

The error analysis of written works english language essay

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



The research we carried out is based on the error analysis of written works made by Slovak primary pupils who learn English as a foreign language. Our aim was to find out the areas of English grammar which are the most difficult for them, i. e. where they made errors, what types of errors they made, what was the frequency of occurrence of each type of errors and what were the causes of appearance of errors.

2. 1. 1. 1 Research Question We formulated the major research question which follows the aim of our research. The research question was: What areas of English grammar are the most difficult for Slovak primary pupils?

2. 1. 1. 2 Research Hypothesis Following the research question we formulated a research hypothesis and we verified this one in our research. The hypothesis was formulated as follows: We suppose that the use of verb forms, verb tenses and prepositions are the most difficult areas of English grammar for participants in our research. We suggested this hypothesis because we had been inspired by information from Slovak teachers of English. According to them these areas of English grammar are often a big problem for Slovak learners.

2. 1. 2 Place and Participants of Research

The participants of our research were 14 years old Slovak pupils of the 9th grade at primary school (Základná škola s materskou školou, Dolná Trnovská 36, Žilina) in the school year 2012/2013. The total number of our participants was twenty-three pupils, i. e. the complete class. We chose them to be subject of our research because we supposed that they had already learnt English grammar much more than pupils of lower grades.

2. 1. 3 Instrument of Research

The instrument of our research was written outputs made by the primary pupils which we applied as the data to be analysed and described the errors made by the learners. We prepared a written exercise (i. e. a set of twenty sentences in Slovak language) and the pupils should rewrite the ones into English by using correct grammar. Sentence structure, vocabulary as well as grammar which were used in the sentences matched the requirements of difficulty according to established curriculum for primary pupils of the 8th grade in Slovakia. Each pupil had both the same assignment (twenty sentences) and the time interval (thirty minutes) for writing. They had a chance for self-correction after writing. This form of grammar testing belongs among conventional methods and this one is also successfully used in Slovak schools to this day. The data were collected in October 2012 (during our pedagogical practice at this primary school). The set of sentences including the correct answers are illustrated as appendices 1 and 2.

2. 1. 4 Research Method

In our research we used Error Analysis (EA) as one of the research methods. We inspired by linguist Corder and his steps of EA which summarized Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) in their work. Steps of Error Analysis: 1. Collection of samples of learner language (i. e. the decision what outputs of the learner's language can be used for the analysis and how to collect the data). 2. Identification of errors (i. e. the way of identifying the errors, e. g. by underlying the errors and using the symbols of correcting code). 3.

Classification of errors (i. e. the errors can be categorized into groups which are stated according to their origin and presence). 4. Explanation of errors (i. e. the calculating and explaining the errors in a suitable way). 5. Error evaluation (i. e. this step involves the interpretation of tables, graphs and conclusions). Taking these steps into consideration we proceeded as follows: Firstly, we tried to identify the errors which primary pupils made in their written outputs. The errors were highlighted and marked with symbols of correction code. Secondly, we had to classify the errors from a linguistic point of view into some categories according to their linguistic origin. We also used linguistic taxonomy which is called Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST) by authors Dulay et al. (1982). This taxonomy was useful for organization and description of collected data. There are four types of errors (omission, addition, misformation and misordering) which form the entity of SST. This taxonomy highlights the way surface structures are altered. The next step which we carried out was the calculation of the errors. We found out the number of errors in each group and we also calculated their percentages. By calculating the frequency of each error we were able to determine the most frequent errors which primary pupils made. In our research we used the following mathematical formula: $E\% = \frac{x}{E} \times 100\%$ = percentage of each error x = total number of the concrete error = total number of all errors Lastly, we sorted and arranged results of the analysis in the form of tables and graphs for each category of errors. We also described in detail each type of errors within each category of errors. The findings of our research are mentioned in a separate part of this work which is called Results of Research. Using the results of our research we were able to

formulate research conclusions and some suggestions for improving of existing pedagogical practice.

2. 2 Results of Research

Our research was realized according to the methodology which had been described in the previous chapters. We analysed twenty-three written outputs made by Slovak primary pupils. There were found out one hundred and forty-free errors of various kinds and they were marked with correction codes and categorized into eight categories.

Tab. 1 List of Correction Codes

Symbol

Kind of Error

AR Article (a / an / the) PREP Preposition VF Verb

Form PRON Pronoun SP Spelling NU Number (singular / plural) WO Word

Order VT Verb Tense S / V Subject / Verb Agreement In the other words, we took morphological and syntactic point of view into consideration when we were dividing errors into categories. We tabellized the results of the analysis as follows:

Tab. 2 Structure of Errors

Categories of Errors

Number of Errors

Percentage

Errors in the use of verb forms 4934, 2 Errors in the use of verb tenses 2517, 5 Errors in the use of articles 2114, 7 Word order errors 1812, 6 Errors in the

use of prepositions 107, 0 Spelling errors 96, 3 Errors in the use of pronouns 64, 2 Errors in the use of plural nouns 53, 5

TOTAL

143

100, 0

The structure of the errors was also summarized and presented in percentages according to the frequency of their appearance in the picture 1. Two copies of primary pupils' works are illustrated as appendices 3 and 4. The data in the table 1 and picture 1 shows which areas of English language including grammar were the most difficult for Slovak primary pupils in our research, i. e. where they made errors and how many errors they made. Following the aim of our research we analysed each category of errors in the next parts of this work. We also tried to describe what types of errors within the each category primary pupils made and to explain the causes of appearance of these errors. The frequency of occurrence of each type of errors was mentioned too.

2. 2. 1 Errors in the Use of Verb Forms

There were the most errors in the use of verbs in our research. Therefore we divided them into following categories: 1. Errors in the use of verb forms 2. Errors in the use of verb tenses Each category was analysed separately. We recognize several verb forms in English. EFL learners have to know to use verb forms correctly. This area of English was also analysed and evaluated in our research. Our findings showed that verb forms had been the most difficult part of English grammar for them. We found out forty-nine errors

(34, 2 %) of all errors which learners had made in the use of verb forms.

Using SST by Dulay et al. (1982) we divided these errors into the following groups: 1. omission of items within the verb forms = 6 errors (12, 2 %)

2. addition of items within the verb forms = 12 errors (24, 4 %)

3. misformation of verb forms = 31 errors (63, 4 %)

2. 1. 1 Omission of Items within the Verb Forms This type of error was made by six primary pupils (12, 2 %) in the sentence: 11. How many foreign countries have you visited? (Primary pupils used verb form visit instead of visited in the sentence: How many foreign countries have you visit?)

They used correct verb tense (present perfect) in the sentence but the verb form of the main verb visit had been used incorrectly. They omitted marker -ed when they had formed past participle of the verb visit.

2. 2. 1. 2 Addition of Items within the Verb Forms We identified twelve errors (24, 4 %) when primary pupils had added some redundant elements in their sentences. They made following errors: 02. He read an interesting book. (Six primary pupils used the verb form readed instead of read in the sentence: He readed an interesting book.)

They formed past tense of the verb read by adding -ed to the base form. It was an incorrect procedure because they should use simple past form of the verb read.

10. Could she lend me some money? (Five primary pupils used lends instead of lend in the sentence: Could she lends me some money?)

Using the third person singular morpheme -s they made the error. We always use a modal auxiliary verb with a main verb which is the bare infinitive (i. e. without morpheme -s which is typical for the third person in singular).

20. Will you help me? (Only one primary pupil made an error when he/she had tried to combine two forms of future tenses together in the sentence: Will

you going to help me?)He/She used going to construction excessively in this sentence. 2. 2. 1. 3 Misformation of Verb FormsWe identified seven sentences in our research where primary pupils had used wrong forms of verbs. The total number of these errors was thirty-one (63, 4 % of all errors). It was the most numerous type of errors in our research. These errors were found out in the sentences: 02. He read an interesting book. (They used form red instead of read in the sentence: He red an interesting book.)This error was made by five primary pupils. They used written verb form which did not exist in English. We pronounce past participle verb read as /red/. 05. I have never drunk Japanese tea. (Seven primary pupils used past simple verb form drank instead of past participle verb form drunk in the sentence: I have never drank Japanese tea.)We pronounce past participle verb form drunk as /drʌŋk/. 07. Some people are afraid of mice. (Three primary pupils made an error when they had used verb form is instead of verb form are in the sentence: Some people is afraid of mice.)They did not respect the rule subject and verb agreement because they had used verb form is with plural noun people. On the other words, the plural subject takes the plural verb. 10. Could she lend me some money? (Six primary pupils used the wrong form of a main verb because they had used the verb borrow instead of lend in the sentence: Could she borrow me some money?)Probably, they were not aware of the meaning of the verb borrow because this word means ' to take' while lend means ' to give'. 16. Have you ever broken a mirror? (Five primary pupils used past simple verb form broke instead of past participle verb form broken in the sentence: Have you ever broke a mirror?)They tried to use the correct verb tense (present perfect) but the verb form broke had been

incorrect. 17. My sister is not living with us now. (Two primary pupils used the verb to do, i. e. third person singular verb form does instead of the verb to be, i. e. is in the sentence: My sister does not living with us now.) However primary pupils tried to use present continuous by using present participle of the main verb living they had also used the wrong verb form of the present tense to do (does instead of is). 19. How is this word written? (Three primary pupils used wrong verb form writted which does not exist in English instead of past participle verb form written). They wanted to form the past participle verb form by adding -ed to the main verb.

2. 2. 2 Errors in the Use of Verb Tenses

Errors in the use of verb tenses point to the learner's incapability to make a decision which verb tense should be used and to use the correct verb tense. These errors are often combined with verb form errors and we can say that they often overlap each other. Error Analysis in our research showed twenty-five errors in this category (i. e. 17, 5 % of all errors). In the other words, primary pupils made these errors because they had used wrong verb tenses in their sentences. According to SST we could categorize this type of errors as misformation. Confusion or wrong use of verb tenses were found out in the following sentences: 04. Why do not you buy yourself a new coat? (Two primary pupils used future simple tense instead of present simple tense in the sentence: Why will you not buy yourself a new coat?) 05. I have never drunk Japanese tea. (He/She used past simple tense instead of present perfect tense in the sentence: I never did not drink Japanese tea.) 06. I am going to tell her about it tomorrow. (Two learners formed this sentence by

using present simple tense instead of the structure going to which is not a tense but a special expression to talk about the future. They wrote the sentence: I tell her about it tomorrow.)⁰⁸. How long have you been playing the piano? (We detected two errors in the use verb tenses when primary pupils had used past continuous tense instead of present perfect continuous in the sentence: How long were you playing the piano? ¹⁰. Could she lend me some money? (Three primary pupils formed interrogative sentence in present tense by using modal verb can instead of could which is typical for the past: Can she lend me some money?)¹¹. How many foreign countries have you visited? (Two primary pupils used past simple tense instead of present perfect tense in the sentence: How many foreign countries did you visit?)¹³. I want to learn English. (He/She used present continuous tense instead of present simple tense in the sentence: I am wanting to learn English.)¹⁵. Our teacher told us about it. (Three primary pupils used past continuous tense instead of past simple tense in the sentence: Our teacher was telling us about it.)¹⁷. My sister is not living with us now. (Five primary pupils used present simple tense instead of present continuous tense in the sentence: My sister does not live with us now.)¹⁹. How is this word written? (Two primary pupils used past simple tense instead of present tense in passive: How did this word write?)²⁰. Will you help me? (Two primary pupils used present simple tense instead of future simple tense in the sentence: Do you help me?)

We summarized errors in the use of verb tenses in the following table 3:

Tab. 3 Structure of Errors in the Use of Verb Tenses

Sentence

Correct Verb Tense

Incorrect Verb Tense

Total of Errors

04. present simple tense
future simple tense
205. present perfect tense
past simple tense
106. going to (planned future)
present simple tense
208. present perfect continuous
past continuous
210. past simple tense
present simple tense
311. present perfect tense
past simple tense
213. present simple tense
present continuous tense
115. past simple tense
past continuous tense
317. present continuous tense
present simple tense
519. passive voice (present)
past simple tense
220. future simple tense
present simple tense
2

2. 2. 3 Errors in the Use of Articles

The use of articles is often a big problem especially for those learners whose mother language does not contain articles. Unlike English we know that Slovak language does not contain the articles. Therefore Slovak primary pupils have to learn the rules of their correct usage. We found out twenty-one errors in the use of articles (i. e. 14, 7 % of the total number of errors) which had been made by seventeen primary pupils in their written works. According to SST we divided these errors into three groups. We ordered them as follows: 1. omission of articles = 10 errors (47, 6 %) 2. addition of articles = 9 errors (42, 9 %) 3. misformation of articles = 2 errors (9, 5 %) We illustrated these errors in the picture 3. 2. 2. 3. 1 Omission of Articles Nearly the half of errors in the use of articles was caused by the omission of them.

The total number of omitted articles was ten (47, 6 %). The sentences where articles were omitted: 02. He read an interesting book. (In this sentence the definite article an was omitted a three times.)04. Why do not you buy yourself a new coat? (In this sentence the definite article a was omitted a three times.)08. How long have you been playing the piano? (The definite article the was omitted once.)16. Have you ever broken a mirror? (In this sentence the definite article a was omitted a three times too.)We use indefinite articles before general, non-specific, singular nouns, which are countable. We always use definite article the in phrase ... play the piano.... 2. 2. 3. 2 Addition of ArticlesThis type of errors was represented by nine errors (i. e. 42, 9 %). Primary pupils made these errors because they had added extra articles to the sentences. Our analysis showed that pupils had added extra both definite and indefinite articles to the sentences. The errors of this type were found out in sentences: 05. I have never drunk Japanese tea. (Three pupils added definite article the in the sentence: I have never drunk the Japanese tea.)07. Some people are afraid of mice. (Two pupils added indefinite article a in the sentence: Some people are afraid of a mice.)11. How many foreign countries have you visited? (Only one pupil added definite article the in the sentence: How many the foreign countries have you visited?)13. I want to learn English. (Three pupils added definite article the in the sentence: I want to learn the English.)We found out there a lot of errors, for instance: errors in the use of indefinite articles ' a' in front of the noun in plural, errors in the use of definite article ' the' in front of a proper noun instead of zero article error in the use of definite article ' the' in front of a noun with general meaning. 2. 2. 3. 3 Misformation of ArticlesWe found out

two errors (9, 5 %) of this type because primary pupils had used wrong forms of articles in their sentences. The sentences where articles were used incorrectly: 08. How long have you been playing the piano? (He/She used indefinite article a instead of definite article the in the sentence: How long have you been playing a piano?)16. Have you ever broken a mirror? (He/She used the wrong form of indefinite article, i. e. he or she used an instead of a: Have you ever broken an mirror?)Primary pupils ignored the rules of the use both indefinite a definite article in their sentences.

2. 2. 4 Word Order Errors

The major difference between English and Slovak language is that English is analytic language but Slovak is synthetic. The word order within both languages is different too. English has got fixed word order. We cannot change the word order in English sentence because their meaning would be changed. Unlike English there is free and unfixed word order in Slovak language. These errors were 4th the most numerous category of errors in our research. We found out eighteen errors (12, 6 % of all errors) when primary pupils used wrong word order in their sentences. We evaluated this category of errors separately because learners had placed various grammatical constituents in wrong order many times. The big problem for Slovak pupils was the placement of both nouns and verbs within interrogative sentences (i. e. Inversion). 04. Why do not you buy yourself a new coat? (Two primary pupils formed this sentence: Why you do not buy yourself a new coat?)08. How long have you been playing the piano? (Two primary pupils wrote this sentence: How long have been you playing the

piano?)11. How many foreign countries have you visited? (Two primary pupils formed the sentences: How many foreign countries you have visited?)18. What were you thinking about? (Two primary pupils formed this sentence: What you were thinking about?)They confused the placement of some pronouns within the sentences: 10. Could she lend me some money? (He/She wrote this sentence: Could me lend she some money?)20. Will you help me? (He/She formed this sentence: Will me help you?)Some of them made errors when they had placed prepositions incorrectly within the sentences: 06. I am going to tell her about it tomorrow. (He/She wrote this sentence as follows: I am going to tell her tomorrow about it.)18. What were you thinking about? (He/She formed this sentence: What were you about thinking?). Two primary pupils were not able to make correct form of the verb ' have got' in negation. 09. I have not got a lot of money on me. (They wrote this sentence as follows: I have got not a lot of money on me.)Two primary pupils wrong formed the interrogative sentence when they had placed demonstrative pronoun incorrectly. 19. How is this word written? (Two learners wrote this sentence as follows: How this is word written?)He/She changed the word order within other sentences: 01. This information is not very important. (He/She wrote: This is not information very important.)19. How is this word written? (He/She formed this sentence: How written is this word?)

2. 2. 5 Errors in the Use of Prepositions

Errors in the use of prepositions were the other significant category of errors in our research. The total number of these errors was ten (7, 0 %) and they

were found out in seven pupils' works. In the other words, thirty per cent of pupils made some errors in the use of prepositions. We divided these errors according to Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST) into four groups. The structure of these errors was as follows: 1. omission of prepositions = 5 errors (50, 0 %)2. addition of prepositions = 3 errors (30, 0 %)3.

misformation of prepositions = 2 errors (20, 0 %)The types of errors in the use of prepositions were also illustrated in the picture 4. 2. 2. 5. 1 Omission of PrepositionsThis type of errors is characterized by the absence of a preposition in an utterance, i. e. some primary pupils omitted some prepositions in their written answers. The total number of omitted prepositions was five (50, 0 % of all errors in the use of prepositions).

Prepositions were omitted in the following sentences: 09. I have not got a lot of money on me. (Preposition on was omitted once: I have not got a lot of money me.)18. What were you thinking about? (Preposition about was omitted a four times: What were you thinking?)We have to use preposition of place on in the previous sentence (09). We always place preposition about at the end of an interrogative sentence (18). 2. 2. 5. 2 Addition of

PrepositionsWe detected three errors when extra prepositions had been added. This type of error is called simple addition and it is one of the subtypes of addition. The occurrence of this error comprised 30, 0 % of all errors in the use of prepositions. Examples of sentences where extra prepositions were added: 08. How long have you been playing the piano? (Preposition on was added in the sentence once: How long have you been playing on the piano?)14. Answer my question! (Preposition on was added in the sentence twice: Answer on my question!)We can see two situations when

the preposition on cannot be used in these sentences. 2. 2. 5. 3 Misformation of Prepositions During our analysis we found out two errors (20, 0 %) of this type. These errors were characteristic by the use of the wrong forms of prepositions. In the other words, the forms of prepositions were misused. These errors were made by two primary pupils. Examples of sentences where the prepositions had wrong forms: 09. I have not got a lot of money on me. (Preposition for was used instead of on once: I have not got a lot of money for me.) 12. Listen to me! I am talking to you. (Preposition on was used instead of to once: Listen to me! I am talking on you.)

2. 2. 6 Spelling Errors

The English contains over 800, 000 words. Each word can be a possible source of spelling errors for EFL learners. Due to this fact they should pay attention to the vocabulary which they use in both speaking and writing. We analysed twenty-three written works and there we found out nine spelling errors (6, 3 % of all errors). We divided these errors according to SST as follows: 1. omission of letters within the words = 5 errors (55, 6 %) 2. addition of a letter within the word = 1 error (11, 1 %) 3. misformation of the word = 1 error (11, 1 %) 4. misordering of letters within the words = 2 errors (22, 2 %)

Structure of spelling errors is illustrated in the picture 5. 2. 2. 6. 1

Omission of Letters within the Words We divided five errors (55, 6 %) which primary pupils had made when they had omitted some letters within the words. 02. He read an interesting book. (He/She omitted vowel e within the word interesting as follows: He read an intresting book.) 06. I am going to tell her about it tomorrow. (Two pupils omitted consonant r within the word

tomorrow as follows: I am going to tell her about it tomorrow.)¹⁶. Have you ever broken a mirror? (He/She omitted consonant r within the word mirror as follows: Have you ever broken a mirror?)¹⁹. How is this word written? (He/She omitted consonant t within the word written as follows: How is this word written?)². 2. 6. 2 Addition of a Letter within the Word Only one error (11, 1 %) was found out when primary pupil had added an extra letter within the word. 05. I have never drunk Japanese tea. (He/She added consonant s within the word Japanese as follows: I have never drunk Japanese tea.)². 2. 6. 3 Misformation of the Word There was only one error (11, 1 %) in pupil's written works. 20. Will you help me? (He/She made spelling error when he/she had written the word help instead of help in the sentence: Will you help me?) The word help does not exist in English. 2. 2. 6. 4 Misordering of Letters within the Words We detected two errors of this type (22, 2 %) when he/she had placed letters within the word incorrectly. 05. I have never drunk Japanese tea. (He/She made an error within the object tea when he/she had changed the letter order as follows: I have never drunk Japanese tae.)¹¹. How many foreign countries have you visited? (He/She changed the letter order within the adjective foreign as follows: How many foreing countries have you visited?)

2. 2. 7 Errors in the Use of Pronouns

Pronouns are other significant linguistic category in language system. There are many subcategories in their structure and a lot of pronouns in each category. However both their system and the usage are difficult for many learners they were not ' the top' problem for primary pupils in our research.

Our analysis detected six errors (4, 2 %) of all errors which primary pupils had made in their written works. These errors were made by five pupils. Structure of types of errors in the use of pronouns by Slovak primary pupils was following: 1. omission of a pronoun = 1 error (16, 6 %) 2. addition of a pronoun = 1 error (16, 6 %) 3. misformation of pronouns = 4 errors (66, 8 %). This structure of errors in the use of pronouns is illustrated in the picture 6. Using Surface Strategy Taxonomy we were able to describe these errors as follows:

2. 2. 7. 1 Omission of a Pronoun There was only one error of this type (16, 6 %) which we had found out in pupil's written works. 10. Could she lend me some money? (Indefinite pronoun some was omitted in the interrogative sentence: Could she lend me money?) We use indefinite pronoun some in front of uncountable nouns where this pronoun usually expresses the quantity of something.

2. 2. 7. 2 Addition of a Pronoun We identified one error (16, 6 % of all errors in the use of pronouns) when a primary pupil had added extra pronoun in a sentence. 14. Answer my question! (Personal pronoun you was incorrectly added in the sentence: You answer my question!) We omit the personal pronoun you in an imperative sentence when we express the second person (i. e. without a subject).

2. 2. 7. 3 Misformation of Pronouns We say about misformation of the pronouns when we find out the use of wrong form of the pronoun in a sentence. We identified four errors (66, 8 % of all errors in the use of pronouns) when primary pupils had used wrong forms of the pronouns. Sentences with errors: 04. Why do not you buy yourself a new coat? (Three primary pupils used the wrong form of reflexive pronoun yourselves instead of yourself in the sentence: Why do not you buy yourselves a new coat?) We can say that

both object in singular (a new coat) and Slovak translation of the word (you) indicate the use of reflexive pronoun yourself. 07. Some people are afraid of mice. (Only one primary pupil made an error in the use of the pronoun in this sentence. The pupil used the wrong form of indefinite pronoun when he had written each instead of some in the sentence: Each people are afraid of mice.)When he/she used each instead of some he/she had changed the sense of the whole sentence.

2. 2. 8 Errors in the Use of Plural Nouns

We can say that in English, just like Slovak, the nouns are inflected for grammatical number - that is singular or plural. Slovak plurals are always regular whereas English has got a range of ways in which plurals are formed. This category of errors was represented in our research by five errors (3, 5 % of all errors) which primary pupils had made in their written works. We divide these errors according to SST as follows: 1. incorrect addition of morpheme -s = 2 errors (40 %) 2. misformation of plural nouns = 3 errors (60 %)

Structure of errors in the use of plural nouns is illustrated in the picture 7.

2. 2. 8. 1 Incorrect Addition of Morpheme -sWe detected two errors (40 %) when primary pupils had added incorrectly morpheme -s when they had formed plural of a noun. We found out these errors in sentence: 07. Some people are afraid of mice. (Primary pupils wrote this sentence with error: Some peoples are afraid of mice.)We can term this error as Double markings because the noun ' people' we use only in plural and the use of morpheme -s is incorrect.

2. 2. 8. 2 Misformation of Plural NounsWe analysed three errors (60 %) when primary pupils had formed plural of a noun in a wrong way. 07.

Some people are afraid of mice. (Three pupils used object mice instead of mice in the sentence: Some people are afraid of mouses.) This type of error is also called as Regularization error. Noun mouse is in singular and its plural form is mice. We term this form of plural as Mutation plural. There are plenty of nouns in English whose plural is formed in this way. Slovak EFL learners need to learn these forms of plurals because their mother language does not contain them.