Error Analysis in Syntax: Common Grammatical Mistakes in Pakistani ESL Learners

1- Faiza Sarwar, MPhil Scholar, NUML Faisalabad campus, Email: faizasarwar585@gmail.com

2-*Dr. Rai Zahoor Ahmed, Assistant Professor, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore campus, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: Email: rai.zahoor@cuilahore.edu.pk

Abstract

This study investigates the syntactic errors made by ESL learners, particularly focusing on common grammatical mistakes such as subject-verb agreement, word order, tense misuse, and omission of auxiliary verbs. The research is grounded in S.P. Corder's (1967) error analysis theory, which posits that learners' errors provide critical insights into their language learning strategies and highlight areas of difficulty. The primary aim of this study is to identify, categorize, and analyze these errors, which are often influenced by the learners' native language (L1) structures, particularly in cases of L1 interference. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed, using content analysis of 200 randomly selected written assignments from ESL learners enrolled in the English department at a public university in Faisalabad. The study analyzed these assignments to determine the frequency and types of syntactic errors made by learners. The results affirm that errors related to subject-verb agreement and tense misuse are the most prevalent, suggesting that L1 interference significantly impacts learners' ability to master English syntax. The findings of this research are significant for ESL educators as they emphasize the need for targeted grammar instruction and contrastive analysis between learners' L1 and English. By focusing on areas of frequent errors and providing regular practice with feedback, teachers can reduce the occurrence of fossilized errors and improve students' grammatical accuracy. The study also highlights the importance of integrating error analysis into curriculum development to tailor teaching methods to learners' needs. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on second language acquisition by providing empirical evidence of common syntactic challenges faced by ESL learners in Pakistan and offers pedagogical recommendations to mitigate these issues. Future research could explore syntactic error patterns among more advanced learners and investigate the long-term impact of targeted error correction strategies.

Keywords: Error analysis, ESL learners, Syntactic errors, L1 interference, Grammar instruction

Introduction

Error analysis is a critical component of the phenomenon of second language acquisition (SLA), particularly for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). It involves examining and

categorizing the types of errors made by learners to provide insights into the challenges they face. As Corder (1967) noted, errors are not merely mistakes but evidence of the learning process, indicating how learners build their understanding of the target language. This approach allows educators to tailor teaching methods that address these errors effectively, making error analysis an essential tool for curriculum development.

One of the most significant areas where ESL learners encounter difficulties is syntax, which refers to the structure of sentences. Due to differences between the syntactic rules of their native language (L1) and English (L2), learners often make consistent mistakes that hinder their language development. Richards (1971) explained that these errors are frequently influenced by L1 interference, where learners transfer grammatical structures from their native language into English, leading to non-standard usage. If these errors are not addressed early, they can fossilize, becoming ingrained in the learner's language habits. In addition, Perception and attention play vital roles in language comprehension and production. How we perceive and attend to stimuli in our environment significantly influences our understanding and processing of language (Faizullah, 2024).

The identification and understanding of syntactic errors are crucial not only for correcting learners' mistakes but also for improving the overall language acquisition process. According to James (1998), understanding the underlying causes of errors can help educators identify specific areas where learners need more focused instruction. For instance, if students consistently misuse verb tenses, teachers can introduce targeted exercises and explanations to address these gaps. This focused approach ensures that learners build a more accurate and effective command of English syntax.

Moreover, error analysis contributes significantly to the development of teaching strategies that account for learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds. Selinker (1972) highlighted the concept of "interlanguage," which describes the evolving system of language that learners create as they progress toward fluency. Analyzing the errors within this system allows teachers to modify their instructional methods, addressing both universal language learning challenges and specific issues related to the learner's L1.

The role of error analysis in ESL learning cannot be overstated. By identifying syntactic errors and understanding their root causes, educators can develop more effective teaching techniques that improve learners' grammatical accuracy and fluency. As such, error analysis is indispensable for enhancing the quality of language instruction and ensuring that students overcome the obstacles posed by syntactic differences between L1 and L2.

Statement of the Problem

Many ESL learners struggle with mastering English syntax due to significant differences between their native languages (L1) and English (L2). Common errors, such as incorrect subject-verb agreement, word order mistakes, and misuse of tense, persist in students' writing, often due to L1 interference. These errors, if not addressed effectively, may become fossilized, leading to long-term difficulties in achieving grammatical accuracy. This study aims to identify the most

frequent syntactic errors in ESL learners' writing and examine the extent to which L1 influences these errors.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be valuable for ESL educators, curriculum developers, and linguists by providing insights into common syntactic challenges faced by learners. Understanding the nature and frequency of these errors will allow educators to implement targeted interventions, thereby improving learners' grammatical competence. By addressing the impact of L1 interference on English syntax, this study will contribute to more effective teaching strategies, leading to better learning outcomes and reducing the likelihood of fossilized errors.

Research Objectives

a. To identify the most frequent syntactic errors made by the ESL learners in their written assignments.
b. To examine the role of L1 interference in contributing to these syntactic errors.
c. To propose pedagogical strategies for minimizing these errors and enhancing ESL learners' syntactic accuracy.

Research Questions

1. What are the most common syntactic errors found in ESL learners' writing?
2. How does L1 interference contribute to the occurrence of these syntactic errors?
3. What teaching strategies can be implemented to reduce syntactic errors in ESL learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Error Analysis in ESL

Error analysis, as a field of study in second language acquisition (SLA), focuses on the systematic identification and categorization of errors made by learners. Corder (1967), a key figure in this field, argued that errors are not just mistakes but evidence of learners' active process of language acquisition. Analyzing these errors can provide valuable insights into the learner's developmental stages and the strategies they use to acquire the target language. For ESL learners, error analysis helps teachers understand the recurring difficulties that learners face in mastering the complexities of English syntax

Syntax refers to the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language. In SLA, mastering syntax is often one of the most challenging aspects for learners. According to James (1998), errors in syntax, such as incorrect word order or subject-verb agreement, are prevalent among ESL learners because the rules governing syntax in English often differ from those in the learner's native language. The correct formation of sentences is

essential for achieving fluency, but errors in this area are frequent, particularly in written English. Therefore, understanding common syntactic errors is vital for improving ESL learners' overall language proficiency.

Corder's (1967) error analysis theory revolutionized the understanding of errors in language learning by emphasizing that errors are an integral part of the learning process. Rather than viewing errors solely as failures, Corder suggested that they offer a window into learners' minds, revealing their current understanding of the language. His theory posits that learners make errors while experimenting with language rules, and these errors can signal developmental stages in language acquisition. Error analysis, therefore, serves as a tool for identifying areas where learners struggle and guiding educators in providing targeted instruction.

Numerous studies have highlighted the prevalence of syntactic errors in ESL learners. Richards (1971) identified several common types of syntactic mistakes, including incorrect subject-verb agreement, tense inconsistencies, and word order errors. These errors often result from the complex nature of English syntax, which can be challenging for non-native speakers. In particular, ESL learners frequently omit auxiliary verbs, misuse tenses, and struggle with maintaining consistent sentence structures. Such errors can hinder communication and affect the clarity of written and spoken language.

Subject-verb agreement errors are one of the most frequent syntactic problems faced by ESL learners. These errors typically occur when learners fail to align the verb form with the subject in terms of number and person. For example, sentences like "He go to school" instead of "He goes to school" highlight this issue. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), this type of error is often caused by learners' reliance on their L1, where subject-verb agreement rules may differ significantly from those in English. As subject-verb agreement is fundamental to sentence construction, persistent errors in this area can severely impact a learner's grammatical accuracy.

Word order in English differs greatly from many other languages, especially those that use more flexible sentence structures. ESL learners often struggle with the rigid subject-verb-object order in English, leading to errors such as "I like very much this movie" instead of "I like this movie very much." Word order mistakes can significantly affect the comprehensibility of a sentence, as English relies heavily on word position to convey meaning. Studies by Selinker (1992) have shown that L1 interference is a major contributor to word order errors, as learners attempt to apply the syntactic structures of their native language to English.

Tense usage is another area where ESL learners frequently make mistakes. English has a complex system of tenses, each conveying subtle differences in time, aspect, and mood. Learners often misuse tenses, either by using the wrong tense form (e.g., "She will went" instead of "She will go") or by failing to maintain tense consistency throughout a text. According to Ellis (2008), this can be attributed to both L1 interference and learners' incomplete understanding of the English tense system. Tense errors can confuse readers or listeners, making it difficult to determine the intended time frame of an action.

https://jssr.online/index.php/4/issue/archive

The omission of auxiliary verbs, such as "is," "are," and "have," is a frequent issue in ESL learners' writing and speech. Sentences like "She speaking" instead of "She is speaking" exemplify this error. This problem often arises because many languages do not require auxiliary verbs in the same way that English does. Brown (2007) notes that such omissions reflect learners' difficulty in grasping English's requirement for auxiliary verbs to express continuous actions, perfect tenses, or passive voice. Understanding this error is crucial for teachers aiming to enhance learners' syntactic accuracy.

L1 interference, also known as negative transfer, occurs when learners apply the syntactic rules of their native language to English, leading to errors. According to Odlin (1989), this phenomenon is particularly evident in syntax, where the word order, agreement rules, and tense systems of learners' native languages can differ dramatically from those of English. For example, native speakers of languages with more flexible word orders, such as Spanish or Urdu, may struggle with the fixed word order of English sentences. L1 interference often results in non-standard sentence structures, making it a significant factor in ESL learners' syntactic errors.

Fossilization refers to the process by which certain errors become permanent in a learner's language use, even after years of study. As Selinker (1972) noted, many ESL learners exhibit fossilized syntactic errors, particularly when these errors are influenced by their L1. These errors are resistant to correction, partly because learners may not receive sufficient corrective feedback or may not perceive the errors as significant. Fossilization poses a major challenge for ESL educators, as it can hinder learners from achieving full grammatical competence. Understanding the types of errors likely to fossilize can help teachers design more effective instructional interventions.

To address common syntactic errors, researchers and educators recommend several pedagogical approaches. According to Ellis (2008), explicit grammar instruction is crucial for helping learners understand the rules governing English syntax. Additionally, contrastive analysis, which involves comparing the syntactic structures of the learners' L1 and L2, can help learners become more aware of the differences and avoid negative transfer. Practice in sentence formation, along with immediate corrective feedback, has also been shown to be effective in reducing the frequency of errors. These strategies can help learners develop greater syntactic accuracy over time. Overall, as a dynamic and complicated aspect of human communication, language exhibits a rich tapestry of variation influenced by cultural, social, and contextual factors (Faizullah & Arshad, 2023).

In conclusion, error analysis provides valuable insights into the syntactic challenges faced by ESL learners. Common errors such as subject-verb agreement mistakes, word order errors, tense misuse, and omission of auxiliary verbs are often influenced by L1 interference. Understanding these errors is crucial for teachers aiming to improve learners' grammatical competence. By employing targeted instructional strategies, educators can help learners overcome these challenges and achieve greater accuracy in their use of English syntax.

Research Methodology

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the error analysis theory proposed by Corder (1967), which posits that learners' errors are not random mistakes but systematic reflections of the language learning process. Corder emphasized that analyzing these errors provides insight into the strategies learners adopt when learning a second language (L2). In the context of this research, error analysis helps to identify the syntactic difficulties ESL learners face, specifically in the areas of subject-verb agreement, word order, tense usage, and auxiliary verb omission. The framework suggests that by classifying and analyzing these errors, educators can better understand learners' challenges and tailor instructional interventions to address them.

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative descriptive approach to systematically identify, classify, and quantify syntactic errors in ESL learners' written assignments. A content analysis method was used to review and examine the written data, allowing for a detailed evaluation of the common syntactic mistakes present in the students' work. The objective of this design is to offer a statistical overview of error patterns, providing a solid foundation for interpreting the types and frequency of errors among ESL learners at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Faisalabad campus. This approach aligns with Corder's (1967) theory that systematic analysis of learner errors reveals their developmental stages and problem areas in acquiring the target language.

Sampling

The population for this study consists of ESL learners from the English department at public university in Faisalabad, Pakistan. The sample includes 200 written assignments, selected through a random sampling technique. This method was chosen to ensure a representative cross-section of the department's student population, capturing a wide range of proficiency levels and learning backgrounds. Random sampling minimizes bias and increases the generalizability of the study's findings to the broader ESL learner population at university level. The size of the sample is adequate to ensure statistical relevance and to identify common error patterns across a diverse group of learners.

Data Collection

The data for this research were collected through student-written assignments, which provide an authentic and natural context for identifying syntactic errors. Each assignment was scrutinized to detect and document mistakes in sentence structure, focusing on areas identified in the literature as problematic for ESL learners. In line with the theoretical framework of error analysis, a checklist was developed to categorize common syntactic errors. This checklist included categories for subject-verb agreement, word order, tense misuse, and auxiliary verb omission,

which were established based on previous studies in the field of second language acquisition (Richards, 1971; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

Data Analysis

The analysis of the collected data followed a structured process, beginning with the identification and categorization of syntactic errors. The errors were classified into four key categories: subject-verb agreement, word order, tense misuse, and auxiliary verb omission. For each category, a frequency analysis was conducted to quantify the occurrence of these errors across the sample of assignments. The frequency of each error type was calculated and visually represented through charts and tables to provide a clear, quantitative picture of the error patterns in the students' writing. These visual aids were used to highlight the most common errors and offer insights into which areas of syntax ESL learners struggle with the most. This method of analysis is consistent with Corder's (1967) emphasis on systematic error classification as a way to better understand learners' interlanguage development.

In summary, this research methodology employs a structured, quantitative approach to examine syntactic errors in ESL learners' written work. By applying Corder's theoretical framework of error analysis, the study systematically identifies, categorizes, and analyzes the errors in order to provide insights into the syntactic challenges faced by ESL learners at university level. This methodological approach offers practical implications for language teaching and curriculum development, emphasizing the importance of addressing specific syntactic errors to enhance learners' overall language proficiency.

Results

Error Frequency and Overall Findings

The analysis of 200 student assignments revealed that the most frequent syntactic errors made by ESL learners at NUML Faisalabad were related to subject-verb agreement, word order, tense misuse, and omission of auxiliary verbs. The frequency distribution of these errors is shown in **Table 1** below:

Error Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Subject-Verb Agreement	190	28%
Word Order	160	24%
Tense Misuse	220	32%
Omission of Auxiliary Verbs	120	16%

The data indicates that tense misuse (32%) and subject-verb agreement (28%) were the most frequent error types. These errors often result from differences in the syntactic structures of learners' native languages (e.g., Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto) and English. Word order errors (24%) were also common, while omissions of auxiliary verbs occurred less frequently (16%).

Errors in subject-verb agreement were frequent, with students often failing to match verbs correctly with singular or plural subjects. For instance, many learners wrote sentences such as *"He go to school"* instead of *"He goes to school,"* and *"The boys is playing"* instead of *"The boys are playing."* This issue was particularly noticeable when the subject was distant from the verb or when complex sentences were used. The prevalence of this error, accounting for 28% of total mistakes, can be attributed to the lack of subject-verb inflection in native languages like Urdu, where verbs are not as rigidly bound to the subject form as they are in English.

Non-standard word order appeared in 24% of the errors. Learners often transferred syntactic structures from their L1 into English, leading to sentences such as *"She to school goes"* instead of *"She goes to school."* In languages like Urdu and Pashto, the typical word order is subject-object-verb (SOV), which contrasts with English's subject-verb-object (SVO) structure. As shown in **Table 2**, common word order errors reflect direct L1 interference:

Native Language	Error Example	Corrected Sentence
Urdu	"Ali to the market goes."	"Ali goes to the market."
Pashto	"They quickly eat food."	"They eat food quickly."

Word order errors were most frequent in complex sentences involving adverbs, adjectives, or prepositional phrases, where the learners' native language structure conflicted with standard English word order.

Tense misuse was the most frequent type of error, accounting for 32% of all identified mistakes. This included both incorrect tense selection and confusion with irregular verbs. For example, students commonly wrote *"I have went"* instead of *"I have gone"* or *"She did not went"* instead of *"She did not go."* The complexity of English tenses and the irregular nature of many verbs pose a significant challenge for learners. **Table 3** illustrates some common tense-related errors:

Error Type	Error Example	Corrected Sentence
Tense Misuse	"I has seen the movie."	"I have seen the movie."

| Irregular Verbs | "They runned fast." | "They ran fast." |
| Future Tense | "I will saw him tomorrow." | "I will see him tomorrow." |

The frequent misuse of past participles, irregular verbs, and future tense forms suggests a gap in learners' grasp of English tense rules, particularly those that deviate from simple past and present forms.

Auxiliary verb omissions, accounting for 16% of the errors, typically occurred in negative and interrogative sentences. For instance, students often wrote sentences like *"He not understand"* instead of *"He does not understand"* or *"You go to the party?"* instead of *"Do you go to the party?"* This issue was especially common in complex sentence structures and may be due to a lack of emphasis on auxiliary verbs in learners' L1, as shown in **Table 4**:

Error Example	Corrected Sentence
"She not have done it."	"She has not done it."
"You understand this?"	"Do you understand this?"
"He going to work?"	"Is he going to work?"

Auxiliary omissions indicate a lack of awareness of the auxiliary verbs' role in forming negative and interrogative sentences in English, especially when compared to simpler syntactic structures in native languages.

A key observation from the data was that syntactic errors often increased in frequency as sentence complexity increased. For example, subject-verb agreement and tense misuse were more prevalent in complex sentences involving subordinate clauses, relative clauses, or passive constructions. In simpler sentences, errors tended to be fewer, suggesting that learners struggle more with complex syntactic structures.

In Pakistani ESL classrooms, students are exposed to English primarily through formal instruction, which tends to focus more on writing and reading rather than on spoken fluency. This limited exposure to English syntax in natural speech contexts may contribute to the prevalence of these errors, particularly in more advanced sentence structures.

The native language (L1) of students significantly influenced the types of errors they made. For instance, students whose L1 was Urdu were more likely to make errors involving word order and subject-verb agreement due to the SOV structure of Urdu. In contrast, Pashto-speaking students exhibited more errors in auxiliary verb usage, which is less emphasized in Pashto syntax. These

differences highlight the impact of L1 transfer, where learners apply rules from their native languages to English, resulting in syntactic deviations. Language functions as more than just a means of communication; it is a powerful tool that shapes culture, identity, and access to opportunities (Faizullah & Akram, 2023).

Analysis by proficiency level indicated that lower-proficiency learners made more frequent and varied syntactic errors, while higher-proficiency learners tended to make fewer but more specific types of errors, such as tense misuse and auxiliary omission. **Table 5** shows the breakdown of errors by proficiency level:

Proficiency Level	Total Errors	Common Error Types
Low	240	Subject-Verb Agreement, Word Order
Medium	180	Tense Misuse, Word Order
High	120	Tense Misuse, Auxiliary Omission

This suggests that as learners progress in their English proficiency, they gradually overcome simpler syntactic errors but continue to struggle with more nuanced aspects of syntax such as tense and auxiliary verb usage.

An interesting finding was that there were no significant differences in the overall error rates between male and female students. However, there was a slight variation in the types of errors: female students tended to make more errors in subject-verb agreement, while male students exhibited more errors in tense misuse and auxiliary omission. This observation may reflect differences in language exposure and usage patterns outside the classroom.

Given the influence of Urdu and regional languages on English learning in Pakistan, many errors reflected direct language transfer. Common examples included sentences like *"He is very much tired"* (direct translation of the Urdu structure *"Woh bohot ziada thaka hua hai"*) instead of *"He is very tired."* Similarly, students often wrote *"He did not knew"* instead of *"He did not know,"* reflecting confusion over the proper use of auxiliary verbs in negative past tense sentences.

The findings suggest that ESL instruction in Pakistan should focus more on syntactic rules, especially in areas such as subject-verb agreement, tense usage, and word order. Teachers need to emphasize these areas in both written and spoken exercises. For example, integrating more sentence transformation exercises and explicit grammar teaching can help students better internalize correct English syntax. Additionally, providing feedback focused specifically on these error types will enable students to recognize and correct their mistakes more effectively.

The data further highlight the need for curriculum development that addresses syntactic error patterns prevalent among Pakistani ESL learners. Incorporating targeted lessons on subject-verb agreement, tense forms, and word order into the syllabus, alongside more interactive and

communicative teaching methods, would help learners develop a deeper understanding of English syntax. This approach can help reduce the fossilization of common syntactic errors.

The results of this study indicate that common syntactic errors made by Pakistani ESL learners, particularly those related to tense misuse, subject-verb agreement, and word order, are influenced heavily by native language structures and the complexity of sentence formation in English. Addressing these issues through targeted teaching strategies and curriculum adjustments will not only improve learners' writing proficiency but also contribute to their overall linguistic competence in English.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that L1 (native language) interference plays in the syntactic errors made by ESL learners. In the Pakistani context, many learners' first languages, such as Urdu, Punjabi, and Pashto, differ considerably from English in terms of word order, tense usage, and verb conjugation. For instance, Urdu follows a subject-object-verb (SOV) structure, whereas English follows a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure. This fundamental difference often leads to word order errors, where learners transfer their native language's structure directly into English sentences. Errors like *"She to school goes"* instead of *"She goes to school"* are common manifestations of this transfer. Similarly, the tense systems of these languages do not align with English's more complex tense structures, resulting in frequent tense misuse, such as *"I have went"* instead of *"I have gone."* These findings align with previous studies that emphasize the impact of L1 transfer on second language acquisition (Ellis, 1997).

One of the most prominent issues revealed by this study was learners' difficulty with subject-verb agreement, which accounted for 28% of the errors. This problem is compounded by the fact that many native Pakistani languages do not mark subject-verb agreement as strictly as English. In languages like Urdu, the verb often remains unchanged regardless of the subject's number or person. For example, in Urdu, the same verb form can be used for both singular and plural subjects in many cases. This results in errors such as *"The boys is playing"* instead of *"The boys are playing."* These findings highlight the importance of addressing subject-verb agreement more intensively in ESL teaching in Pakistan, particularly in contexts where learners' native languages lack similar syntactic rules.

The study also found that word order errors are frequent among Pakistani ESL learners, accounting for 24% of the identified mistakes. These errors are primarily due to learners' tendency to follow the SOV structure of their native languages when constructing sentences in English. For instance, errors such as *"She to school goes"* reflect the direct transfer of L1 syntactic patterns into English. This suggests that ESL learners need more exposure to the natural syntactic flow of English through sentence-building exercises and authentic language use. Moreover, these errors indicate a need for focused instruction on sentence structure, particularly in more complex sentence forms involving subordinate clauses, relative clauses, or interrogative structures.

Tense misuse was identified as the most frequent type of syntactic error in the study, accounting for 32% of total errors. This finding reflects learners' struggle with English's more intricate tense system, particularly in comparison to the simpler tense systems of languages like Urdu. In particular, learners often misused irregular verbs and had difficulty forming the correct past participles, resulting in errors like *"I have went"* instead of *"I have gone."* The lack of a direct equivalent for certain English tenses in many Pakistani languages also contributes to these mistakes. For instance, the present perfect tense does not have a direct parallel in Urdu, leading to confusion and frequent errors. These findings suggest that ESL teachers should place more emphasis on tense instruction, particularly on the use of irregular verbs and the differences between simple past, present perfect, and past perfect tenses.

The results of this study carry several important pedagogical implications for ESL instruction in Pakistan. Firstly, teachers should recognize the role of L1 interference and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. By incorporating **contrastive analysis** into the curriculum, teachers can help students become aware of the syntactic differences between their native language and English. For example, by comparing the SOV structure of Urdu with the SVO structure of English, learners can better understand the need for proper word order in English sentences. Additionally, targeted grammar instruction focusing on high-frequency error types, such as subject-verb agreement and tense usage, can help address these recurring issues. Lessons should explicitly address the differences between English and the learners' L1, ensuring that students are aware of potential areas of negative transfer.

Another key pedagogical implication is the need for regular practice and feedback. ESL learners require frequent opportunities to practice constructing syntactically correct sentences, both in written and spoken form. Teachers should create exercises that allow learners to experiment with different sentence structures and receive immediate feedback on their performance. For instance, sentence transformation exercises, where students convert simple sentences into more complex forms, can be particularly effective in helping them internalize the rules of English syntax. In addition, corrective feedback should be prompt and focused on the specific types of errors learners are making, such as tense misuse or word order problems, to prevent these errors from becoming fossilized.

Given the prevalence of syntactic errors among Pakistani ESL learners, it is essential that curriculum designers take these findings into account when developing English language syllabi. The curriculum should include more comprehensive lessons on sentence structure, verb conjugation, and the use of auxiliary verbs, particularly in negative and interrogative sentences. **Interactive grammar activities** and **authentic language use** should be incorporated to reinforce the grammatical concepts being taught. Moreover, providing contextualized examples of English syntax, such as how sentence structure changes in different types of writing (e.g., narrative versus expository), can help learners apply these concepts in a variety of contexts. This approach will better equip students to avoid common syntactic errors and improve their overall English proficiency.

The findings of this study also have broader implications for research in second language acquisition (SLA) and ESL pedagogy. The high frequency of errors related to L1 interference

suggests that more research is needed on the specific syntactic challenges faced by learners from different language backgrounds. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of different instructional approaches, such as contrastive analysis or inductive grammar teaching, in reducing syntactic errors among ESL learners. Additionally, research into the role of learner motivation and exposure to authentic English in reducing errors could provide further insights into how learners develop syntactic proficiency over time. By continuing to explore these areas, researchers and educators can develop more effective strategies for helping learners overcome the challenges of English syntax.

This study identifies the most frequent syntactic errors made by ESL learners, focusing on subject-verb agreement, tense misuse, and incorrect word order. These errors predominantly stem from L1 interference, where learners transfer syntactic rules from their native languages into English, as well as from incomplete mastery of English grammar. In particular, Pakistani learners of English, whose L1 often follows different syntactic patterns, encounter challenges in mastering English's more rigid structure, resulting in recurrent errors. The findings highlight that addressing these syntactic issues is critical for improving ESL learners' overall language proficiency.

Recommendations for Teachers

To help learners overcome these errors, several pedagogical strategies are recommended. Teachers should incorporate *targeted grammar instruction* that specifically addresses problematic areas like subject-verb agreement and tense usage. Additionally, contrastive analysis between English and learners' native languages can make students more aware of the syntactic differences, reducing L1 interference. Furthermore, learners need consistent practice with immediate feedback to internalize correct sentence structures. This approach will enable them to recognize and correct their errors, ultimately improving their syntactic accuracy.

Future Research Directions

Future research should extend this study by examining the prevalence of these errors among more advanced ESL learners. Investigating how learners' syntactic proficiency develops over time and whether these errors diminish with increased exposure to English can provide valuable insights. Moreover, exploring the long-term effects of targeted error correction in different instructional settings, such as formal classrooms or immersive language programs, could further inform teaching practices and ESL curricula.

Conclusion

Understanding and addressing syntactic errors is essential for effective ESL instruction, particularly in contexts where learners' native languages significantly differ from English. By identifying common errors and implementing pedagogical strategies tailored to learners' needs, educators can better equip students to navigate the complexities of English grammar. This study

contributes to that effort by highlighting key areas for improvement and offering practical recommendations for enhancing learners' syntactic skills.

References

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 5(4), 161-170. https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1967.5.1-4.161

Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language two*. Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R., & Barkhuizen, G. (2005). *Analysing learner language*. Oxford University Press.

Faiz Ullah. (2024). The dynamic interplay between language and mind: Exploring cognitive impacts through empirical and theoretical perspectives. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 7(4), 400–423. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11514393

Faizullah & Arshad, A, 2023. Language Variation in Print Media: A Study of Code Switching Patterns in Pakistani Urdu 'Express' Newspaper Editorials. (2023). *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, *12*(4), 86-102. https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2023.12.4.6

Faiz, U, Akram, A, (2023). Linguistic Imperialism in the Globalized World: Examining English Dominance and its Sociolinguistic Consequences. *Harf-o-sukhan*, 7(3), 279–288. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11420082

Gass, S. M., & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.

James, C. (1998). *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. Addison Wesley Longman.

Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. University of Michigan Press.

Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). *How languages are learned* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, R., Myles, F., & Marsden, E. (2019). *Second language learning theories* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Richards, J. C. (1974). A non-contrastive approach to error analysis. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 25(3), 204-219. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/XXV.3.204

Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 10(1-4), 209-232. https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1972.10.1-4.209

Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford University Press.

Swan, M., & Smith, B. (2001). *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Tarone, E. (1988). *Variation in interlanguage*. Edward Arnold.

Thornbury, S. (1999). *How to teach grammar*. Pearson Education Limited.

Yule, G. (2016). *The study of language* (6th ed.). Cambridge University Press.