

# Grammatical Errors among L2 Learners At The Undergraduate Level

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## ABSTRACT:

Language and communication are the primary pillars that are emphatically developing prominence in today's challenging world. English language has globally acquired acceptance and coverage as an important language that enables every individual to adhere to the need in the field of communication. In the Indian context multiple regional languages pose a challenge to the English language especially among the teachers and students. There is always a struggle to develop accuracy, proficiency and competence in the English language. The outcry is also seen against the English language being a more foreign entity and also an influencing factor over the regional languages. This conflict between the regional and foreign branding has led to a dire influence on the learning community who preferably adapt to regional language as frequent filler in place of English language in most of the learning practices. This in turn has resulted in a poor linguistic accuracy and learning among the native learners especially the students. In the qualitative research on error analysis especially related to grammatical errors through the steps proposed by Coder (1973) the following outcome was observed the errors related to articles were (25.88%), errors related to preposition were (21.17%), errors related to verbs were (34.11%) and this is highest in number, errors pertaining to nouns were (18.82%). Language Classrooms too have not succeeded in evoking the responsibility in language learning and hence the result of weak grammatical and structural incompetence makes the learners end up at the losing side in competitive and job placements. English Classroom must convincingly encounter this problem by providing solutions in an accurate manner. This paper has focused on inter language errors prevalent among regional learners in an undergraduate course.

**Keywords:** Proficiency, English classroom, communication, learners.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the basic tenant of human existence. Language plays a vital role in the entire process of communication. Communication can happen in various ways like signs,

action, speech, symbols but all of these serve a purpose to fulfil the result of intended transfer of information between the sender and the receiver. In the English language we refer to skills in communication and they are classified as LSRW skills where L stands for Listening Skill, S for Speaking, R for reading and W for Writing. Though all these skills are necessary and relevant for today's world of communication, lack of mastery on anyone skill can lead to a failure in the communication process itself. In the academic atmosphere we usually find students having a predominant problem in expressing and furnishing their ideas due to a lack in their skills. The deeper roots of this problem can be seen among the regional students who use inter language learning exercise between the regional and English language to make an understanding of concepts and this in turn ends up on a faulty note. Writing is one area where this problem unfolds more dominantly. Learner's assessment criteria in exams and other academic assignments are mostly based on their writing.

Analysing an individual's linguistic competence is based on the speaker's competency level and how well he performs the language functions. Generally a native speaker is deeply influenced by the regional language and he tries to use it as a step to understand a foreign language but in this process he tends to make a number of errors and this is what Corder (1982) analysed as interference of language. Selinker (1972) also analysed the error formation process as one where the native speaker uses his language in order to make a connection for communicating the intended idea in the target language this pioneering of language could end up in different types of errors which can be termed as grammatical, structural, semiotic, and mechanical. Errors occurring through overgeneralization and fossilization are termed to be of frequent occurrence among most of the second language learners. Errors put a highly negative impact in writing especially among the student community and those students who have studied in regional medium have a higher disadvantage of committing maximum number of grammatical errors in prepositions, conjunctions, articles and subject verb agreement because they are more fluent in the regional languages and they try to translate the same sentence structuring into English writing too. Inter language errors put a adverse effect on the target language use, when the learners lack the ideas and try to incorporate faulty approach in language presentation through the lack of knowledge, construction and presentation (Edrogon, 2005). This paper tries to analyse the common grammatical errors of writing among regional medium students in Mangaluru, Karnataka who have taken up undergraduate studies in a particular field of their choice.

### 1.1 The paradigm of writing.

Writing is a common yet powerful tool to express, define or formulate one's views and opinions. We use it to convey our opinions and ideas to others in a language that in turn is decoded by the receiver in order to understand the intensity in which the subject has expressed himself or herself. Writing has reached a pedestal of importance in today's world, especially in the academic circles where it is assessed as an important component through exams. Writing is not only evaluated in the academic platform but even in competitive platforms as well. Generally, what hamper effective writing strategies are the errors that are committed while writing, that can be either casual or severe and any one of its kind ends on a poor scoring. To mention about L2 learners, the students who are from the regional medium

always tend to commit grammatical errors even in small writing exercises. The grammatical components can be easy for an English teacher or for student who has studied for long in an English medium but for regional medium students become ignorant, especially when they are in a mixed language classroom like an undergraduate section. Murray (1982) has stressed on the context and situation of word meaning in words which become conventional in a linguistic community, it's the situation that imitates responses in people among that community. Englebert (2004) views about language as: "...to teach a foreign language is also to teach a foreign culture, and it is important to be sensitive to the fact that our students, our colleges, our administrators, and, if we live abroad, our neighbours, do not share all of our cultural paradigms."

### 1.2 The relation between grammar and writing:

Grammar plays a significant role in effective writing. A grammatical structure in a sentence is a principle element that works effectively and structures the ideas to be expressed. There are various definitions given by scholars for the concept of grammar. According to Harmer, "Grammar of a language is the description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in that language" (Harmer, 2009). Donald and Knaele (2001) define grammar as "the science which formulates rule to describe the working of language." Brinton and Brinton (2010) define the simple and the deep meaning of grammar as "grammar is the rules or principles by which a language works, that is, its system or structure."

Hence there are various scholars who have emphasised on the effective use of grammar in writing as it plays a major role to bring about ideas and concepts in a suitable format that is acceptable and error-free. Any error simple or complex can put a considerable negative impact on writing especially among the L2 learners. The role of language teaching is very important in the process of formulating and designing the methodology as in the words of Richards (1985:144) "Grammar has traditionally had a central role in language teaching. Particular theories of grammar and theories of learning associated with them have provided justification for syllabuses and methodology in language teaching for thousand years."

### 1.3 Error Analysis:

Errors in language acquisition is an integral part of second language learners the errors can turn as a strategy for language learning among the learners as identified markers or devices to learn a language better as Corder (1967) mentions language errors among learners are indispensable and they can act as a device for the learners to learn better. Gass and Selinker (2001) compares errors to be "red flags" which can be symbolised as warning signals that reveal the learners capacity of acquiring the basics and idea of second language learning. Inter language has a prominent and key sequel in the learner's development of second language as observed by many researchers, learners tend to make use of the primary language to convert the sentence formation and word meaning into target language often making errors which go unnoticed by them. (Al-Jarf, 2000; Bennui, 2008; Corder, 1982; Hammad, 2016; Lim, 2007; Liu, 2013; Ridha, 2012; Silva, 1993). A study conducted by Huang (2001) among

46 students about their performance in English language in contrast to the errors in grammar in Taiwanese university showed a similarity of error types among second language learners that are very common with respect to the misuse of verb forms, formation of Nouns, Overuse of articles, inappropriate use of Prepositions and misuse in word choices, generally it's a tendency among second language learners to ignore the grammar rules, repetitive use of similar ideas and incomplete presentation in sentences. The occurrence of errors in language learning can be attributed to various reasons, the analysis of these errors enables us to arrive at a conclusion these research analysis of the following researchers enables us to broadly classify errors in language presentation in the following manner. Here is an overlook of some error types that are broadly classified as: a. Language transfer b. Overgeneralization c. Simplification d. Underuse e. Fossilization f. Lack of the knowledge of the rules g. Interference (James, 1989, 1998; Ellis, 1995; Ziahosseiny, 1999; Kashavarz, 2003, 2006; Şanal, 2007; Darus, 2009; Kazemian& Hashemi, 2014)

Looking into a deeper aspect of error analysis and the classification of them, they can be described as following -

Language transfer- This is a process in which a language is learnt with the help of other language, this type of learning is always done in schools to learn the target language by using the regional language and this could stand in way of learning the foreign language. (Selinker, 1972 as cited in Richard, 1974, p.37).

Overgeneralization – Languages are always rule oriented, generally rules of one language cannot be applied to rules of other, but they are instances when such language errors tend to occur among second language learners when they apply the past and past participle forms of –ed to verbs. (James, 1998, pp.178-179).

Simplification- This is a common and recurrent phenomenon among teaching and learner community, where teachers adapt a safer technique of avoiding use of complex structures in teaching and students also implement the same practice in learning language.

Fossilization- Is an error in language acquisition where use of incorrect language becomes a mundane or a routine influence on ones language learning, it also turns out to be a difficult process to correct or to get rid of.

Lack of knowledge of the rules- Can be stated as another complex problem among learners when they do not abide by the rules of language usage, especially on the rules of subject-verb agreement.

The error analysis among second and foreign language learners has given rise to a number of literature reviews in different contexts. Various studies have been conducted to identify different types of errors that are prevalent among the student community and second language learners. The intensity and depth of errors might change among the type of learners and the language they use in terms of their regional background. Considering the various aspects of error analysis the present study looks at the errors committed by learners from a semi-rural college pursuing their undergraduate studies in Mangaluru, Karnataka. This study

tries to unearth the common grammatical errors committed by students in their day to day Language presentation in English at degree level in their various academic exercises.

Corder (1967, 1971 & 1974) has classified a broader view of errors that can be categorised in the following manner they are- a. Addition b. Omission c. Selection d. Ordering

Addition: The following words **fish- fishes, deer- deers,youth- youths** are given a plural form by regional students generally because of the regional influence of Mother tongue, second or third language learning in school, learners try to translate the same forms into English language as well.

Omission- words like **go-goes,take-takes, bring-brings** are always wrongly used in sentences as learners find it difficult to use them appropriately in singular and plural forms, regional languages don't concentrate more on the following aspects. Hence learners tend to neglect this application even in English Language.

Selection- These errors are frequently observed among regional learners as they find it challenging to use appropriate forms of degrees in comparison, especially when selecting forms of **tall-taller-tallest** or **big-bigger- biggest**.

Ordering- These errors are frequently seen in ordering the sentence structures in the form of subject- verb- object. Eg: **They were asked in the morning to come here**. The following sentence is an example for error in ordering of a sentence.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research design:

The scope of the following research was based on the following research questions:

1. What are the common grammatical errors committed by second language learners due to the lack of knowledge on the specific area?
2. What are the common errors committed by the learners and the reasons behind them?
3. What are the reasons for the errors and the awareness they possess regarding them?

The study was conducted through document analysis that included written materials in the forms of essay writing, dialogue writing and completion of the outline story. Analysis of documents helps to obtain data and enables to gather information on a phenomenon to be studied.

### 2.2. Data Collection:

The data has been collected from around 46 students who were both male and female students who were pursuing their undergraduate course in a semi-urban degree college in Mangaluru, Karnataka. The writing topics were given to them with aintention to be more open and suiting to their general understanding, the topic for essay was "some common problems encountered by students in their life". The topic for dialogue writing was "an

interview with a prominent person”. And a general outline story was given to students to complete. The written materials were documented for analysis on grammatical errors and they were studied to identify errors.

### 2.3 Participants and details:

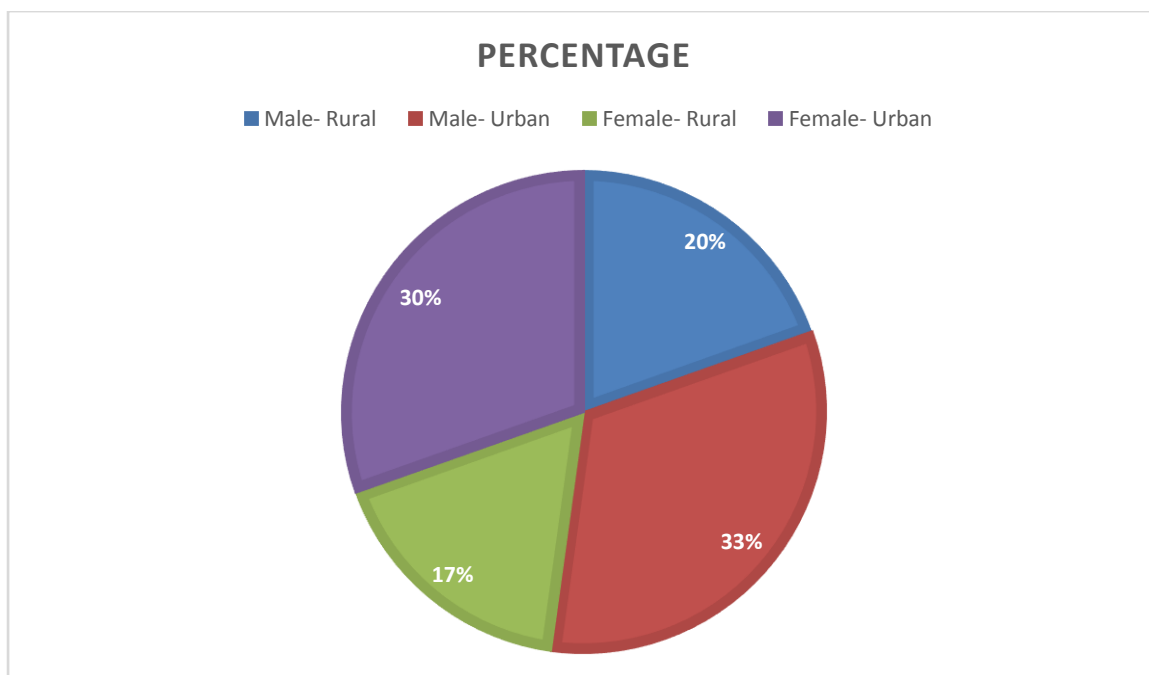
The details of the participants are provided as following.

#### 2.3.1 Demographic characteristics:

The total number of participants in this study was 46 students, 24 were male students and in that 09 were hailing from rural area and other 15 were from urban area. Among the females 08 were hailing from rural area and other 14 were from urban area making it a total of 22. The following table gives the gender distribution of the participants. All the participants had taken part in the writing exercise.

**Table 1 Gender distribution of participants**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Rural (Male)	09	19.6
Urban (Male)	15	32.6
Rural (Female)	08	17.4
Urban (Female)	14	30.4
Total	46	100

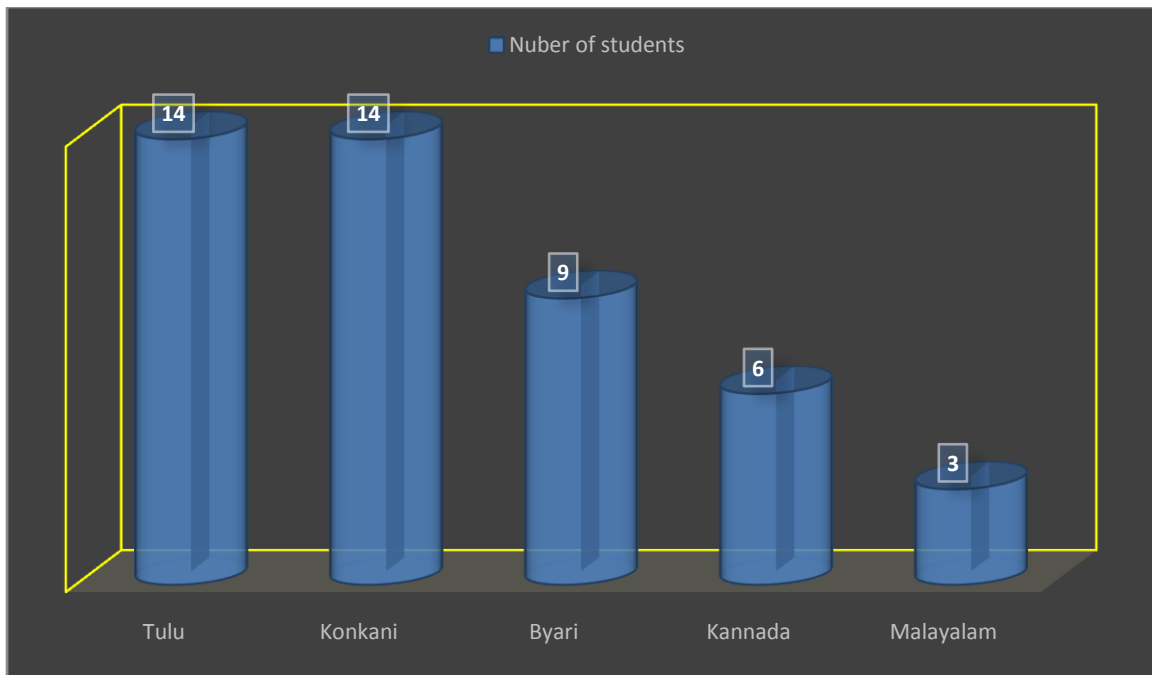


### 2.3.2: Language Status:

The following is the information related to the mother tongue of the learners and the language they frequently use in their communication circle.

**Table 2 Mother Tongue of participants**

Language Used	Frequency	Percent
Tulu	14	30.43
Konkani	14	30.43
Byari	09	13.04
Kannada	06	19.56
Malyalam	03	06.52
Total	46	100



#### 2.4 Data Analysis:

Corder (1967, 1971 & 1974) classification of error analysis was adapted to identify the frequency of errors in the grammatical classification of errors.

Step-1: collection of documents from the samples.

Step -2: Identify the errors related to grammatical inappropriateness.

Step -3: Describe the error type and occurrence.

Step -4: Relate the errors.

Step -5: Analyse and evaluate the errors.

Classification of errors based on- Addition b. Omission c. Selection d. Ordering

The analysis of data was compiled in the following method of collecting the data from all the samples, Errors were classified into grammatical errors with special reference to errors in articles, prepositions, verb forms including tenses and noun forms.

First stage: After collecting the data from the participants, content analysis was used to classify the errors. The errors were noted down based on the frequency of occurrence. The reason for frequent occurrence of similar type of errors was the use of inter language in classification of sentences and ideas as similar to their mother tongue. Many of the participants who are fluent in any one type of their mother tongue would generate sentences in the known language and try to convert them into English often giving rise to a number of grammatical errors in English language and they are unaware of these errors.

Second stage: The frequency of the errors were identified, noted and classified according to the type and frequency of its occurrence. The errors were identified as errors of addition,



errors of omission, errors of selection and errors of ordering. It was noted that errors related to verb forms and especially tense structure in sentences were more in number, followed by errors in articles, errors in wrong use of preposition was in third position followed by errors related to noun forms.

### 3. Results:

Classification of errors under each of the types:

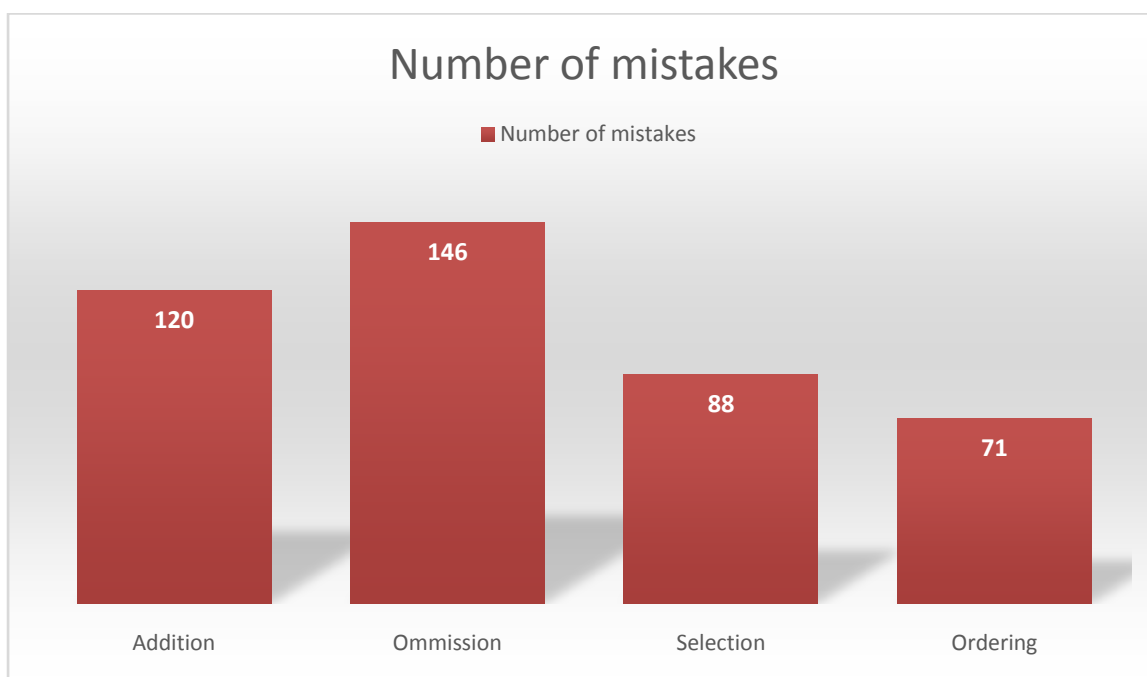
<b>ERROR TYPE</b>	<b>CATOGARY</b>	<b>SUB-CATOGARIES</b>
Grammatical errors	Nouns	Singular and Plural forms
Articles	Unnecessary use of articles	
Overuse of articles		
Omission of articles		
Prepositions	Unnecessary use of Prepositions	
Overuse of Prepositions		
Omission of Prepositions		
	Verb	Subject- verb agreement errors
Inappropriate tense forms		
Wrong verb forms		
Overuse of verb forms		
Omission of verbs		

The documents of the 46 participants were analysed in detail and following results were drawn through content analysis.

**Table 3:Assessment of Grammatical errors and its division based on the category, frequency and percentage.**

<b>Types of Errors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Addition</b>		
Regularization	40	9.41
<b>Double Marking</b>	45	10.58
<b>Simple Addition</b>	35	8.23
<b>Omission</b>		
Verb Forms	36	8.47
Articles	30	7.05
Pluralisation	15	3.52

Be forms	30	7.05
Preposition	20	4.70
Pronoun	15	3.52
Selection		
Spelling	35	8.23
Word Error	30	7.45
Substitution	23	5.41
Ordering		
Subject-verb agreement	36	8.47
Adjective -noun forms	20	4.70
Possessive Forms	15	3.52
<b>Total</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>100</b>



From the table -3 the following data can be deduced on the types of grammatical errors and the frequency in the errors. Errors of double marking and redundant use of words have the highest (10.58) of the total percentage. The errors of regularization (9.41) take another substantial component of errors in faulty usage. Simple addition errors (8.23) too have seen a rapid surge in the writing exercise. Errors in verb forms and subject verb agreement are yet another area that has seen an equal share of (8.47). Similarly other dominant areas of grammatical errors have been seen in articles and its use, usage of 'Be' forms, misspelt words, these are few other areas that have seen an upward trend of the total errors.

### 3.1 Errors in articles:

1. He thinks of himself as an European.

2. I am **a** M.A graduate.

(A, An, The)

The following sentences are example of error in use of articles among regional language learners as these languages don't have the concept. In the English language one is generally taught to put the article 'an' before a vowel (a, e, i, o, u), but they are unaware of the difference between vowel sound, consonant sound and pure vowels and application of articles before vowel sounds as well.

### 3.2. Error in tenses:

1. I have not **eat** anything today

2. He had**inform** it to me.

Eat- Eaten

Inform- Informed

Many students have a difficulty of applying appropriate past participle forms to Verbs as these are not used in their regional language, there are only three forms of tenses – past, present and future in regional languages but there are no participle forms. Hence there is an increase in such type of errors.

### 3.3 Error in Verb forms:

4. The respondents **is belonging** to professional community (are belonging, is belonging, belong, belongs)

5. The respondents **belongs** to professional community.

(I- Belong, He/ She- Belongs, You-Belong).

These are common forms of errors among students as they find it difficult to choose appropriate verb and tense form associated with singular and plural usage in sentences. In regional forms of language use, there are no such differences in usage.

### 3.4. Errors in singular and plural sentence structure:

6. Ten members were present and one of them **were** absent.

7. Time and tide **waits** for no man.

(Was- Were, Wait-Waits)

These sentences are more examples of erroneous formation among students as they try to convert them into structures of regional language forms and due to this there is inappropriate usage of singular and plural forms.

### 3.5 Errors of 'do' 'does' and 'did' and forms of 'be'

9. He **do** his job.

10. I and he **does** the job successfully.

11. We had **did** it on time.

(Do- Does- Did)

Students from regional medium always find it difficult to differentiate on the forms of 'do', 'does' and 'did' appropriately as they don't distinguish it in the regional languages. Also the forms of 'Be' are also inappropriately used in sentences most of the times.

### **3.6 Errors in primary verbs and subject verb agreement.**

12. The secretary and the treasurer**is** going for a meeting.

13. The captain along with his team**are** on the field.

14. One of them**are** absent.

These are the most common forms of errors that dominate in the writing scenario of the students as the concept related to subject verb agreement aspects is precisely found in English language. The errors related to subject verb agreement is higher amidst regional students because they try to translate sentences from the regional format into English. Most often they do not follow the rules of subject- verb agreement and tend to make open errors in this area.

### **3.7 Errors of 'have' and 'has':**

15. He said, everyone**have** seen the movie

16. All have come but Ravi and his friends **has** not

(Have- Has- Had)

The use of 'have' and 'has' is always put in inappropriate form by students because such type of sentence construction is not emphasised in their regional languages.

### **3.8 Redundant errors in usage:**

17. I am **returning back** tomorrow.

18. The **final conclusion** was to close the shop.

19. Your dress is **very unique**.

Error of redundancy is one among the most common errors of writing among regional students as they try to connect regional utterance and writing into conversation related form of writing specifically in dialogue writing. Hence generally they end up making double reference to particular idea.

### **3.9 Errors related to Homophones**

20. accessory, accessary

21. aisle, isle

22. alms, arms

24. stationary, stationery

These are yet another set of errors most commonly featuring in writing as the words having similar pronunciation are often misspelt in writing contexts. There are no such differences in regional usage or terms as regional language is mostly used in spoken than written context. Synonyms and similar words generally feature predominantly in English language.

### **4. Discussion:**

The findings of the study has brought to light certain factors on grammatical errors and these are also a part with many others who had tried to make various inferences on the effect of regional languages and the errors generating in this process on the target language. It is seen that generally all the students tend to make different types of errors while learning a foreign language and also they try to rely on their regional tongue as a mode of assistance to learn that language. Learners generally lack the grammatical skill and this is seen through the persistent errors committed even among simple grammar usage of articles, prepositions, verbs and so on. Poor grammatical skill can hamper the effective writing skill because lack of sentence structure is openly perceived as errors and they cannot be accepted. The highest number of errors (10.58) was seen in errors of double marking and redundancy probably because the learners try to translate and link foreign language learning with regional learning and they commit more of these errors. Errors of regularization (9.41) and simple addition (8.23) were successively higher in number among all the learners, this shows that language classrooms have to emphasise more on writing based assessment exercise and identify the errors that are common and are in frequent occurrence.

Another noteworthy mention is about the grammatical errors that are frequently in a rise is related to articles, verb forms, tense forms and subject verb agreement, one of the possible observation from the region under study is that there are a number of regional languages in use and as a cultural blend most of the students are familiar with at least two to three languages. This might make the students take the target language lightly and often look at it in the same capacity as other languages. Another fact that could be worth mentioning is that in language classrooms teaching and emphasising on grammar related learning is given less prominence, mostly the teacher adapts to lecturing and the students don't get a practical experience on learning these concepts and hence they remain untouched. Emphasising on writing is another method to improve the learner's ability on the following subject.

### **5. Conclusion:**

5.1 Recommendations

- Activities that improve grammatical competency must be recommended to the learners in order to develop skills in language.
- Emphasis must be provided on all skills as every skill provides equal opportunity.
- Learners must be made aware of their errors and they must be supported in their learning process.
- Teachers should adapt to new teaching methods like TBL approach.
- Mother tongue must be emphasised but the learners must also be made aware of their drawback too.

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