the preferences for error correction in writing classes? That is, which errors should be emphasized in the process of error correction?
2. Regarding the frequency of the error occurrence, what are the preferences for emphasizing on writing microskills? That is, which micro skills of writing should be emphasized based on the students' errors?

4. Review of the Related Literature

Writing is an integral part of a language course. It is complex and sometimes difficult to teach, requiring mastery not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also of conceptual and judgmental elements. According to Heaton (1988), skills necessary for writing are divided into five general components or main areas: "language use, mechanical skills, treatment of the content, stylistic skills, judgment skills" (p. 34). By language skills, he means the ability to write correct and appropriate sentences. Mechanical skills refer to punctuation and spelling. Treatment of the content means having creative thought and developing ideas. Stylistic skills refer to the ability to manipulate the content and language effectively. Judgment skills refer to the ability to write in an appropriate manner for particular audience and organize relevant information. In order for people to communicate, they have to be able to use both speaking and writing. Visitors to another country will often have to leave a note for the mailman, fill out a customs form, give written instructions, or write thank you letters. Writing is a productive skill. It is considered the last skill among the four skills, since it needs more mastery of the L2. From the time of the Audio-lingual method, it has always been ignored. However, it has recently been taken in to consideration. Chastain (1988) believes that writing can be used to focus on the components of language and to manipulate them. A literate person, then, should read and write. However, Bowen (1985) states that writing lends itself to advanced-level training and use in specialized situations. Indeed, without well-developed writing skills, advanced-level training and education seem to be impossible.

4.1. Writing as Product or Process

Several scholars have differentiated between the product and the process approach to writing. Chastain, Murry and Cohen have paid special attention to the issue. Most students, both in their native language and in the second language, have received minimal or no instruction in learning how to write. They have received feedback—often unhelpful because it has been incomprehensible to them on the product, they have submitted for correction and grading, but no one has led them through the process of generating ideas, organizing them into a coherent sequence, and putting them on paper. What has been taken for instruction in composition has been, in effect, evaluation of a product. Recently, various writing specialists have proposed a distinction between the process of writing and the written product. Their contention is that if the teacher wants to improve the product, she must assist the students in ways that will enable them to improve the process they go through to produce that product. Brown (2001) advises the writing teachers to mix the process and product in order to have an effective writing class. He suggests teachers to, "make sure students are carefully through appropriate stages in the process of writing toward final creation" (p. 346). He continues suggesting some effective techniques in designing a writing class and defines them, e.g. accounting for cultural/literary background, connecting reading and writing in which they learn by observing "relevant types of texts", framing the techniques in terms of prewriting, drafting, and revising is other techniques a teacher should consider in class (Brown, 2001, p.347). Schmitt (2002) states that an objective of the

process approach is: "to help students develop viable strategies for getting started, drafting, revising, and editing the product and the written text is of secondary concern. One of the most controversial aspects of writing pedagogy has been the tension between the process and the product approach. Product-oriented approach as Nunan (2001) shows "focuses on the final product, the coherent, error free text and the process approach, on the other hand focuses on the steps involved in drafting and redrafting a piece of work"(p. 272). He adds that in product writing teachers do not care for correctness and only want the final text. Nunan concludes, "what we need in writing classroom are both models and procedures. In other words, we need both process and product in order to have a good writing outcome" (p.274). "Since the 1980s, a process approach to teaching writing, typically emphasizing strategies related to the exploration of ideas, revising and editing, has been the object of substantive research within second and foreign language contexts"(Cumming, 1989). In the process writing classroom, teachers plan activities which help students understand that writing. They also need to guide students through the writing process and help them develop effective writing strategies (Seow, 2002).

4.2. Micro skills for Writing

Brown (2001) classifies micro skills of written production in the following way. Mastering each of these micro skills, students are supposed to:

- a. Produce graphemes and orthographic patterns of English.
- b. Produce writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose.
- c. Produce an acceptable core of words and use appropriate word order patterns.
- d. Use acceptable grammatical systems (e.g., tense, pluralization), patterns, and rules.
- e. Express a particular meaning in different grammatical forms. (p. 343) and...

4.3. Grading and Responding to Writing

There is no doubt that teachers invest so much time responding to students' writing, and for that alone they deserve a lot of credit. No matter what the writing task is, the teachers stress the importance of providing feedback (Zamel, 1985). Hendrickson (1980) in Ommagio Hadley (2003) proposes three types of errors: (a) those that impair communication (major/global), (b) those that have highly stigmatizing effects on the reader, and (c) those that occur frequently. Hyland (2003) also, re-emphasizes the importance of the individual when considering students respond to feedback. She adds that an over-focus on correct English can restrict students to using only those structures they feel confident of getting right. Mahili (1994) states that teachers should abandon their preconceptions of traditional writing classes and respond to the students, they should not simply give feedback just to their writing. Teachers should adopt the role of genuinely interested readers rather than that of evaluators. Students can all learn from this reciprocal, dialectical process. She suggests some guidelines to follow when responding to the students' first draft: 1. focusing on the content and avoiding language errors. 2. making specific

comments avoiding cryptic language, jargon, and respond with questions as well as statements. 3. not imposing one's own interpretation on the students' writing. 4. noting strengths as well as weaknesses. She also adds that when responding to the second draft the teacher should: 1. not correct errors in grammar or mechanics by providing the correct lexical or grammatical item. 2. teach students how to use a dictionary in the editing process. 3. set a number of priorities and provide selective feedback for better results. 4. decide carefully about which errors to correct. 5. diagnose some general problems along with the individual errors and work on them in class. 6. make a comment, preferably an end comment, that is, positive— something the teachers usually tend to forget.

Mobaraki (1995) focuses on the impact of peer feedback on the EFL learners' paragraph writing. The findings of the study show that teachers can take advantage of other students, responding to their peers. Chastain (1988) divides the grading systems into two ways: objective and holistic ways. Objective techniques are considered to provide a constant and reliable grading system and they are done by for example, counting especial forms such as a verb form. This approach is not very practical and takes a lot of time. Therefore, global or holistic approach which attends to content and organization as well as the language forms is more applicable. Chastain (1988) suggests a formula for grading writing: "Function + content – inaccuracy = score". This formula provides an integrative approach to writing grading. He disagrees to subjective grading such as giving A, B, or, D, to the students' writing (p.262).

4.4. Errors and Error Analysis

Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the Target Language (TL) and that TL itself. Corder is the "Father" of Error Analysis (the EA with the "new look"). It was with his article entitled "The significance of Learner Errors" (1967) that EA took a new turn. Errors used to be "flaws" that needed to be eradicated. Corder (1967) presents a completely different point of view. He contends that those errors are important in and of themselves. For learners themselves, errors are 'indispensable,' since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. Corder (1981) also adds that, EA is something beyond the CA and is about the psycholinguistic processes of language learning. There are two branches of error analysis: theoretical and applied. As Keshavarz states:

"The objective of applied error analysis is purely pragmatic and pedagogical such as organizing remedial courses and devising appropriate materials and strategies of teaching based on the findings of error analysis. It is worth pointing out here that long before the theoretical dimension of error analysis came into existence, learners' errors were identified and classified by classroom teachers in an attempt to deal with their practical needs and to devise appropriate materials and techniques of teaching. In fact, until recently a typical error analysis went little beyond impressionistic collections of 'common' errors and their classification into different categories, such as errors of agreement, omission of articles and prepositions, and the like. Little or no attempt was made

to systematically account for the occurrence of errors in psycholinguistic terms." (Keshavarz, 1992, pp. 46-7).

Moreover, according to Richards and Sampson (1974), "At the level of pragmatic classroom experience, error analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determines priorities for future effort" (p. 15). Corder (1967) highlights the importance of considering errors in the language learning process. Based on his consideration, there is a shift in emphasis towards an understanding of the problems learners face in their study of a language. Errors are indispensable to learners since the making of errors can be regarded as 'a device the learner uses in order to learn. Research has provided empirical evidence pointing to emphasis on learners' errors as an effective means of improving grammatical accuracy. Indeed, as Carter (2001, p.35) notes, 'Knowing more about how grammar works is to understand more about how grammar is used and misused'. There is a need for students to recognize the significance of errors which occur in their writing, to fully grasp and understand the nature of the errors made. This requires English language teachers to be better equipped, more sensitive and aware of the difficulties students face regarding grammar. Kitao and Kitao (2000) suggest that error analysis in language use can predict the learners' type of errors which will be useful for developing teaching materials and selecting teaching methods. Moreover, the result of such analysis can be used as an indicator of the learners' achievement. It can also be used for researching language acquisition and learners' strategy in language learning. Richards & schmitt (2002) believe that the use of linguistic item in the speech or writing "in a way which a fluent or native speaker or writer of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning ." (p.184). Despite its shortcomings, EA is still alive and in the recent studies there is no mention of any methodological problems involved in EA (Ellis, 1994). It has made a great contribution to second language acquisition research. And some (e.g., Mirhassani, 2003) even believe that "CA with all its limitations is useful in teaching... ". Corder (1981) refers to five steps that researchers in the field of EA should follow: collection of a sample in which the researcher can collect errors from the learners' production, identification of errors in which it can be either spontaneous or preplanned, description of errors or which one comes first and is more important than others, explanation of errors and the source and the causes of each one, and evaluation of errors.

4.5. Classification of Error Type

There are several classifications for the error types from which we can mention several of them. Ho (2003) provides samples of suggested classifications of error type as follows:

- Omissions: Is there something missing?
 - Article
 - He hit ^ car.
- Additions: Is there an unnecessary addition?
 - Overgeneralization or Unnecessary insertion
 - Suffix: past tense marker - ed
 - putted for put
 - Suffix: plural marker -s
 - Apparatuses for Apparatus

- Wrong combination: Is there something which shouldn't go with another?
 - Noun 'information' is Uncountable and must therefore take a singular verb.
 - Your information is false.
- Inappropriate construction: Is there an incomplete/inappropriate construction?
 - Fragmented/Incomplete sentence:
 - Because I didn't like Law. I dropped it in my 1st year.
 - Run-on sentence:
 - When I was in school, I studied very hard in every subject but I cannot success in everything because I weak in every subject and father try to stop learning.
- Disordering / Inversion: Is there a wrong order of items?
 - Subject-verb inversion:
 - Now I don't know why we are taught this.

Norris (1999) mentions to the most common error types (and examples) that he pays attention to in his writing classes as follows:

1. "Be" verb problems, especially (a) the use of the nonexistent "'be' Verb + dictionary form of another verb" pattern and (b) the lack of agreement between the subject and noun complement in the "'be' verb + noun" pattern

- a. "I was belong to the volleyball club in high school."
- b. "My brother is junior high school"

2. Wrong usage of the passive and active voices

- a. "I was enjoyed the movie."
- b. "The library sometimes used for sleeping"

3. Omission of verbs after the auxiliary "can"

- a. "He can English very well."
- b. "I cannot piano."

4. Wrong usage or omission of prepositions

- a. "Winter holiday starts at December 24th."
- b. " I stayed hotel one night."

5. Wrong usage of articles

- a. "I gave the book to a my friend."
- b. " Japan is not the big country."

6. Lack of subject-verb agreement

- a. "She walk to school every day."
- b. "Every movie star are handsome."

4.8. Correction of Errors

Huntley (1992) maintains that feedback on content and organization should be provided to students while feedback on form should be avoided, and she recommends that second language teachers incorporate peer reviews and student-teacher conferences in their teaching as two valuable alternative feedback methods to traditional error correction.

Truscott's review paper on grammar correction published in 1996 has led to a great deal of discussion. He argues that grammar correction is both ineffective and harmful; therefore it has no place in the writing classroom. However, Ferris (2006) rejects Truscott's thesis after scrutinizing his sources. It was found that some of her arguments against Truscott were not valid. For example, she criticized the lack of definition for the term "error correction," which was denied by Truscott in his response to Ferris' article in 1999. According to Lee (1997), attitudes towards error correction changed from direct correction before the 1960s to condemnation of error correction in late 1960s, and to a more critical view of the need and value of error correction in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, the controversy over error correction remains unresolved.

Truscott (1996) refers to a number of studies to provide evidence for the ineffectiveness and unhelpfulness of grammar correction in ESL writing classes. He concludes that there is no reason to correct grammar errors. Though Truscott managed to find numerous negative results in many studies to support his thesis and only few positive results stemming from the grammar correction. It needs to be noted that he did not conduct any actual experiment in ESL writing classes to support his argument in the paper, and he might have overlooked some other significant findings that contradict arguments against grammar correction. For those ESL teachers who find responding to students' errors in writing very tiring and time-consuming, or those who think that students' motivation might be negatively affected, Truscott's article might be beneficial. Despite shifting perceptions on the importance of 'accuracy' and current pedagogies which reject 'grammar practice' orientations to writing instruction, error correction is widely seen by teachers as crucial for writing development and generally expected and welcomed by L2 students (Ferris, 2003; Hyland, 1998).

To investigate the relationship between students' L1 and EFL writing, Chan (2004) examined English writing samples from 710 Hong Kong ESL college students. The findings revealed that, in all of the five error types investigated, most errors were closely related to the subjects' L1. The data from interviews with the students also confirmed that EFL students first called upon their L1 before producing their English writings. The use of the language transfer was even more obvious among the learners of a lower English proficiency level. Along the same lines, Liu, Sung, and Chien (1998) also concluded that the less English proficiency learners possess, the more L1 interference was found in their English writings. In the study of Liu, et al, the authors applied a think-aloud method to detect how Taiwanese EFL students generated notes in the process of writing in English. The findings revealed that beginning EFL learners relied on their L1 to retrieve words more than advanced EFL learners. Holmes (2000) described the first step of a research in developing an error analysis marking tool for ESL (English as a Second Language) learners at Malaysian institutions of higher learning. The writing in ESL comprised 400 essays written by 112 undergraduates. Subject-matter experts use an error classification scheme to identify the errors. Markin 3.1 software was used to speed up the process of classifying these errors. In this way, the statistical analysis of errors was made accurately. The results

of the study showed that common errors in these essays in decreasing order were tenses, prepositions, articles, word choice, mechanics, and verb to be. The findings from this phase of the study were supposed to lend to the next phase of the research that was developing techniques and algorithms for error analysis marking tool for ESL learners.

Duskova (1969) identified a total of 1007 errors based on the writings of 50 Czech learners of English and analyzed them in terms of 9 categories. She discovered that errors in articles (260) were most frequent, followed by errors in lexis (233) while there were 54 errors in syntax and only 31 in word order. Kim (1987) identified a total of 2455 errors in the English compositions of 12th grade Korean EFL learners. The findings showed that errors in BE and auxiliaries were most common (419), followed by errors in prepositions (287) and that intralingual errors arose more than transfer errors. In the following year, Kim (1988) investigated errors in English verbs with reference to tense, mood, and voice. The 120 subjects were the 11th grade Korean EFL learners who were asked to translate 42 Korean sentences into English. Results revealed that errors in mood were most frequent (903), followed by errors in voice (885) and tense (720), among the total of 2508 errors.

With regard to the sources of the errors, overgeneralization (65%) occurred the most while L1 transfer occurred at 22% and simplification at 13%. Kim (1989) conducted EA with 200 students at the 10th grade Korean EFL learners, using their English translations of 30 Korean sentences. She identified 1122 errors in which transfer errors resulting from L1 structures were higher (24%) than overgeneralization errors (23%). In the essay writings of 200 students at the 10th grade Korean EFL learners, Kim (1998) identified 2122 errors and classified them in terms of 6 domains and subdivided them into 22 linguistic categories. Her findings revealed that errors in articles were most common (354) and that there were only 8 errors in word order and 2 in voice.

5. Methodology

5.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 300 male and female university students majoring in TEFL, English Translation and English language and literature who chose the course of essay writing in the second semester in Islamic Azad University, Roudehen Branch. The method of sampling was simple random selection. All the subjects had passed the prerequisite courses of essay writing i. e., paragraph development, basic structure one and two.

5.2. Instrumentation

The research instrument was a researcher-made checklist designed based on reviewing the essays written by a group of students randomly chosen as a pilot group. The results obtained from the analysis of the group which comprised 30 university students majoring English language (i.e., Literature, Translation, or Teaching) provided the researcher with the most frequent writing errors. Taking the committed errors into account, the researcher designed the desired checklist which later was administered to the essays written by research subjects.

5.3. Procedure

The researcher went through the following steps to obtain the required data and analyze the results:

First, the researcher randomly selected the students who had taken "essay writing" course. Second, to find the common errors made by students, the researcher conducted a pilot study through which the most frequent errors were categorized and a checklist was designed to be administered for the research subjects. Third, at the end of academic course, some topics (from 2 to 4) were given to the subjects. The students were supposed to write a five-paragraph essay according to the organization of essay writing emphasized during the course. Fourth, the researcher analyzed the essays and categorized the errors made by the students. Finally, based on the hierarchies of errors i.e., from the most frequent errors to the least frequent ones, the researcher suggested the related micro skills which could be included in the process of teaching writing skill.

6. Data Analysis

The obtained data have been represented and analyzed using the frequency counts, bar graphs, and pie charts. To answer each of the research questions, the related data have been tabulated and analyzed. The final step in the data analysis section was suggesting a hierarchy of error occurrence which presents the error types based on the number of occurrence from the most frequent to the least frequent types of errors.

6.1. Results

To represent the obtained data in a graphic form, the following bar graphs and pie chart have been provided using the SPSS software.

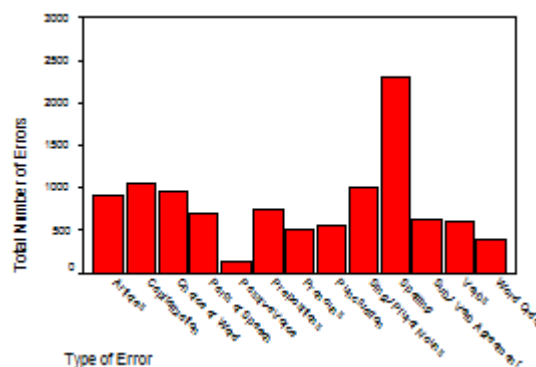


Figure 1: Bar Graph for Micro Skill Errors

As the bar graph shows the more frequent type is spelling error (i.e., the number of occurrences equals 2287), and the least frequent one is passive verb error (i.e., the number of occurrences equals 139). The occurrences of the other eleven errors types range from 1053 to 393 which relate to "Capitalization" to "Word Order" respectively.

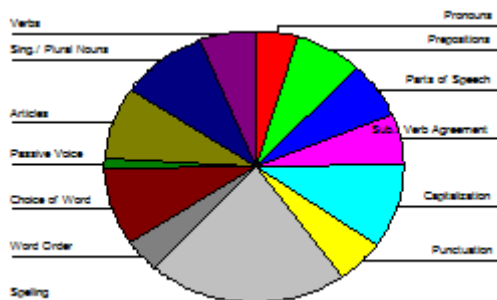


Figure 2: Pie Chart for the Obtained Data

The pie chart represents the same data in the form of percentage. The lion share has been devoted to spelling error with 21.7 % and the smallest share has been given to Passive voice errors with just 0.013 %. The percentages related to the remaining types of errors are as follows: Capitalization, 10%; Singular/ Plural Nouns, 9.5%; Choice of Word, 9.2%; Articles, 8.7%; Preposition, 7.1%; Parts of Speech, 6.8%; Subject/Verb Agreement, 6%; Verbs, 5.8%; Punctuation, 5.4%; and Pronouns, 4.8%.

6.2. Discussion

Presenting a hierarchy of error types based on the frequency of their occurrences and comparing the results of the study with the findings of other researches done in the same field are among the different topics that will be dealt with in this part. As table 4.1 shows, the major errors committed by the students have been categorized in 13 types and each type of errors has been repeated from 0.5 to 7.6 times in each student's writing. Regarding the frequency of the error occurrences, the following hierarchy of error occurrences is represented.

The point that should be taken into consideration is that some of these types of errors occur at the level of words (e.g., spelling) and the others are made at the level of sentence; therefore, it is natural to observe that the high number of occurrences of errors are made at the level of word. Taking this fact into account, the researcher randomly chose a sample of 30 papers and counted the number of words and sentences written by the students. Then, the obtained data were generalized to show the approximate number of the sentences and words written by all 300 students who had been considered as the subjects of the study. The results are as follows:

- The number of sentences comprised 6400 sentences.



Figure 4.4: The Hierarchy of Error Occurrences

- The number of words comprised 97000 words. It can be concluded that the average number of sentences in each essay was approximately 21 and, in turn, the numbers of words in each essay and sentence were 323 and 15 respectively. Reviewing the papers once again showed that students mostly had problems with the spelling of content words. If the number of content words are just taken into account, it can be concluded that the chance of occurring spelling errors are two times more than the other errors; so, it is more logical to divide the number of error occurrences of this type by two to have a more sensible interpretation. Although the number of errors was divided into two, spelling errors proved to be high again and needed to be emphasized. On the other hand, the reviewing of the papers showed that the majority of spelling errors were "local", i.e., it was possible for the reader to guess the intended word out of the misspelled one. The following extracted errors illustrate the issue.

- It depends on our habbits [habits], our way of thinking, interesting things and other ways.
- The employess [employees], secreteris [secretaries], insurance igents [agents] and accountents [accountants].

Aside from the findings of the present research, there were lots of specialists whose findings confirm the findings in this research. In addition to the related studies mentioned in chapter two (i.e., Lee, 1997; Sattayatham and Honsa, 2007; Chan, 2004; Holmes 2000; Duskova, 1969; Kim 1987; and Huang, 2001), there are other studies which have focused on the students errors in ESL and EFL contexts. Erel and Bulut (2007) whose findings were in line with the present study studied the effect of coded error feedback in a Turkish university context with regard to accuracy in writing. The results showed that the group which received coded error feedback committed fewer errors. The study worked on 18 different types of errors. Comparing the categories included in the present study with the abovementioned research, it is revealed that all 13 types of errors under investigation have been included in the Erel and Bulut's study except the category of "parts of speech". In his study, Chen (2007) found that students could correct each other's writing and give appropriate feedback to their peers. He considered 10 types of errors in his study, all of which have roughly been included in the present study. Chun-Xian further found out that although students could provide their classmates with suitable feedback, they failed to correct the errors related to the categories of "word choice", "collocation", and some other global errors. His findings showed the importance of teachers' role in giving feedback to students through teaching microskills of writing, which also was truly in line with our study.

7. Summary and Conclusion

The research problem for this study arose when the researcher found some errors in students' writing. Then the researcher felt the need to analyze the errors made by students in compositions and put them in different categories. The researcher figured out that the outcome would be effective for devising remedial lessons and exercises. The questions of the study were: "Regarding the frequency of error occurrences, what are the preferences for

error correction in writing classes? And, regarding the frequency of error occurrences what are the preferences for emphasizing on microskills? So, the purpose of the study was to decide on the degree of the emphasis on microskills in writing classes based on the frequency of error occurrences. In order to become more familiar with the field, the researcher reviewed lots of related literature and contradictory theories about writing, error analysis, error correction and error categories. The preliminary studies showed that, at first, writing was viewed as a supportive skill for practicing literature and handwriting, but now, it is an important skill in universities and colleges. It is used for communication between teachers and scholars. So, special attention should be paid to this skill in international forums. Different approaches were seen during these times. Some believed that the students should begin with a limited amount of writing with the help of a teacher and after sometimes gradually move toward the free writing, while, others believe that the quantity of writing is more important than the quality. Some believe that the process of writing should be emphasized during teaching writing and some believed that the end product should be focused. In learning writing stages the students began copying, combining and finally writing creatively. The researcher also tried to find the relationship between the writing skills and reviewed other scholar's findings in the field. Also, there were lots of contradictions about error and error correction. In this regard, some educators believe that errors should be totally avoided from the learners' production; on the contrary otherwise, some believe that errors are the indicator of learning process and should be tolerated and even sometimes ignored. Some specialists assert that by analyzing errors and classifying them, teachers can be aware of their students' needs and, in turn, improve or even change their teaching techniques. Also there are some educators who maintain that error occurrences are due to transfer of first language, training, strategies and overgeneralization. Classification of error types is another area in which various kinds of classification are represented. In order to find the results of the study the researcher chose 300 students majoring in TEFL, translation, and literature that had chosen the course of essay writing. All the students were taught how to write a paragraph essay. The research was descriptive and no manipulation was needed. Based on the frequency and types of errors the researcher classified the errors. So, the results were presented in form of nominal and ordinal data. So, at the final stage the data were represented in some graphs and a pie chart. Also, by a hierarchy the number of errors was shown which the preference for error correction from the most to the least is as follows: spelling, capitalization, singular/plural, and choice of word, article, preposition, parts of speech, subject/verb agreement, verb, punctuation, pronoun, word order and passive. In order to apply the described and presented data the researcher decided to prepare pedagogical applications which are as follows.

8. Pedagogical Implications

Focusing on writing process rather than writing product, the teacher is supposed to teach the students in a way that covers the following steps: The first one is prewriting and brain storming, the second step in this process is organizing, the third one is drafting; the next one is revising, editing is the next step and; the last one is publishing. Now the question

that comes to mind is that where the teacher can emphasize on the microskills to improve the students' writing skill. Based on the present research findings, there are thirteen types of errors that most of the students have committed in their writing. Some of these writing errors can be emphasized in prewriting and brain storming, it makes students avoid some global errors that violates their writing and cannot be understood by the readers. The second type of errors can be emphasized in editing. There is no unique way of teaching microskills and also, there is no unique way to correct students writing. Therefore, the suggested techniques that have been gathered based on the findings of the research are recommended as a guide to the writing teachers. According to Messenger and Tailor (1989) who suggest the teachers to follow a specific process for teaching writing this is where the students are taught or guided to correct their writing. First, the errors that are related to microskills of passive voice, different forms of verb, and choice of word are considered. Normally the teachers decide on two things in prewriting. When students are supposed to brain storm and find the suitable materials or whatever is related to the writing, the first thing that the teachers can focus on is the grammatical structure. The structures that the students need to write their writing. The second area that can be emphasized in pre writing is content, that is, what they want to write. In this part; therefore, the teacher focuses on the structure. The grammatical points that the students need to know when they want to write, and the content while focusing on the content the teacher can represent the appropriate words and verbs that are related and have appropriate collocation with the other content words in students' writing.

The other part that can be emphasized by the teacher in pre writing stage is passive voice because if the students do not know how to use passive voice correctly, the intended meaning will not be conveyed to the reader. According to the present research findings students have made just 139 errors related to the structure of passive voice. In the other words, the students have had 139 errors in their 300 papers. It shows that the students have used avoidance strategy, that is, they have not used passive form in their writing whenever they have been supposed to. Because they have not been able to write passive forms so they have ignored that structure. Then it is better for the teachers to teach appropriate form of passive voice in order to teach students to use them correctly in their writing. "Choice of word" and "proper form of verb", are the two types of errors that can be emphasized in pre writing stage. The remaining types of errors can be emphasized in editing stage, that is, the fourth stage of writing process. As it has been mentioned in different books, errors related to punctuation, spelling, or language usage can be emphasized in this way. But, the problem is that, students have not been taught any of these microskills in their writing class. So, as the findings of the present show students have had a lot of errors regarding these types of errors. Although it is not recommended to teach all these microskills before hand, before students write their own first draft, but the teachers are supposed to focus on at least, two or three types of errors between two pieces of writing i.e., when students hand over their final draft of an essay and want to work on another topic. In other words, it is better to devote time to re emphasize on the errors that students have mostly made and the hierarchy of errors that

has been provided in the previous chapter can help the teachers find the priorities.

A study done by Tan (2007) under the title of "the Study of EFL Learners Writing Errors and Instruction of Strategies" shows that in order to be successful, students should already know about two thousand words and these words should be of productive type or active words rather than passive. The reason is that, when the students want to write a simple sentence they have to know the collocation of the words and its appropriate preposition, especially when it is a verb. The university students in this study are supposed to have mastery of more than two thousand words; so, this prerequisite according to Tans study is satisfied but the point is that the students should be encouraged to use the knowledge that they have had as linguistic competence as he refers to these research findings. Because he believes that aside from the words students need to upgrade their basic linguistic competence. Explicit teaching of grammar points like types of sentences, syntax, verb forms and some commonly used tenses is highly recommended; so, he believes that grammatical points should be taught deductively. Again, university students have passed these courses before, as the prerequisite for essay writing. So, they have had these things, just reminder is necessary because the kind of errors that the students make are really mistakes that they have the knowledge but they are not able to apply it. Tan (2007) also believes that good writing is certainly beyond grammar manipulation, yet it will be very difficult to compose a clear, logical, and fluent paragraph if a writer is unable to write a reasonably acceptable simple sentence and does not possess the mastery of some complex sentence structures. According to Rivers (1981) one of the exercises which can make students think through the rules and select the ones applicable to the particular case is convergence. Convergences are cognitive exercises which require the students to think through the rules and select the appropriate and applicable rules to the particular case under consideration. She suggests two commonest ways as follows. Students are supposed to write the sentence, replace the singular nouns with plurals and make all necessary changes. This kind of exercise can make students focus on subject verb agreement, parts of speech, word order, and other errors that have been taken into consideration in the present study. Regarding the spelling errors, there are some spelling rules that students can work on with the help of the teacher. Some of these spelling rules have been mentioned here. The teacher can focus the students' attention on spelling conventions by asking them to work out for themselves, from reading passages or dialogues they have studied. Probable rules of spelling are like the following:

/s/ maybe spelled c before e, I, or, y. Example: Certain, receive, city, recipe, bicycle

/k/ maybe spelled c before a, o, or u:

Example: cat, came, college, cut, current.

/k/ usually is spelled ck finally in monosyllables:

Example: back, lock. It may also be spelled "que" as in liquor, or "que" as in antique.

This is a suitable small group activity. It can be undertaken whenever particular spelling problems emerge in dictation or writing practice. Similarly, there are some rules for the correct application of punctuations that can be taught by the

teacher. As an example of application and correct use of apostrophe the following is presented. The uses of apostrophe pose persistent problems for students. To become familiar with current practice they may be given a research project of finding out from printed texts how apostrophes are used. Through personal observation students will easily discover facts like the following: The apostrophe is used to represent the omitted letter or letters in contracted forms.

The commonest contractions are those of "NOT" and have:
Is not = isn't; he is not = he isn't, etc...

When students have discovered regular patterns in the use of the apostrophe, they find it easier to remember. This project may be continued to cover more intricate rules for the use of the apostrophe e.g., in expressions of time and measure. To help some exercise related to word order Rivers (1981) suggests scrambled sentences. She believes that scrambled sentences are good exercises in which they are used as stimulus to the reproduction of pieces of writing. This technique makes the students think of the meaning of what they are reproducing. Regarding the errors related to the passive and active voices, it is recommended that students are asked to underline some sentences that they have read in their texts. They are also required to list them on the board and bring some real examples to show how the rule works in English. The teacher can demonstrate the use of passive and active voice in the class. An example has been mentioned to clarify this point. After teaching a lesson which contains passive and active sentences, students are asked to underline them in the texts. They are also required to list them on the board and bring some examples in reality to show how the rule works in English. The teacher can throw his keys on the ground and ask students to make sentences. At first, they may brainstorm some rules and this will help the teacher to identify which students know the related grammatical rules and which of them do not. Then, the teacher can ask those who knows the rules to and show others how one can use the passive form of the verb to write a sentence about that action.

Student A: You throw your keys.

Student B: The keys are thrown.

The teacher: Yes, you can say: The keys are thrown.

Therefore, the correct forms of verbs are written on the board and the teacher tries to give more active and passive examples.

Regarding teaching prepositions, a good example has been mentioned here to show that the teachers can let students be involved in the process of correct application of preposition in their own writing. The example is as follows.

Teachers introduce prepositions to the students by thinking of two words that describe what they could do with a box. You could even draw a box on the board or have a box to use as a visual aid. Brainstorm these words and write them on the board. Most of the word will be prepositions (e.g., inside, into, by, over, beneath, beside). After that, try to show one thing for example inside, beside, behind the box. Aside from the fact that when the students read a lot and see authentic texts written by native speakers, they can experience the real use of capitalization, the other way that

students can be taught to become familiar with capitalization is to give them some original and authentic texts and ask them to underline capital letters. This will help them get familiar with the rules of capitalization. Another activity is that asking the students correct each other's writing and find the problems related to correct use of capitalization. Students can have some exercises to focus on the correct application of pronouns. At first, the teacher should teach the students the appropriate kinds of pronouns and places of them in various grammatical structures. Then, they can be asked to underline some authentic materials in order to become familiar with the rules and appropriate places of pronouns in the texts.

Articles can be taught inductively. Students are presented some examples; then, they are asked to underline the articles in a text. After completing this procedure, through explaining the reason behind this application of the proper articles or without explaining, they can internalize the rules. Because choice of word and verb forms are two categories which are too broad and require a lot of time to make the mastery of these two types of errors, it is better to make students consult a dictionary in the cases that they need any guideline. In that way, they will be familiar with the choice of correct words whenever they need to choose the appropriate word out of different options.

Collocation is another category which can help students focus on the appropriate verb form. By comparing the present situation that they want to write a sentence and the examples given in a learners' dictionary they can find a suitable verb that can suffice their need.

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Author Profile



Behnam Hashemi received his M.A from Khatam University, Tehran. At present, has received Ph. D from Panjab University and has been teaching and researching for 10 years in government and private sections. His specialization is more on technology and

ELT.