RESEARCH PAPER

Influence of L1 on the Academic Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students of English: A Case Study of Thal University Bhakkar

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by investigating the impact of the first language (L1) on the academic writing skills of undergraduate students majoring in English at Thal University Bhakkar (TUB). The study utilized a mixed-method research approach by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. The sample comprised of 130 students. Quantitative data were collected from 100 students while 30 students were recruited for qualitative data. SPSS was used to analyze the questionnaire data, while the qualitative data were analyzed qualitatively following Pit Corder's Error Analysis taxonomy. The results of the study reveal that the learners' L1 strongly interferes with their academic writing skills in English. In turn, students make multifaceted mistakes in English. The major outcome of the study is that dissimilarities between English language and students' L1 is mainly responsible for their mistakes (e.g. in connection of pronunciation, spellings, vocabulary, and grammar) in L2.

Introduction

Language serves as a representation of our mental state. The natural progression of learning the first language involves listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These linguistic abilities are categorized under learning (reading and writing) and acquisition (listening and speaking). Initial language (L1) acquisition significantly differs from learning a second language (L2). Infants acquire their mother tongue as their first language, while children and adults learn additional languages in an institutionalized setting. The process of first language learning begins in the early years, with babies quickly recognizing sounds, words, and simple sentences. However, when learning an L2, a student has already acquired L1, and their background knowledge makes it easier for them to pick up L2 (Gonca, 2016).

According to Hussain (2019), second language learners (L2) do not have the same degree of comfort with language learning compared to L1. The acquisition process in L1 is a result of the natural environment, while L2 learning is a deliberate process that mainly occurs in a classroom. L1 refers to the language learned before the age of three, during the formative years of life (Suzuki et al., 2019). Furthermore, according to Anorboyeva and Botirova (2023), L1 is sometimes referred to as the mother tongue, native language, or primary language.

Developing proficiency in a second language is crucial for achieving objectives in areas like education, employment, and other fields, and it is often an official or social language.

The selection of words and writing style used in L1 often carries over to L2, leading to syntactical and grammatical errors in L2 (Kaplan, 1996). Correct English writing poses a challenge for Pakistani English language learners, as a bilingual setting limits their practice (Mason & Tufis, 1997). Many students use English only in their English classes; they speak their native language at home, Urdu at college, and other languages occasionally. Even in English-teaching classrooms at Pakistani institutions, the majority of pupils speak Urdu (Rahman, 2001). In attempting to learn English, students use their knowledge of other languages. The distinction between the guidelines for the first and second language can cause confusion among students (Cohen, 2014). Various factors influence the academic writing skills of EFL/ESL learners, but the most dominant element is the influence of L1, creating hurdles for learners in writing English as a language (Mahmood et al., 2020).

It is an undeniable truth that learning L2 (English, in particular) is indispensable for one's existence in the global academic arena. Consequently, Pakistan faces a similar situation where learners use Urdu as (L1) and English as (L2). This sequential multilingualism confuses learners in achieving fluency and native-like accuracy in English. As a result, they encounter problems due to L1 interference.

The current study aims to explore the L2 learning phenomenon, focusing on the Academic Writing skills of undergraduate students of English. This study will emphasize the issues arising from the influence of L1 and provide recommendations for enhancing students' Academic Writing abilities in L2. The findings would be very beneficial for students, the researcher, and teachers alike. It would assist teachers in guiding their English students more effectively, enabling them to understand the challenges posed by the influence of L1.

Literature Review

Academic Writing

Many academics have highlighted the traits of the writing process. For instance, according to Ellison (2021), Academic Writing is a generative and cyclical process in which students revise, evaluate, respond, and move on from their previous work. Moreover, according to Gillett et al. (2009), academic writing necessitates the use of a variety of skills and approaches, including the ability to comprehend the topic at hand, plan ahead, conduct research, read, take notes, write critically and descriptively, communicate one's viewpoint, and work with feedback. Similarly, according to Al-Khasawneh & Maher (2010), Academic Writing involves creating an outline, summarizing, and paraphrasing, which students might struggle with while writing their tasks.

According to Sharifian (2014), students' capacity to find and access essential resources, analyze those resources, organize their thoughts, and include their points of view contributes to a distinctive voice, which is one of the elements of Academic Writing. Furthermore, as per Kellogg (2007), Academic Writing is a cognitive process that evaluates one's capacity for memory, critical thinking, and linguistic expression of ideas because effective text creation denotes an effective learning process. Similarly, Coulmas (2003) explained that academic writing is a way to store ideas, thoughts, and messages conveyed to readers through a variety of codes. Academic Writing is a unique mental activity that calls for learners to have control over various variables, dependent on the writer's academic background and individual interests in various psychological, linguistic, and cognitive phenomena (Dar & Khan, 2015).

Influence of L1 on Academic Writing

According to Selinker & Lamendella (1980), there are two distinct types of transmission while learning an L2: positive transfer and negative transfer. Positive transfer

facilitates the learning of the second language, while negative transfer occurs when the first language interferes with the second language and vice versa.

Negative Effects of L1 on Academic Writing

The current study aims to investigate the connection between L1 interference and academic writing. The second language is greatly influenced by the first language. There are several terms used to elaborate on it, such as Cross-linguistic influence, interference, or language transfer.

In literature, the topic of L1 to L2 transfer is sometimes referred to as cross-linguistic influence. Simply said, L1 to L2 transfer describes the impact of the primary language (in this case, Urdu) on the learning of the L2 (in this case, English). This influence is referred to as "negative transfer" when it directly degrades the quality of an L2 result, such as errors in word order or tense characteristics. The difficulties Asian students typically confront in learning and developing their English writing skills have been extensively discussed in EFL/ESL literature (Shih, 1999; Takagi, 2001).

According to the views of Van Weijen et al. (2009), the caliber of the L2 content may suffer as a result of L1 use while L2 writing. While writing in L2, learners who frequently employ L1 meta comments typically generate works of lower quality. In addition to it, Kim & Yoon (2014) looked into the effects of L1 interference on academic writing, including lack of confidence, fear of L2 writing evaluations, lack of enjoyment, and avoidance in L2 writing. They discovered that the study's participants were impacted by the anxiety component of L1 interference. As per the views of Freeman (2001), the sentence structure of the second language is overshadowed by the L1 or mother tongue's accent and sentence structure. Through the use of the conventional Grammar Translation Method, the majority of students in developing nations acquire L2 through L1. Most of the time, they attempt to translate every word from English into their own dialect. It will not be inaccurate to state that they have incorporated English vocabulary into their language's sentence structures (Pokorn, 2005). Moreover, Cruz-Ferreira (1987) asserted that when non-native speakers speak, converse, and write in the English language, their native accent, sentence structure, and vocabulary predominate and become the cause of errors.

According to Ellis (1994), errors happen when variations emerge as a result of ignorance. It is crucial to correct mistakes that L2 learners make. These mistakes result from the mixing of first language and second language rules. It is important to look at the variations and deviations that L2 learners have while writing L2 language. Due to the interference of L1 in L2 habits, a student experiences difficulty with the phonology, vocabulary, and grammar of the second language (Alizuddin, 2021). In addition to it, while making an effort to speak and write in the L2, second-language learners translate the structure, meaning, and culture of their L1 to L2. During the learning habits of L2, L1's habits are also transferred, which becomes the cause of errors (Masood, 2020). Likewise, according to Karim and Nassaji (2013), when EFL/ESL learners write in L2, their L1 has an impact on their academic writing in L2. Furthermore, according to the study by Farooq et al. (2020), students of English language as L2 language learners believe that the biggest obstacle to learning English is that their thought process initially takes place in L1, and then they translate their concepts into English. Lack of vocabulary, interference from L1, and difficulties in understanding and applying grammatical rules are noted as urgent problems faced by Pakistani pupils. The traditional approach to teaching languages is the root of this issue in their opinion because writing is the most difficult of the four language abilities.

These are the negative effects of L1 which have been highlighted by different authors in their research works.

Positive Effects of L1 on Academic Writing

The concept of a "shared underlying proficiency" introduced by Jim Cummins in (1986) was the first to provide theoretical backing for the notion that the L1 can serve as a supporting device for the L2. This phrase describes a collection of higher-level academic competencies and implicit metalinguistic understanding necessary for academic achievement. Cummins (1986) maintained that these abilities, once acquired through one language, are transferable. As a result, learners can draw from both the stronger and weaker languages.

The study conducted by AKIS (2020) demonstrates that learners can perform better in writing tasks in English if they have discussions in their L1 before writing tasks in L2 because they have the chance to comprehend the task's topic in its entirety. Similarly, Friedlander (1990) found that when L1 is utilized to plan EFL/ESL writing, adult students' L2 writing quality increases. Moreover, Lay (1982) affirms that employing L1 is helpful to facilitate the L2 writing process. Oi (1984) recommends that L2 writers turn to their L1 while writing their L2 texts because it's simple to revise the information with the aid of their L1.

Writing in L1 may have an impact on writing in L2, and L2 authors' strategic usage of L1 may help them produce better L2 writings (Kim & Yoon, 2014). The examination of Lameta-Tufuga (2001) shows that if learners conduct a session of discussion in their first language before attempting to write in a second language, the results will be better in writing English because they have an understanding regarding the content of the task. According to the study of Storch & Wigglesworth (2003), academic writing benefits from L1 because L2 receives assistance for task management, task clarification, learning new vocabulary, and grasping challenging grammatical principles. Based on their research, they concluded that L1 effects could be advantageous even in the target language setting since students frequently revert to their L1 when confronted with activities that require more advanced cognitive skills than they already possess (Rana, 2018). The use of L1 could aid the L2 written material (Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001, and Knutson, 2006). Likewise, Woodall (2002) chose to concentrate on a smaller group of L1 users and noted that "the use of L1 among highly skilled writers of related language" showed to be positive. According to the study of Hall & Cook (2012), using L1 in a classroom context is a practical option and serves a variety of important educational purposes. The Cummins hypothesis was also examined by Mukhopadhyay (2015), who concluded that L1 was a factor to improve EFL/ESL writing performance.

Regarding Chinese students learning to write English, Liu (2013) asserted that "language transmission is unavoidable in L2 writing." After examining the written work of students in Harbin, Hu & Bodomo (2009) concluded that "The prevalent mistakes made by English learners in Harbin are mostly due to the influence of their native language." The conclusion of Yoshimura's article on the subject of L1 effects on EFL students' acquisition of inflectional morphology was that "analysis of 30 compositions by the EFL learners of the lower and higher competence groups demonstrates that L1 effects L2 learners' Production of inflectional morphology."

In research on college students in Iraq, Ridha (2012), as quoted by Mohammad & Hazarika (2016), looked into the mistakes EFL/ESL students made when writing their English essays. The following taxonomy was used to classify the errors: grammatical, lexical, semantic, mechanical, and word order errors. The most serious and common faults were grammatical and mechanical in nature. The interference of Arabic was the main cause of the majority of the students' mistakes.

According to a study by Farooq et al. (2020), students of the English language as L2 language learners believe that the biggest obstacle to learning English is that their thought process initially takes place in L1, and then they translate their concepts into English. Lack of vocabulary, interference from L1, and difficulties in understanding and applying

grammatical rules are noted as urgent problems faced by Pakistani pupils. The traditional approach to teaching language is the root of this issue in their opinion, because writing is the most difficult of the four language abilities.

Kaplan (1966) examined 600 ESL students' essays and discovered common organizational patterns shared by all cultural groups, such as direct linearity, parallel constructions, indirectness, and digression. He concluded that the transfer of L1 rhetoric has a significant negative impact on L2 writing.

Material and Methods

This study aims to investigate the "Influence of L1 on Academic Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students of English" using a mixed-method approach. According to Creswell & Clark (2017), no research study can be strictly categorized as purely quantitative or qualitative, as each method incorporates numerous shared characteristics. An inductive approach is employed for this research, utilizing the case study strategy. A case study involves an in-depth examination of a specific case or phenomenon and is often used in interpretive research to understand the complex and unique aspects of a particular case. The research paradigm is interpretive, drawing conclusions based on responses obtained from the sample. The study is initiated in the area of Tehsil & District Bhakkar, with students selected from Thal University Bhakkar, specifically from the English department.

Data Collection and Sample Size

For data collection and analysis, the study adopts a mixed-method approach using an explanatory sequential design. According to Creswell & Clark (2017), in an explanatory sequential design, quantitative and qualitative data are progressively collected in two phases and combined to produce results. In this design, quantitative data is gathered first, followed by the acquisition of qualitative data to complement the quantitative results.

The sample size is divided into two groups: one providing qualitative data and the other providing quantitative data. The qualitative sample consists of thirty respondents, considered optimal as per Campillos (2010) and O'Leary (2010). The sample size for quantitative respondents consists of 100 participants, in line with Crystal's (2008) recommendation that a sample size of 100 to 130 participants yields better results. Thus, the total sample for this research comprises 130 participants.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data are analyzed in two stages: first, the quantitative data using SPSS software with co-relational analysis tests, and second, the qualitative data using Pit Corder's Error Analysis (EA) taxonomy. Corder's Error Analysis procedures, developed in the 1970s, are recognized as a direct approach for addressing issues in the EFL/ESL context (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). The collected written data have been examined, described, elucidated, and evaluated using existing literature and research inquiries.

Results and Discussion

This section deals with the results of the questionnaire, the results would be displayed, analyzed and discussed in this section. The responses, which represent the respondents' viewpoints on the questionnaire's questions about the influence of L1 on the Academic Writing skills of Undergraduate Students of English at Thal University Bhakkar, are displayed in the form of pie graphs and column graphs below.

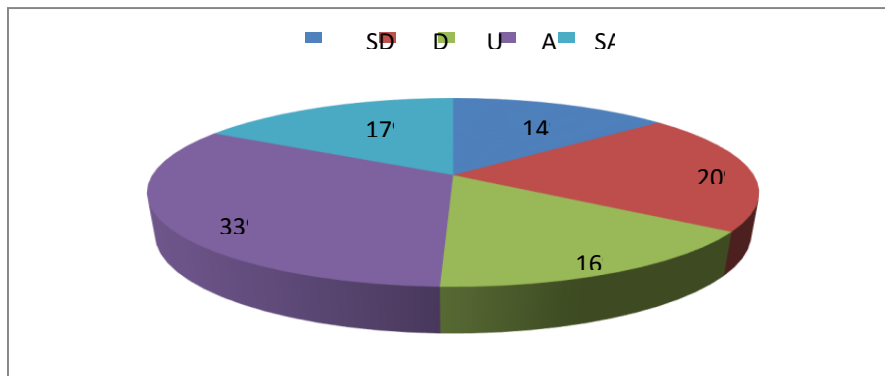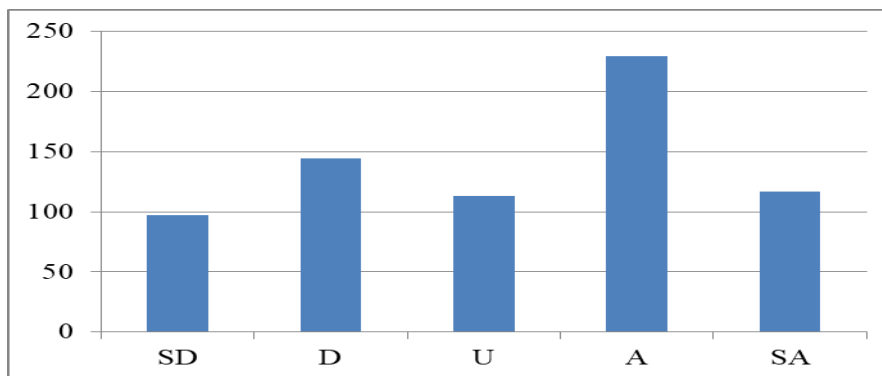## Findings of the Quantitative Data

Figure 1 Influences of L1 on Academic Writing Skills

The analysis of the graphs indicates that 14% of students strongly disagreed, and 20% expressed agreement. Additionally, 16% remained neutral, while 33% agreed that L1 has multi-dimensional effects on the academic writing abilities of undergraduate students of English at Thal University Bhakkar. Furthermore, 17% of respondents strongly agreed with the proposition.

The findings suggest that L1 functions as a double-edged weapon, with both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, students sometimes use it to enhance their academic writing, but on the other hand, it can mislead learners and create ambiguous effects in their writing. These effects extend to vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The results demonstrate that L1 interference significantly influences the Academic Writing skills of undergraduate students of English at Thal University Bhakkar.

Findings of the Qualitative Data

Influences of L1 on Academic Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students at Thal University Bhakkar

The qualitative data collected in this study is analyzed using Pit Corder's model, focusing on the stages of description, evaluation, and correction of errors. Steps one and two of the model were applied during data collection and problem identification. This section draws support from Pit Corder's (1974) Error Analysis study.

- **Influence of L1 on Academic Writing:** The study emphasizes the impact of the learners' native language (L1) on their academic writing in English. Cognitive processes in L1 influence sentence structure, leading to challenges in applying proper academic writing techniques. The influence is evident in incorrect word usage, inappropriate collocations, and the misuse of phrasal verbs and other parts of speech.

- **Grammar Challenges:** A notable issue is the lack of awareness among learners regarding Standard English grammar. Despite occasional similarities between L1 and L2 rules, students struggle with fundamental concepts due to poor grammar command. The persistent challenge of subject-verb agreement is highlighted through examples from the excerpts like "One group of scholar is in favors of co-education," where the correct form is "One group of scholars is in favor of co-education." The learners repeatedly made such mistakes. Other such incorrect instances include sentences as "It is against the idea of Islam" while the correct form would be "It is against the ideas of Islam". The majority of students make these mistakes because they don't seem aware that the subject and verb must agree to form a grammatically correct sentence.

- **Article Usage and Pronoun Challenges:** Learners often neglect the use of articles in English, affecting sentence coherence. Learners do not employ articles in their native tongue, however using articles appropriately in English is essential to generate coherent sentences. For instance, in the phrase "It enhances spirit of cooperation", there is an omission of definite article "The" before *spirit*. Although, it is a meaningful sentence in their first language, Urdu, but it is grammatically incorrect to express meaning appropriately in English language. In another example "Co-education is serious problem in our society" Here, the student failed to employ the indefinite article "a" before *serious* which is crucial for expressing meaning cogently. The correct form is "Co- education is a serious problem in our society"

Learners also faced the use of appropriate pronouns, such as using "I" incorrectly, further demonstrate the influence of L1 (Urdu) on English writing. Errors like "I has done my work" underscore difficulties in understanding English grammar rules. The pronoun *"I"* is used in the singular case in the majority of Pakistani native languages because there is no distinction between the pronoun *"I"* and other singular pronouns like *"he," "she," or "it."* in their usage*.* Moreover, due to its inconsistent meaning in L1 and L2, the word *"I"* is frequently employed incorrectly. The pronoun *"I"* is used in the singular case in the majority of Pakistani native languages because there is no distinction between the pronoun *"I"* and other singular pronouns like *"he," "she," or "it."*

- **Vocabulary Limitations:** The study identifies lack of vocabulary as a significant hurdle for L2 learners. Limited vocabulary leads to the frequent use of colloquial language use, such as employing "*said"* instead of more varied alternatives like *"argued"* or *"affirmed."* The students also made ultimately use of improper diction due to their L1 (Urdu) interference. For example a learner wrote *"Students are in involved unethical activities"*, here learner adopted the structure of Urdu and used a preposition before a verb, and this error is the result of overgeneralization of the rules of L1 into L2. In another phrase, a learner wrote *"Islam does not inclination to allow the both genders "*, here learner also adopted the L1 "Urdu" structure and used the method of literal translation from their L1 to L2. In English language, this phrase can be written as *"Islam does not allow the inclination of both genders"*. In Thal University of Bhakkar L2 learners do not have grip over the proper use of diction. Their restricted essence of vocabulary make it difficult for them to employ L2 in a variety of contexts with appropriateness.

- **Use of Roman Urdu and Idiomatic Expressions:** The use of "Roman Urdu" words in English writing and the incorporation of idioms from L1 (Urdu) contribute to lexical challenges. For example participants used words such as *"Zrori"* instead of *"necessary", "Sakhat"* instead of *"hard or tough", "Dilchasp"* instead of *"Interesting"* The fundamental cause is a lack of suitable vocabulary. The study emphasizes the need for a richer vocabulary to express ideas accurately in English.

- **Intensifiers and Figures of Speech** Differences in the intensity of expressions due to variations in L1 and L2 are observed. In contrast to the English language, the native language (Urdu) of Pakistan has fewer intensifiers. As a result, learners have a lot of difficulty learning English as a foreign language because there seem lack of enough intensifiers in their native language; e.g. *"The system of co-education is dangerous for younger generation," can* be replaced with *"The system of co- education is extremely dangerous for younger generation".* A learner further wrote *"In co-education, students work hard to win competition",* It can also be employed in a more substantial way as *"In co-education, students work too hard to win competition"* There are numbers of intensifiers in English language like *"surprisingly, amazingly, extremely, hardly* etc.*"* Thus, Learners face challenges in employing intensifiers, and the study suggests replacing phrases like "dangerous" with more impactful alternatives like "extremely dangerous" for clearer communication.

- **Cohesion and Coherence Issues:** Lexical problems and grammatical errors hinder the development of coherence and cohesion in academic writing. Learners often resort to familiar patterns due to a limited vocabulary, impacting the consistency and development of their thoughts. Cohesion and coherence offer one's creative writing strength, but if they aren't given enough consideration, the essence of communication might be difficult to achieve. The learners' innovative arrangements in their language use, such as the frequent and inappropriate usage of transitional devices such as, 'like, furthermore, thought, point of view, and another' demonstrate a lack of expertise as how to write in English with acute precision.

- **Linguistic Barriers and Pronunciation Challenges:** A discrepancy between L1 and L2 is observed, particularly among students from rural areas, resulting in linguistic barriers. Pronunciation challenges and misspellings, as illustrated by examples like "Impreve" instead of "improve" or "Menteer" instead of "Mentor," highlight difficulties in phoneme pronunciation and spelling.

To conclude this section, the analyst noticed a discrepancy between the learners' L1 and L2 while evaluating their written transcripts, which served as a linguistic barrier and hindered their effective learning. Students from rural areas of Bhakkar were found to be more rigorous in their approach to learn English as a second language. They were seen to make unconscious mistakes while writing in the English language. In conclusion, the study underscores the pervasive influence of L1 on the academic writing skills of L2 learners. From grammatical challenges to vocabulary limitations, these factors contribute to coherence and cohesion issues in their work. The observed discrepancies between L1 and L2 highlight the need for targeted interventions to enhance English writing proficiency among learners, especially those from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Conclusion

The researcher's data analysis supports the conclusion that L1 (Urdu) significantly influences various aspects of academic writing skills in English among students at Thal University Bhakkar. The identified flaws encompassed tense usage, sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, spelling, vocabulary, and punctuation. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions and language support to enhance the overall proficiency of students in academic writing in their second language (L2), English.

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